
Cars, Education and UDL

In Belgium, the national motor show and vehicle exposition just closed up. Here, all new cars are presented to the public with glamour and glitter. Looking at all these shiny cars, I can see that they have one thing in common. They are the waxed example of good education. Yes, you hear me right; cars at this exposition are the shining equivalents of powerful education for everyone.

After all, cars are universally designed, and so is good education. When I sit in a car, my seat can move forward, backward and even warm up at the push of a button. For a minute, let's suppose this was not possible, then my short legs would not be able to touch the pedals and I could only see my single grey hair in the rear-view mirror. Customisation is the keyword we are looking for; the ability to tweak our educational practice, just like tweaking our car interior, so that individual variation is catered for; we then arrive at universal design for learning UDL.

UDL stands for universal design for learning and is an excellent education strategy to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). The essence of UDL in education is flexibility and alternatives provided to meet the different needs, learning styles and preferences of each student. It is a way to remove barriers in the learning process (Meyer et al., 2014; Pliner & Johnson, 2004).

The UDL framework provides guidance for teachers to have an eye for all talents of each student. Within this approach education and the educational environment are not tailored to the average or individual needs of a student, but to the entire group of students. Imagine if cars were designed for the average person, you would get complaints from both the people of China and the Netherlands. In the same way, education is also best designed with a focus on potential students that reflect the diversity in society (Meyer et al., 2014).

Imagine if you were designing a car and then you may think: oops, there should be room for more passengers - and you have to make a hole in the back of your car. Of course that's not what happens, the car designers have thought about it beforehand.

Thus, as a teacher, one starts to develop a teaching and evaluation practice in advance, with all learning styles and learning needs in mind because retrofitting is always an expensive and less aesthetic and can lead to stigmatisation. We suggest that seeking inclusion by retrofitting in the form of assigning and implementing large numbers of reasonable adjustments is very time-consuming for both the student and the teacher.

So, is UDL the solution for all problems in the classroom? Are you going to meet all needs in this way? Of course, not, there are always more complex problems or educational needs. You just have to imagine that you live in a very busy city like Brussels as a passionate car user, without an extra option such as parking assistance you will never be able to park there. A two-track policy is therefore also essential.

A two-track policy is therefore the hybrid car amongst cars. A car that therefore finds its flow within two built-in energy systems. The two-track policy implies that one strives for the widest possible educational delivery (energy drive 1), so that the ad hoc reasonable accommodations (energy drive 2) can be reduced to a minimum and can be reserved for the more serious or more complex support needs in the class. So just like hybrid cars, the start is

taken from a broad energy source to get going, and where more is needed, the other energy source complements it.

This provides a win-win situation for both students and teachers. In this way lesson design can be tackled more proactively, with fewer requests for individual accommodations. The pressure during the evaluations will decrease and the teacher can organise their education in such a way that **all** students benefit from the support offered.

And yet we are often stuck in a traffic jam. We growl about the overcrowded parking and we persistently sing karaoke in our shiny cars. We look with anxiety at emission figures, air pollution and young people who protest in the streets about climate change. In education, we stubbornly continue to design educational practices for the 'average' student; it's time to design for **every** student - design for all.

So, do not miss opportunities to discover the unique talents of students, just give them a forum to flourish. Student diversity is the cradle of creativity, communication and exchange, and it is also our social responsibility to put our own heart in it and to shape our educational concept in such a way that there is a powerful learning environment for **all** students - let UDL be your guide..

Vroom Vroom Pedal to the floor and let's go

References

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