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Hello, everyone. This is Katie Novak, and you're listening to the education table. This is a micro podcast where we're going to answer your questions about inclusive education in ten minutes or less. In today's episode, we're answering the burning question, what is universal design for learning, or UDL? And I'm going to answer this question in three parts. First, I'm going to tell you a story. I'm going to share anecdote about the value of universal design for learning in our own lives. Then I'm going to dive into some research and statistics so that you can understand how incredibly important it is for us to use this evidence based framework. And lastly, I want to share some concrete strategies so that you feel prepared to implement UDL in your learning environment right away. So, let's dive in. So, first, I want to tell you a story.

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This is about my amazing french canadian grandmother. We called her Mehme. And Mehme loved a good casserole. We often had these big family dinners on Sunday where the aunts and uncles and cousins would come together. And Mehme loved herself a casserole dish. Whether it was shepherd's pie or pot roasted potatoes or tuna casserole or even american chop suey, everything was made in a single pan. And all of us were given the same portion in a very one size fits all way, and we're told you're gonna eat that. And lo and behold, that is what many of us did. And this, I guess, worked okay at the time because no one in my family had any really significant dietary needs. But this practice simply does not work today and does not work in our classrooms because one size fits all just excludes so many people.

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And I'm just imagining having a bunch of people over my house for dinner and saying, all right, everyone, look, I have tuna noodle casserole. Here it is. And taking a big old scoop and putting it on somebody's bowl or plate. And why would that not work? Simply because the exclusions are incredibly predictable, that we know that there are many people who are vegan or vegetarian or lactose intolerant or gluten sensitive or just have other dietary needs. And the goal is not tuna noodle casserole. The goal was never tuna noodle casserole. It was about coming together around a table and enjoying a meal. And so. So the way that we approach universal design is we simply say, what really is the goal? And based on the variability of my learners, who might be excluded if there were not other options and choices.

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And so, although the casserole had its heyday in the 1970s and maybe into eighties. Today, we're much more likely to invite people over our homes and have potlucks and buffets and stations because we know that one size fits all just doesn't fit everyone. And the same is true in our classrooms today. Okay, so let's get to the statistics. Why would memes casserole not work today? And it's simply because dietary variability is so predictable. And the same is true in our classrooms, in our professional development sessions, in our meetings. Or we know that there are people who have really significant needs for support and challenge and just have different ways of learning and sharing what they know as they work towards those same goals. So just how predictable is it? Let's just start with our student population.

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According to the National center for Education Statistics, 15% of all of our public school students have disabilities. They'll have an IEP or a 504. That number increases to one in five or 20% when we include students who have learning and thinking differences like dyslexia and ADHD. That's according to understood.org dot. So we're talking about one in five learners is going to have a need for something different who will be excluded if we have one size fits all lessons. And so what we really want to do is we want to shift to really thinking about firm goals and providing really flexible means, and then allowing learners to reflect on the goal and to make choices about their learning.

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And in a recent meta analysis from Atec and Kula, two researchers out of Turkey, they essentially argue that student centered approaches transform the role of the teacher from the person who conveys information to a person who creates learning environments that facilitate learning. And they go on to say it is not possible for teachers who have adopted student centered approaches to use a single teaching method in lessons. So this research is really advocating for us to create these flexible learning environments. Whether we're talking about young students or whether we're talking about, again, a meeting in a corporate space. We want to make sure that learners have options for how they're learning and how they're working towards the goal. So what is the impact on this? The effect size in this meta analysis of student centered approaches is 0.73. So what on earth does that mean?

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One of the most commonly referenced benchmarks for interpreting effect sizes comes from the amazing John Hattie. His work is published in Visible Learning, and he suggests that an effect size of 0.4 is a year of academic growth of which is considered to be a really significant benchmark. Can you imagine if every single learner made a year of growth? Every single year? Goodness gracious, that would be magical. But using this benchmark, an effect size of 0.73 is almost two years of academic growth. So not only does it allow us to include more learners, but the flexibility allows learners to actually have increased outcomes in terms of critical thinking, in terms of sharing their learning. So what we know is that one size fits all is going to exclude some learners.

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But by recognizing potential barriers and providing flexibility, we're increasing critical thinking, increasing engagement and increasing learning. So the next question is, so how do we do it? I've shared a story. We've gone through some statistics and some research, and now it's time for the strategies. How do we put this into action? UDL is all about firm goals and flexible means. So the very first strategy is simply starting with what is the goal of this learning? What is the goal of this lesson? What is the goal of this meeting? The next is really taking the time to unpack the success criteria. Criteria, which is what does it mean to know this?

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We have to be really clear about how we break out the success criteria of not only that you'll be able to do this, but this is what it means to do this really well. We might want to provide exemplars, we might create checklists, but we need to be really transparent about these are the goals. And this is what success looks like in alignment with these goals. So if every single person is going to learn about universal design for learning and be able to summarize the framework and how it allows for more student centered approaches, I could say to you, UDL is really recognizing that one size fits all does not work. It excludes some people, and it's really important that we have firm goals and flexible means.

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Essentially, the strategy that we're going to use in universal design for learning is what is the goal? What was my plan or what was my strategy? And is there another way to do this? Would you rather share what you've learned by writing a blog, or by writing a letter, or by posting on a discussion board? Or would you rather have a conversation and have somebody facilitating and listening to the conversation?

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And in this, we are shifting some of the planning and shifting some of the co creation to the learners, which ensures that all of us really understand what is the purpose of learning and how can we really embrace and celebrate the different ways that we could learn and the different materials and strategies we could leverage and the different pathways that we could show what we have learned and what we could do, always bound by those firm goals. So the strategies that are really important are, number one, articulating really firm goals. Number two, unpacking success criteria, getting on the same page of what success looks like, and then simply saying, is there another way to learn this? Are there additional materials we could use as we're learning and sharing our learning?

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And is there another way to prove that I know this or I can do this? And the more that we partner in that, the more that we create a space that really allows all learners to learn and share what they know. Thank you so much for joining me at the education table. Be sure to check out the show notes for more resources. Until next time. Onward.