MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Corporation

"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27).

At a Glance

Knowing Your Learner	Curriculum Connections	Data	Assessment and Evaluation

Rights and Responsibilities

According to Catholic teaching, **fostering a vibrant community and protecting human dignity can only be achieved when human rights are actively defended and responsibilities are fully met.** Every individual possesses an inherent right to the basic necessities required for human decency. Linked to these rights are vital duties and obligations—to one another, to our families, and to our society as a whole. This includes fair and equal access to learning.

Bridging Catholic theology with today's teaching practices reinforces a key truth: **every student deserves the chance to learn**. Whether we're reflecting on the call from Genesis 1:27 to honor every person created in God's image, or following the Ontario Ministry of Education's Learning for All (K–12), the takeaway is the same. We have a moral and professional responsibility to ensure equitable access and a dignity in education for every single student in our classrooms.

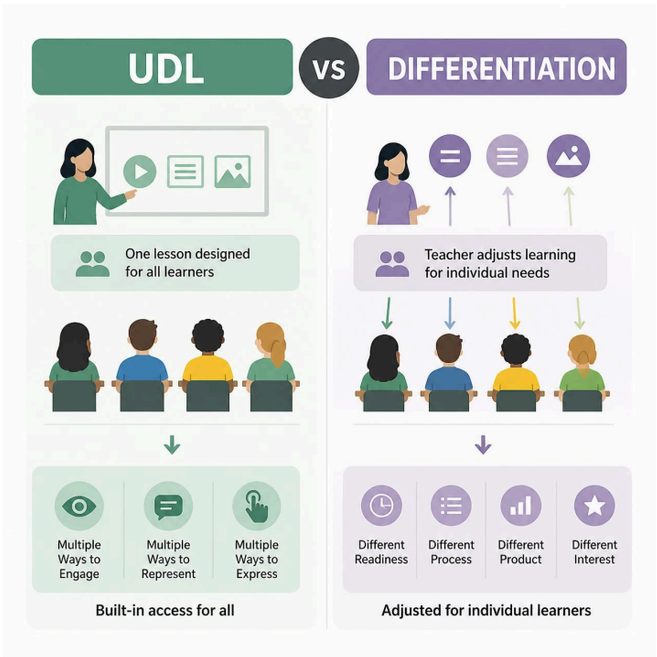
Teachers can ensure the opportunity for every student to learn in planning with Universal Design for Learning and through differentiation.

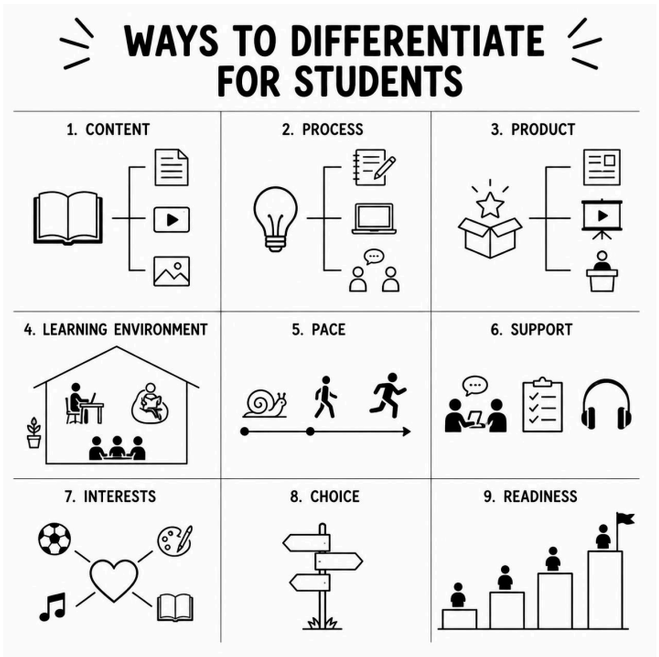
Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an evidence based framework which transfers power of learning and demonstrating that learning to students. It functions on three main

principles: engagement, representations and action/expression. UDL creates the necessary conditions needed to maximize every students' opportunity to learn and grow. UDL focuses on both what is taught and how it is accessed. Click here for an overview.

As Catholic educators, we are called to build a supportive foundation that empowers every student to develop their unique talents and reach their full potential. UDL isn't about erasing differences between learners and make "one-size-fits-all" lessons and assessments, it's about "recognizing barriers, naming them, highlighting them, celebrating them, and designing for them" (Chardin & Novak). UDL ensures those who have special education requirements, or are multilingual or require task variety are served.

UDL is proactive while differentiation is reactive.





Differentiation is the process by which an educator adjusts the ways in which individual students may engage with material and demonstrate their understanding of it. The process adjusts that which has been designed in a UDL framework to better suit the specific learner. Differentiation makes thoughtful shifts to four areas - content, process, product, and learning environment and helps more students succeed (read more here).

Knowing Your Learner

By leveraging UDL and differentiation, we empower students to become **self-directed, responsible, lifelong learners—a core Catholic Graduate Expectation.** Understanding our students allows us to maximize their potential, helping them recognize their strengths, navigate challenges, and build essential self-advocacy skills. It is an educator's responsibility to learn about our students so we can maximise their opportunity to learn.

Try co-creating Classroom Agreements (norms or contracts) with students. These are guidelines for a group of people to ensure open, honest, active, inclusive and respectful dialogue and participation (How to Create Class Agreements).

Understanding Your Students: Legislation and Role of the Ministry

Primary	Junior	Intermediate	Senior
All About Me Project and Letter to Families about the Project	ELL/MLL Classrooom and UDL Vision Board		Your Learning Story Through Music
Visual Poster- At-a-glance: Every Student Brings a Story	Learner Profile Template	ELL Voices in the Classroom.pdf	Where I Stand – Diagnostic Movement Activity
Class Agreements	Class Contracts Sample	Class Agreements	Class Agreements Class example (gr 12)

School Mental Health Ontario

Teachers may want to engage in the lessons provided by School Mental Health Ontario. These can provide deep insight into a student's engagement and how they want to represent their learning. The "Wayfinder" tool helps educators pick the right lessons for your students by grade and curriculum.

Curriculum Connections

The Ontario Curriculum provides numerous opportunities to help students to develop their confidence and sense of self as well as demonstrate flexibility and adaptability. Students can be encouraged to be lifelong learners and take risks while learning. Universal Design for Learning provides a structure for engagement, representation and expression, playing to the strengths of all learners.

Review your learner profiles. What common essential tools or supports are required for learning? In what ways can you plan your lesson to start with these essentials and then add to it so all your students can be successful?

When planning for learning, educators must consider how the students can show the mastery of curriculum expectations. A student can still be successful even if they haven't mastered every single specific expectation taught – as long as they grasp the big picture. One powerful way to support this is through 'Low-Floor/High-Ceiling' tasks. These activities offer broad entry points that invite every student into the learning, encouraging both confidence and engagement.

Kinder/Primary	In primary grades, UDL provides flexible ways for children to

access learning, engage with content, and demonstrate their understanding.

Criteria for a Lesson to be Considered UDL

- **Multiple Means of Engagement:** Offers choices that motivate and engage learners.
- **Multiple Means of Representation:** Presents information in different ways (e.g., visuals, oral language, hands-on materials).
- **Multiple Means of Action and Expression:** Provides varied opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning (e.g., drawing, speaking, writing, building).
- **Accessible and Inclusive:** Removes barriers so all students can participate meaningfully.
- **Flexible and Differentiated:** Supports diverse strengths, interests, cultures, and learning needs while maintaining high expectations.

Helpful References and Examples that Promote UDL

a) Website: "Low Threshold High Ceiling Resources for Primary Teachers"
b) Blog: "Level the Playing Field: Low Floor High Ceiling Tasks to Promote Engagement and Equity."
c) Activity Example: Math (Place Value)- Grades 3-5
d) Community Agreements: How to Slide Deck

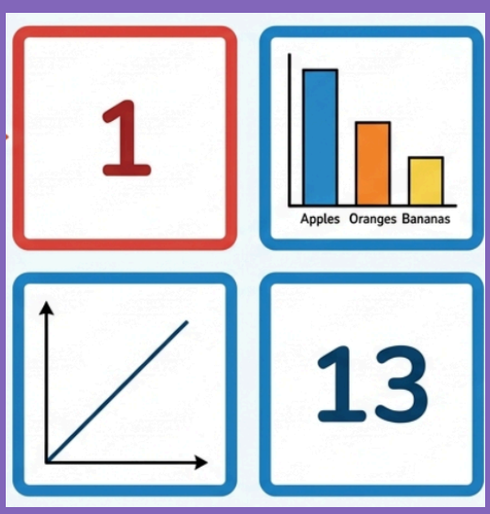
Low-Floor/High-Ceiling Math Task

- **"**Which One Doesn't Belong?**":** Show four mathematical images, numbers, or graphs. Ask your students: *Which one doesn't belong and why?*
- **Floor:** A student might say, "Top left, because it's red and the others are blue." (Valid, visual observation).
- **Ceiling:** Another student might say, "Bottom right, because it represents a prime number/non-linear relationship."
- Everyone participates in the exact same discussion. No one is sitting silently because they "don't get it."

Low-Floor/High-Ceiling Literacy Task

- While Junior division students are developing text comprehension, expressing that understanding verbally or in writing can present a barrier—particularly for multilingual learners and students with learning disabilities.
- **Floor (Accessing the Text):** Allow students to read the text, use text-to-speech, listen to an audiobook, or read a graphic-novel version of the story.
- **Ceiling (Expressing Mastery):** Offer a "Choice Board" for their final product, based on their preference:

Junior



- A. Write a traditional character analysis.
- *B:* Create a 3-frame comic strip capturing the climax.
- *C:* Record a podcast episode interviewing a character.

- By providing these options, you are directly assessing their understanding of the plot and character development (the expectation).

Intermediate

Low-Floor/High-Ceiling Examples for Intermediate Classrooms

Low-floor/high-ceiling tasks allow a student working below grade level to fully participate (low floor) while simultaneously challenging students who need extension (high ceiling).

1. Mathematics: "The Border Problem"

- **The Task**: Show students a 10 X 10 grid. Ask them to determine how many squares are on the outer border without counting every single square one by one.
- **Low Floor**: Students can physically color the grid, use algebraic tiles, or count by twos or fives to find the answer, which is 36.
- **High Ceiling**: Students derive a generalized algebraic formula for an n X n grid (4n - 4) or 4(n-1)) and prove why it works using visual representations.

2. Language: "The One-Word Image Analysis"

- **The Task**: Project a powerful, ambiguous historical photograph or modern media image. Ask students to select exactly *one word* that captures the theme, emotion, or thesis of the image.
- **Low Floor**: Students select a basic descriptive word (e.g., "Sad", "Crowded") and point to one piece of visual evidence in the photo to justify it.
- **High Ceiling**: Students select abstract, nuanced vocabulary (e.g., "Isolation", "Systemic") and write a persuasive paragraph linking multiple symbolic elements of the image to current global contexts.

3. Science (Systems in Action / Cells): "The System Failure"

- **The Task**: Present a diagram of a complex system (a mechanical pulley system, an ecosystem, or a plant cell). Ask: *"What happens if one single part disappears?"*
- **Low Floor**: Students identify immediate, obvious chain reactions (e.g., "If the string breaks, the weight drops").
- **High Ceiling**: Students evaluate long-term, systemic feedback loops, calculating efficiency losses or proposing alternative, innovative subsystems to prevent total collapse.

This Grade 9 Math example compares a traditional lesson with one in which UDL was considered throughout.

The Multi-Modal "Sandbox" Launch Sheet A project framework where the core evaluation criteria are strictly separated from the medium of output. Instead of assigning a traditional essay or slide deck, students are given a "sandbox" period to choose how they demonstrate mastery.

Project Blueprint: 3-Week Senior Seminar Task A self-directed project-tracking model that replaces rigid, end-stage marking with flexible, point-of-growth feedback tailored to individual student workflows.

Senior

Data

When we collect data on what our students CAN do, we make space for their success.

The UDL framework begins by giving students agency over how they reach their learning goals. Involve students in defining what success looks like for the task. Encourage them to identify their own entry points and decide how they will demonstrate their understanding. Co-creating Success Criteria allows for the teacher and their students to come to a collaborative understanding of what success actually looks like.

When starting a new lesson, review what the students retained from the previous lesson allowing them to activate their prior knowledge. Using bell review work and exit cards can be a great way for students to show their understanding quickly. Leverage tools to produce data that will help drive the components of the next lesson.

Do you have multilingual language learners in your classroom? What are your students' first language, if not English? What STEP are they working on in oral communication, writing and reading? Are they accommodated or modified? How can you apply this data to your UDL lesson design?

Here are examples of how data can be collected in your classroom:

Kinder/Primary	Junior	Intermediate	Senior
Multilingual Learner "I Can Statements"	Step Tracking	STEP Activity ELL and MLL (Grade 9 Religion).pdf	A Quick & Creative UDL Bell Ringer
Infographic: Ontario's Framework for Student Achievement and Tips for Collecting Data	KWL Chart	Many Roots, Many Voices (Supporting ELL in Every Classroom).pdf	The "Three Colour" Traffic Light
Co-Constructing Success Criteria	Co-Constructing Success Criteria	Co-Constructing Success Criteria	Co-Constructing Success Criteria

Assessment and Evaluation

The primary purpose of assessment and evaluation is to improve student learning (Growing Success, 2010). Teachers need to use a variety of assessment methods in the classroom to acquire information about student progress in their mastery of curricular expectations.

Offer your students relevant, authentic options for assessment and evaluation and provide opportunities for frequent assessment for and as learning. Check in with your learners throughout the learning process and be flexible. When learning goals and success criteria are clear, teachers can offer students flexibility and choice in how they choose to demonstrate their understanding. Here are some great considerations for designing assessment within a UDL framework.

Consider removing as many barriers as possible. You don't need to plan for every distinct need in your classroom, but some components of a lesson that are essential for some, could be beneficial for all. Dr. Shelley Moore's work on inclusive education uses a bowling game analogy for how we can best plan to universally include all learners. For example, a word list is essential for learners with recall challenges, but a list can help strong learners make more meaningful connections between concepts they had momentarily forgotten!

Using the Triangulation of Data for Assessment and Evaluation

Kinder/Primary	Junior	Intermediate	Senior
Primary Assessment UDL	Single Point Rubric	Equitable Teaching and Assessment Practices.pdf	The Single Point Progress Tracker
Website: CAST UDL Guidelines ☐ Guidelines ☐ Examples ☐ Research based ☐ Professional Development ☐ Articles and Catalogues	Mood Meter for Social-Emotional Learning	Supporting Multilingual Learners Instructional Strategies & Supports For Secondary Religion Classrooms.pdf	The Mystery Mixer Bell Ringer
Universal Design in 3 Minutes	Novel Study Choice Board	Choice Board (history)	The Senior Triangulated Choice Board

Additional Resources

Equity by Design: Delivering the Power and Promise of UDL - Mirko Chardin and Katie Novak

Student Well-Being and Mental Health

Healthy Relationships

What's So Special About Special Education? (Video resource)

Understood Website

Kindergarten and Multilingual Learners (Ministry of Education)

UDL Guidelines

School Mental Health Ontario

"Every Kid Needs a Champion"

Acknowledgements

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