GABRIELLE O’BRIEN: My name is Gabrielle, and my pronouns are she/her. My role is the Senior Project Officer for ADCET, and I want to welcome you all today to this session called Redefining Universality, a context engaged approach to assessment fairness with our presenters, Dr Danielle Hitch and Dr Joanna Tai. Please note the requirements for captioning and etiquette on our home page, our UDL Symposium home page. So this session will be recorded, so please turn off your camera and mic for the whole of the session, use the Q&A function to pose questions to the speaker, or speakers, ensure your surrounding is quiet, non-stressful, non‑distracting. Don’t forget to tag us on your socials with #UDLSymposium2023. If you need captioning, you press the CC button at the bottom of the page, or Darren is going to put in a link to the browser captioning that you can access as well. So thank you, Danielle and Joanna, it’s over to you.

DANIELLE HITCH: Thank you very much. I think we are going to start by showing a video.

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT (1:23 – 11:09)

Thank you for viewing our poster presentation. My name is Danielle Hitch, and I'm presenting on behalf of my teammates, Dion Williams, Joanna Tai, and Jessica Lees.

Universal Design for Learning (or UDL) aims to create learning outcomes, resources and assessments that are accessible and equitable for everyone. The concept of assessing fairness aligns closely with these principles as a means of reducing bias, providing equal opportunities, and fair access while responding to individual needs. All the assessments occur in complex and dynamic contexts, which encompass individual factors, environmental factors, and activity or task factors. When it comes to implementation, context is everything.

Today, we are presenting an overview of a critical analysis the team has undertaken about the adaptability of UDL guidelines within diverse learning contexts. We would like to challenge prescriptive approaches to their application and assessment in higher education and propose the use of the Person, Environment, Occupation, Participation (or PEOP) model in partnership with the guidelines.

The PEOP model describes the interrelationships between personal or individual factors (that is person), ecological or contextual factors (that is environment) and activities or tasks (that is occupation), along with a combined influence on participation. Each of these domains incorporates a range of factors, all of which have an influence on how people participate in daily life.

This model was developed within the health profession of occupational therapy, hence the use of the word ‘occupation’. By occupation, we mean the everyday activities that people do as individuals, in families and with communities to occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to life. Assessments are key activities within the occupational realm of education, and in this case, they are the occupations we are referring to.

The person domain refers to both assessors and students, while the environment domain encompasses both social and built environment aspects which are external to the individual.

In this brief presentation, we provide an overview of a critical analysis the team is undertaking about the adaptability of the UDL guidelines within diverse learning contexts. We were wondering, “Do the detailed and tangible guidelines available to support UDL implementation put the cart before the horse by encouraging a prescriptive approach?”.

The diagram on our poster summarizes our critical analysis of the alignment between the UDL guidelines and the PEOP model. The domain which aligned with the most UDL guidelines was occupation, as there were multiple guidelines relevant to the design of assessments. The environment domain was the next most frequently identified with the person domain the least often identified.

The main aspect of the person domain relevant to assessment was guidelines around the development of personal qualities and beliefs supporting assessment success. These included self-assessment, reflection, perseverance, and resilience. Another example is engagement with subject phobias. For example, orientation to an evidence-based practice unit could include reassurance and reframing around the student's ability to complete the required statistical analysis.

Much of the guidelines relevant to environment refer to the format and content of learning or supportive resources. However, there were also guidelines for the social environment related to access to peers and mentors, and the creation of an inclusive learning and assessment environment.

An example of this is provided by Peer Assisted Study Sessions (or PASS), which support the students to prepare for assessment.

UDL guidelines regarding assessments focused on diverse opportunities for engagement or response, feedback, and the integration of relevant contextual information. An example of this approach was the use of realistic clinical scenarios as case studies within assessments

However, many of the guidelines are shared between multiple domains, as shown in the white boxes. Highlighting patterns as a UDL strategy is undertaken by persons (both assessors and students) and is expressed in the environment via learning and support resources. An example of this approach would be the design of scaffolding and adjustments for a specific assessment for delivery within the learning environment.

The area of the PEOP model where most of the UDL guidelines aligned was the overlap between the person and the occupational domains. This is not surprising given the focus of UDL on meeting the needs of diverse learners. The active involvement of students in assessment goal setting, assessment design, and contributing personal responses is advocated to promote engagement, but these measures can also promote fairness by ensuring the student voice is heard at all stages of assessment.

Another example implemented in many health professions courses is explicit references to existing knowledge and prior learning by asking students to reflect on clinical placements as part of their assessment response.

All three domains combine to result in participation - in this case, assessment participation. Participation is an emergent property which results from the complex interaction of the guidelines within and between the PEOP domains. Emergent properties are self-regulating because modifications of one domain or guideline will inevitably influence the other domains or guidelines. This more accurately reflects the complexity of assessment fairness than a prescriptive application of the guidelines - where ‘A’ is thought to result in 'B’.

Using the UDL guidelines together with the PEOP takes advantage of the best features of them both - the specificity of the guidelines, and the complexity of the PEOP model. The interdependence between the domains of the PEOP provides the flexibility required for solutions tailored to different learning contexts. Without the flexibility, implementation of the UDL guidelines continues to suffer from a lack of engagement with context.

Our original question about putting the cart before the horse challenges the prevailing assumption that the UDL guidelines are applicable and relevant across all learning environments. We argue that to be truly universal, UDL guidelines must be responsive to both the assessment needs of individual learners and their broader learning context. The guidelines are very detailed when it comes to assessments as an occupation, but unless comprehensive in regard to person or environment factors. While all domains may not need equal detail, we are potentially missing opportunities to develop personal and environmental strategies that promote assessment fairness when most of the focus is on the assessment itself.

In conclusion, we will challenge prescriptive approaches to the UDL guidelines for assessment in higher education. A context engaged approach using the Person-Environment-Occupation- Participation model can be applied in partnership with the guidelines. Assessment fairness is a very complex concept and issue, with fuzzy boundaries with many other related concepts. Engaging in the broad context for assessment, beyond the characteristics or approach adopted for the assessments themselves, will promote fairness in a more holistic manner rather than matching strategies to specific guidelines. The PEOP model encourages educators to look for opportunities to address multiple domains simultaneously. In this way, educators can approach universal design as a practice occurring within a multi-dimensional context. Complex issues need complex solutions and further development of the person and environment aspects of the UDL guidelines is recommended.

Thank you for your time.

GABRIELLE: Okay. Thank you so much. Now we will just see if there is any questions. You can either put them in the Q&A chat or put your hands up. It's a much smaller group here, put your hands up and we can answer them live. Maybe we have no questions. Don't be shy, people.

DANIELLE: Don't be shy, we are very friendly. While we are waiting, I could give a little bit more information about the context of the analysis and the projects.

GABRIELLE: Fantastic.

DANIELLE: We are focusing on allied health professions, so these are basically all the professions that aren't nursing and medical. So it includes physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers. And I guess what prompted the analysis was we’re looking at assessment fairness for students at risk of disadvantage, so from equity groups, also students who are carers who are often left off that list but are a very important group, and I guess the allied health context offered the chance to look at assessment fairness in two very different contexts, because some of the assessments allied health profession students are within the universities, so prac exams, essays, multiple choice questions, all the usual, that are really large and a really important part of their assessments are out on clinical placements, and there's a massive amount of diversity in the clinical placements and community placements they undertake. So it's an opportunity to compare and contrast those two sorts of contexts for assessment and how we can make assessment fair across multiple different environments.

GABRIELLE: Danielle, how hard was it to implement this activity in your university?

DANIELLE: Well, we haven't got to the point of implementing just yet. It was very hard to do the analysis - I will speak on Dion's behalf with that - because the concepts are very complex and trying to align them sometimes was - required a lot of thinking, and I think that's what the section about the boxes in between was really about, that it's never just categorical, there is always one fit within multiple categories. I guess it made us think in terms of the implementation there's a lot out there about assessment design but this offers a different perspective, and perhaps once people have been through all the assessment design stuff, they might want to then think about the environmental context or what can I do on the person level. So it offers opportunities to extend the way we think about assessment fairness in relation to UDL. Part of the project is going to be interviewing occupational therapy and physio students and academic educators and clinical educators, and from that will come out a set of resources and tools to support assessment fairness that will reflect some of the analysis we have produced today.

GABRIELLE: Great, and somebody has asked can you provide some specific examples of successful assessment design that incorporates both PEOP and UDL.

JOANNA TAI: Danielle, do you want me to have a go?

DANIELLE: Yeah, jump in.

JOANNA: Thanks. Hi, everyone. Joanna Tai also from Deakin. I'm going to talk about an example that adopts a UDL approach. We weren't specifically thinking about the PEOP model at the time because this is Danni's new contribution, but the first thing to start thinking about assessment design as more than just the task itself but about all the things that lead up to the task. So how do we prepare our students for the assessment task. This includes things like instructions, the assessment brief or what's in the unit guidelines. And what we realised when we were thinking about those multiple means of representation of engagement, in terms of what students had to engage with, and then how they could represent their knowledge, was that we realised that just having written assessment briefs was kind of not UDL. It's just words. And frequently, the words were very confusing when we talked to students about it. They actually said, “Ah, we don't actually understand what this means. If you could actually talk us through it, that would be really helpful.” So in some of the units we actually had students who had done the unit previously talking at a similar level to their peers, actually explaining what the requirements and the format of the assessment needed to be. And so having that audio version and perhaps a more casual use of language was part of the assessment design that supported students towards actually completing the assessment. And I think this really takes on that PEOP model, thinking more about that environment, rather than thinking always about the person, so actually thinking about the environment in which the person is doing the task. So that's good.

GABRIELLE: That's great. Ruth has asked how might assessment criteria be flexible to individual student needs and differences but fairly evaluated in relation to performance?

DANIELLE: I think both occupational therapy and physiotherapy has had a go at this, so both of those professions have - I won't use the word ‘standardised’ but they have clinical assessment tools which have tried to capture what are the core things that a student needs to demonstrate regardless of where they are. So the SPEF, which is the one for occupational therapy, has 7 domains, and they're quite broad in terms of communication, documentation, occupation-based practice, and the way they're written is broad enough they are applicable to any clinical setting and it's up to the assessors to put in the really detailed feedback about what's expected within that particular setting. And one of the big challenges with the SPEF - and I think it’s the same for physio – is that students are assessed at halfway and then they’re assessed at the end of their placement as well, and trying to just learn what are the expectations of where you will be at halfway or what are they at the end. If someone passes something at halfway but makes no further progress, they'll fail it at the end. That was one of the really big things. So it wasn't necessarily about the context itself, it was about the assessment over time and expectations which are very different depending on where you are and where you are in the course, whether you’re a first year versus a fourth year. So both of the professions have had a go at that. I guess there's…

GABRIELLE: Still working it out.

DANIELLE: Still working it out. It's pretty complicated.

GABRIELLE: And I guess we also need to remember that things like reasonable adjustments need to be still considered in the context of this, and have you had to consider changes to any sort of inherent requirement type documents?

DANIELLE: I think in OT there's a lot of discussion about that because we do work in disability a lot, and I think there's a lot of discussion in OT that it's not just about disability, like all of these measures are good for all students, and that idea of intersectionality as well. So inherent requirement is a really interesting one, and there's a real tussle between what is a reasonable accommodation and what registration boards for health professionals require. So I know there is a long ongoing discussion around that because we are caught a little bit in terms of what a registration board says has to be done and how we make reasonable accommodations around that.

JOANNA: That's something I'm actually doing some research on right now. We have been awarded a grant from ACEN to look at this in the context of health professional placements, and I was just looking at the nursing inherent requirements today and they're not all the same across all the universities, so what - this suggest they're maybe not all inherent requirements. Anyway, if you are from - in the health professions field at all, we are hopefully going to have a survey out about what those capabilities really are, so this is a plug for this other research project. Please fill in my survey when it comes out.

GABRIELLE: We would be happy to promote that on our AustEd list as well because ADCET has been doing some work with ACEN as well about work placements, and I think there is a big disconnect between what actually the inherent requirements are versus what people would like you to have.

JOANNA: Wonderful.

GABRIELLE: Yeah.

DANIELLE: And I think also in allied health, we are not just one workforce, there's 30 different allied health professions and I think oftentimes inherent requirements are very influenced by the culture of the profession. And views on disability, views on inclusion, and things like that, differ in lots of different ways. So I think that's a big thing in terms of allied health; we are not just one profession, we are multiple varied professions and that's always going to be something tricky to navigate.

JOANNA: And in this age of being able to connect so well online, and people doing telehealth placements recently, the types of work that our graduates are going to go into are not just one kind of work.

DANIELLE: Yeah, it’s not just a hospital-based job anymore.

GABRIELLE: We have got two minutes if anyone has any more burning questions. Doesn't look like it. Just a reminder that all these sessions will be available after the symposium, everything is recorded, we have all the power point presentations, we will have all the transcripts. It might take us a little while to get everything up on the website, but once we do that you will be able to review this information and talk directly with Danielle and Joanna about the work they're doing. So thank you so much, both of you, for being part of our symposium and I would like to encourage everybody to join one of the workshops which is our last session for today, and don't forget we have another three hours on Thursday. So thanks, everybody, for coming.

DANIELLE: Thanks for the opportunity.