PRESENTER: Welcome to this ADCET Podcast, your gateway to the world of inclusive education in the post-secondary sector. As part of ADCET’s long running commitment to supporting Universal Design for Learning or UDL we are running a special series of Podcasts called UDL in Action, the What, Why and How.

In this Podcast series we will be highlighting international approaches to UDL. In this episode Lillian Nave, Senior Lecturer and Universal Design for Learning Coordinator at Appalachian State University and host of the popular Think UDL Podcast series joins Darlene to discuss all things UDL and share with us her journey into Universal Design for Learning, Learner Variability, the Importance of Accessibility and some key strategies for designing and implementing UDL. Over to you, Darlene.

DARLENE: Today’s guest, Lillian Nave, has an impressive bio which I’m going to let her kind of provide an overview soon.

I first became aware of Lillian’s fabulous Podcast, Think UDL, in 2021 when she reached out to us at ADCET to see if we could suggest any guests from Australia to interview and in 2022 were able to kind hook her up with Jen Cousins from TAFE, SA and Meredith Jackson from TAFE Queensland and together they spoke about UDL in our vocational education and training sector.

Then we followed this up with Erin Leith from Monash University and Lizzie Knight from Victoria University. They covered a range of topics in their conversation which included how UDL can be used as a blueprint to engage high impact teaching strategies. We’ll provide a link to both of those Podcasts in the show notes.

Hi Lillian, it’s so fabulous to meet you in person. I think we were just having an off-recording chat about the joys of internationally listening to voices and then suddenly being faced on the screen which I’m fortunate enough to see you today on the screen. There has been many a walk around my local suburb where you’ve been in my ear, so it’s great to finally chat with you.

LILLIAN: I’m so thankful and I’ve really appreciated the help you have given me to reach out and get a lot of disability advocates and how UDL is being implemented in Australia. It’s a huge listener base and I really appreciate your arm and hands moving those switches so that I can reach out and talk to more folks there.

DARLENE: Brilliant. Well, firstly as I said in the intro it would be great if you could give a little synopsis of your career and how UDL fits into that.

LILLIAN: Sure. I am a Senior Lecturer at Appalachian State in North Carolina, so I’m teaching first. I have a three quarter time load of teaching students and then for the last decade or so I’ve had some sort of core time release to be a faculty developer. That means I’m working with our faculty in how to teach better, engage our students and around 2018 I hooked up with a grant called College STAR and STAR is a supporting transition access and retention and that introduced UDL to me.

I’ve been our UDL coordinator and now I am coordinating our newest campus in Hickory, North Carolina and that means I get to help all of our faculty to implement UDL and help them teach, design, syllabi design their courses and that sort of thing.

I’ve been teaching in higher ed. off and on but since around 1997. I started in art history and then have been teaching our first year students and I love doing that, getting students right when they come into the university. I’ve been doing that for about 10 to 12 years, about 16 years at Appalachian. I’m the originator, host of the Think UDL Podcast and speak and present on UDL in teaching and learning in higher education. That’s my bio synopsis.

I’m also a mum and a hiker. I love travelling to meet people, talking and listening.

DARLENE: Wonderful. I’m glad I gave you that opportunity. I think you probably did a far better, more passionate job than I would have reading off a script.

What kind of inspired you to create the UDL Podcast?

LILLIAN: In 2018 it was with that College STAR group that introduced me to UDL and was hooked up with CAST who created the UDL guidelines decades ago and we wanted to implement Universal Design for Learning by working both through students, focused interventions like tutoring centres but also through faculty. I was on that faculty side, how are we going to introduce UDL to faculty at our university along with several other North Carolina institutions.

As we were doing that, you know, there were the old standbys like a workshop or a presentation and I realised that pretty much we should have multiple means of representation, a principle of Universal Design for Learning and we just didn’t have various means. We were kind of using the old standbys, so I thought of the Podcast. I’d heard of Podcasts. I’d never made a Podcast.

The grant allowed for me and my first partner, sound engineer, to go to a Podcast conference honestly to learn what is a Podcast, what microphone do you buy, that sort of thing and totally learned it by doing it. I don’t even want to listen to the first episodes because there were a lot of umms and, you know, falling on my face I felt. It was because of UDL, like this isn’t matching. If we’re only doing these old things like the way we’ve always done faculty development and we’re not accessing different ways for people to listen, you know, there’s no way that people all over the world could get this information.

The point and the mission of the Podcast is to raise the chatter and the awareness of Universal Design for Learning in post-secondary education and this was the lowest cost, free to listeners way to get that out in multiple formats because we have all the transcripts on the website and you can listen or read and the resourses too.

DARLENE: It’s a brilliant medium and we’re very fortunate too. We put a lens over our work, a UDL lens over our work at ADCET and one of our ideas was we’ve done webinars for about eight years and in the last year actually put many of those that can be into a Podcast, as well as we transcribe and caption our videos because we’re aware that it’s really often hard if you’re not present at a webinar to then go back and listen if you missed out, but many people tell, “I finally caught up with it on my walk, in the car”, and so forth. Once again it’s kind of those principles of UDL with those multiple means.

Looking over Podcasts that you’ve undertaken, and it was great the last one that you did with Dr Thomas Tobin who is a friend and ally of our work here in Australia and we’re very fortunate to have him as one of our guest speakers at a symposium a couple of weeks ago, you talk about it in the context of Universal Design for Learning around learning variability. Could you unpack that a little bit about what that means and why is it important in the post-secondary education sector?

LILLIAN: Absolutely. For learner variability what that means and how I explain it often is that everybody is different and that is good. That’s an absolute that everybody is different, so like biodiversity human diversity it’s a positive good.

I always think of the example of there’s some plant in South America that might be the cure for cancer or Alzheimer’s or something, we need all of these things at our disposal that diversity is a positive good and everything and every person has positive strengths to share, so neurodiversity is a positive good.

Cultural diversity, all different forms of human of living, you know, disability and exceptionalities all contribute to who we are, to our world and contribute to the betterment of our human condition. We recognize that everyone has something of value to offer and there are different ways to approach any subject.

Specifically why is it important post-secondary education is that there used to be many more barriers to getting into higher education post-secondary, only certain people, for a long time only certain gender was allowed, only certain socioeconomic classes or groups were given that opportunity, only people who lived in cities, you know, not many people who were rural or culturally, that just wasn’t allowed and now thankfully we have a much more diverse group of students in the classroom in the United States, in North America, all over the world but I definitely see it in the US and it's more diverse than ever before.

Thankfully the barriers to entry have decreased but that also means we have a multitude of variable learners in our classrooms and I think it is our job as instructors, teachers, professors, whatever you want to call us, it’s our job to cultivate these talents and challenge minds to become excellent thinkers and expert learners which is certainly what Universal Design for Learning hopes to do, create expert learners and want excellent thinkers, so that these incredible students, people, can address the many issues that need to be solved in today’s world, so more people, variable people and we need to serve. That I believe the reason for higher education is to serve these students to better our world.

DARLENE: Once again a brilliant answer and it’s probably such a really important time here in Australia. We are currently going through a university accord where our current government is really committed to improving the access and participation of more diverse cohorts and looking at ways and strategies on how we can support that, very much coming out of the data that’s showing that nine out of 10 jobs now and into the future require a tertiary qualification. We just haven’t got the population that are currently attending universities so we need to kind of broaden our view of who can access and succeed in universities. It’s quite an exciting time. It’s been fabulous in some of the feedback into our accord process that people have actually identified as Universal Design for Learning could play an important role in ensuring that success which is a delight.

One of the key goals of your Podcast is to delve into not just what you’ll get for teaching but how they design and implement it and you share some of the examples of effective UDL strategies that you’ve discussed on the Podcast, the impact that they’ve had on students. I know it’s a big question.

LILLIAN: It is, it’s a wonderful question. I came up with three different examples to throw out that I have found were in many ways semi-revolutionary and have been very helpful for faculty students. The first one is one of the most listened to, widely received episodes and it’s Mary-Ann Winkelmes and her TILT method which is TILT stands for Transparency In Learning and Teaching.

This is an assignment design, so within the classroom, within the higher ed. classroom she has created and her team have come up with a way to design assessments that are very clear, where you are clearly setting the goal and then you outline, so you give a purpose why you’re doing that. The task which is usually what the assignment is, something like write a five-page paper, make sure it’s 12 point type. That’s usually what the assignment is but this adds why are you doing it, what the purpose is, what the task is, what you need to do, whether it’s make a Podcast, write a paper, create a play, make a video, whatever, you write that all out. Then finally you offer criteria for success and all of these are directly linked to our Universal Design for Learning principles.

That has been so helpful to me and other faculty that in our conversation linked so many of those things to our UDL principles. At the end she was like, “Oh, I didn’t realise how UDL design this was.” I was like, “I did. That’s why I wanted to talk to you.” She has done a lot of research in that that found that especially students who were previously in groups that didn’t attend university, that had been minoritized or there were many barriers for these students, that this TILT transparency type of assignment helped all students, but it helped those students that had many barriers even more. So, everybody was helped by this and the students who had often been excluded from success were helped a lot more. That’s been really revolutionary. For me I use that format for all of my assignments, I share that and how it relates to UDL.

That would be something inside the classroom. Also, I thought another example would be how to even deliver a class at all. The interview I had right at the beginning of the pandemic on HyFlex, how to design a classroom that could go in multimodality, so you have students in person. You have students asynchronously participating or you have students also synchronously participating from outside the classroom.

That was also another game changer for me since that in the pandemic we realised oh, there are so many ways we can have students participate that allows for multiple ways for students to interact in a class, to allow for quiet students, thoughtful students, students with different processing speeds to interact or if they’re not able to come to campus because maybe they got COVID and you’re not supposed to come into class, all those things. That was another major design implementation I thought that was very helpful and also one of the most listened to episodes.

Another example I thought was applying Universal Design for Learning to systems, to not just the class, not within the class but systems and for that I was in an interview, it was Episode 106 with Zebadiah Hall from the University of Wyoming and he at Cornell University, a well-known school, was the head of disability services and had used Universal Design for Learning to reduce barriers for students to get accommodations, so things like every student had to bring in documents from a doctor that said we need this accommodation. You had to have a formal interview and he realised that many of those things were barriers, so how can we take down those barriers so students can more easily get the accommodations they need and be more successful.

So, those are just different ways, within the class, within the course and outside or in the university itself would be I think some of the many examples that we could draw from.

DARLENE: I’d like to unpack all three of those so I won’t get to the other questions but I’ve written down 106. I’ll go back and listen to that. We often have that conversation here around the medicalized model that we seem to work under here in Australia yet we espouse to a human rights and social justice model and a social model as well but they don’t quite work. It would be nice to kind of frame that also around a UDL perspective.

Following on from our symposium or during our symposium I suppose we had lots of discussion around time, that people felt there was no time. Sometimes when you’re talking to people around UDL and especially in our academic and teaching staff that are really pushed for time, sometimes suggesting UDL can seem such a huge thing. Many of our educators here in Australia are familiar with the concept of UDL but they often aren’t quite sure where to start or how to implement, so what advice would you give to educators who are just at the beginning of exploring UDL in their teaching practices?

LILLIAN: I thought about this and my firm stance now is to start with accessibility. That’s the first step, the best thing we can do and that means making sure any document that you have is accessible, it can be read by a screen reader, it can be easily transferred into multiple means so a student could listen to it. There are easy templates you know. Tech can make this easy but there are very simple ways to just make sure your presentations are accessible, your documents, your assignment to your class. I think that’s a very first step because if you don’t have accessible assignments or readings then you have created a barrier for many of our students.

That’s number one and I think shortly following that is thinking about flexibility and choice, how can I present whatever the materials. Now I’m specifically talking about multiple means of representation, how can I present this differently, so knowing that students have various ways of learning, thinking and being, how can I present this differently. Am I using a cultural reference that some of my students wouldn’t understand, can I present this differently. That could be a written text or they watch a video or they listen to a Podcast, but it could also be maybe I need to provide multiple examples for students to understand, so just thinking about the materials that you have, make sure they’re accessible and then think how can I add to the understanding.

That goes back to how students perceive information and if they can’t perceive it then they can’t understand it, so the perception is the first and then comprehension, so thinking about multiple ways to present would be quickly following after accessibility. Those would be the easy ways to start. They’re kind of easy to start with. You don’t have to go into full on design, just think how can I do this differently, let’s think about all the students I might have, maybe I can try another way to present it.

DARLENE: That’s great. One of the sessions we had on the symposium was around creating accessible documents. I chaired that session and came away with even more tips and tricks on accessibility. It’s so important but often you just haven’t been taught that as a lecturer or a teacher and you don’t know how to structure a Word document or how to ensure your LMS is set out properly.

Just talking about symposium, all of our recordings are up online now. I’ll put a link into the show notes as well so people can access all the recordings of that brilliant event that we held.

The next question was when it comes to designing and implementing UDL strategies what role does technology play in enhancing the learning experience for students with diverse needs, the segue really from the previous answer I think went well into this question.

LILLIAN: As I said, yes, tech can be an absolute game changer that allows access for students, so speech to text, screen readers, accessible documents. Tech though can also make learning more convenient, better fit into our lives, things like I can listen to this chapter while I’m walking from home to school rather than I have to stop everything I’m doing so I can read this page I have to open and sit under a tree or whatever, so something that’s absolutely necessary like to provide an accommodation or provide for all students’ abilities or also what about our students who have full-time jobs or who are carers for young children or for elderly parents or things like that. That tech helps learning better fit into our lives.

I also want to say that I’ve learned this especially by working with something called the TEA Fellows at Appalachian where I work. The TEA Fellows are Fulbright Fellows from countries all over the world, specifically Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, South America, Far East Asia and South East Asia. We have TEA Fellows. These are high school teachers who win their country’s award to come and study how to teach, getting ideas, and they come for six weeks and I do a UDL session.

Some of these classrooms have zero tech. There’s no internet. There are not even desks for students. I have a little handout and thing. I talk about that UDL doesn’t have to be high tech. You can do high tech, you can do low tech and you can do no tech. Tech doesn’t have to be part of UDL although it’s still helpful but it doesn’t have to be, so even if you don’t have the internet, if you don’t have any sort of electronic or battery powered anything you can use design strategies, things like engagement strategies like using a jigsaw technique which means students are teaching each other in interactive groups. That’s one way to engage students. Offering interviews, interviewing each other learning their knowledge and sharing that, that means no tech either. There are plenty of ways to incorporate UDL, things through like choice and flexibility without using technology.

I mean even just allowing students to draw their answer, use a mind map rather than writing a paragraph, make a play they can act out or speak or write their answers. That’s all UDL as well, so don’t feel you have to invest a lot of money to incorporate Universal Design for Learning. There can be no tech and super low tech like multiple- coloured pieces of paper to show what you think, is the answer A, show your blue card, is the answer B show your yellow cardand then you can find, “Oh, our class is really split. We’re kind of green between these two colours.” We could talk about that further, let’s find out why we have a disagreement, so there are plenty of ways to do it without tech although it sure is helpful to have that tech.

DARLENE: Now I wish you were my teacher, someone who has struggled very much especially in the world of academia and writing. It’s absolutely brilliant, the creative thinking about how to engage students and to understand, like you know I don’t feel like I don’t understand some things but to write it down is quite a significant challenge for me.

I know this probably may have been a very difficult question to ask you and I gave it to you beforehand because you have done so many brilliant Podcasts before, but I have asked would you share a memorable story or example from a Podcast where the guest approach to UDL had a profound effect on their students’ learning outcomes, kind of getting your memory to go right back.

LILLIAN: I actually had a very immediate answer to this. There are many examples but I’m going to share one absolutely and that’s Episode 52 which is with Gloria Niles. It’s called Neurodiversity is a Strength and it revolutionized the way I think and share about that variability of learners.

In that episode we talk about her using a strength based talent focused approach wherein she provides opportunities for students to lead with their strengths rather than point out weaknesses. That’s just been an absolute game changer, figuring out what we want students to learn, clear goals but then providing flexibility, ways for students to get to that goal that capitalizes on their strengths and the impression I can remember it very clearly. She was talking about her son who is autistic. Now he is grown, he’s a firefighter. They live in Hawaii.

She said her son in middle school, so secondary school, came to her and said, “Why am I only disabled in school?” Outside of school there was no disability at all and that was incredibly memorable and a threshold through which I have passed and I cannot go back in that. It really helped me to see how the environment shapes any learning that happens.

I’ve sensed, talked a lot about the social model of disability that we really need to be creating environments where those strengths can come out and I can never look at a classroom again and not think about the environment that I am creating that may privilege some and create barriers for others and must think about that strength based talent focused approach. I just can’t go back.

DARLENE: It is hard to ask the next question after these brilliant answers, so thank you so much.

UDL requires a shift in mindset and teaching practice and, you know, once again that topic came up a little bit at our symposium around that resistance and scepticism. I know that in the Podcast with Thomas, I haven’t actually listened to all yet, but you were talking about that kind of shift into bringing it into larger organisations and stuff. What kind of things could you suggest if you come across people with that resistance or scepticism when adopting UDL principles?

LILLIAN: This is a big problem. It’s a really good question because it is absolutely present. Any university, any large system is a juggernaut, it takes a long time to shift and move and even in speaking with individuals people have done the same thing for a long time. It’s really hard to change or shift, move in a different direction.

What I’ve come to realise is that we have to just recognize that teaching in any job, any education, it’s work. It’s not just it happens magically, we need to design and create and give feedback and be knowledgeable, all those things, it takes a lot of work.

In looking at teaching and learning we just have to think well, when do you want to put in the work. Do you want to put in the work throughout the semester when you have a student comes to you and says, “I couldn’t access the document.”, or “I missed the deadline because I have a job until 11 and the deadline was at 12. Can you open it up for me? Can you send me another example? I didn’t understand this assignment, can I do it over again?” That’s a lot of work.

Do you want to be doing the work over and over and over again or would you like to put in the work, a little bit more work, at the beginning and design for flexibility and design for choice and design for strengths so that students have more flexibility which Spoiler Alert gives you more flexibility because you’re not trying to fix the problems that were bugs, actually they weren’t bugs, were kind of a feature of the system. If your feature is inflexible and then, “Oh, I’ve got to go open this quiz because I only gave them 10 minutes and then this person their tech went out and I’ve got to …”

We can design a way that’s much more flexible. In my courses I have a lot of flexibility. There’s interdisciplinary and I don’t have any of these multiple choice quizzes. I hate having to deal with if there’s tech that goes out, “Oh, please can I have this.” I didn’t see a point in doing that so I figured out what was important and could design for a way that made it easier to bound some barriers for my students and in the end it gave me more time.

When people say, “Huh, I don’t want to put the time in.”, or “I’m going to have to do this now? I’m going to have to make all my documents accessible?”, well you are eventually anyway, so if you start out with an accessible document that’s a lot better than changing one off again, again, answer the student question, “Oh, I’m fixing that, I’m rewriting, I’m redoing.”, but if you design for that variability from the beginning it helps you out in the long run.

If I can frame it, and I have framed it this way, make my teaching life easier I will because I do think, I honestly do think it makes it easier for us to teach when we design for that learner variability from the beginning. If we can just kind of get our heads around that we’re I think better off knowing. I can’t snap my fingers and it’s all very easy because it does take work but when do you want to put in that work.

DARLENE: A brilliant way to frame it. I was having a conversation a couple of months ago and I got all tongue-tied, like I wish I had said that at one whole university, just didn’t want to actually even look or think about UDL and kind of asking why should they.

LILLIAN: They’re going to. It’s just a matter of when do they want to do it.

DARLENE: No, definitely. In your experience what are some of the common misconceptions around UDL and how have you worked to clarify those in your Podcasts but even probably in your teaching profession and with your colleagues?

LILLIAN: Yes, there are a lot of misconceptions. It’s a fantastic question. The first one that I get often is from what I affectionately call are dinosaurs, the ones who’ve been doing it the same way a lot and have a particular way of doing it and it’s because it’s the way they did it. It’s not necessarily because it’s the best way but it is the way they did it.

The criticism that I often get is, “Well, that’s going to dumb down my course. That’s going to make it way too easy.” The distinction that I make there is well, it doesn’t first of all, but what you are doing is reducing friction not rigour, the friction of being able to get at the documents, being able to get to the learning. It’s taking down the barriers to learning so that real rigour, the actual thinking, can be undertaken, not the “Oh, first of all you missed class.” “Well, I had a funeral.”, or “I had an emergency.” “There you missed class, that’s five points.” Well, is there an option, do you want to learn this? Do you want your students to learn this? Then give them the option to do it so you’re not making false barriers.

The second thing I get too is a misconception that UDL is just good teaching, you’re kind of naturally born to do it. If you know your stuff you’re going to be able to teach your stuff, if you’re smart you can do it and that’s not true. Teaching is an art, it takes time. Just because you know your material does not mean you know how to convey it or teach it or motivate students or design. It takes some learning and practice and Universal Design for Learning is based on research, on what has been successful, it’s continuously improving on what UDL can do and how it’s worked.

There’s a lot of research currently going on. It’s based on research on how humans learn, how the brain works and so it takes time and effort to implement these things and we collectively worldwide I don’t think do a very good job of teaching teachers how to teach in post-secondary. If you want to teach K-12 you have to get a degree in teaching. You do not get a degree in teaching for post-secondary. You might get one course but mostly it’s like, “You’re going to teach this section as a TA or whatever.”, but you don’t learn how to actually do it. I hope that changes. That needs to change. If it changes then I don’t have a job any more which is great. A lot of us are doing a lot of the clean-up, like “Oh, my students weren’t learning this at all.”, so okay we need to think about how we’re teaching it and how they’re engaging with it.

That misconception of it’s just good teaching, it’s sort of naturally you’re able to teach if you know your stuff. Now there are some brilliant people. There are some incredibly brilliant people, I’ve met them but I could not understand what they were trying to get across. It takes some time and thought and effort to implement.

DARLENE: It is amazing. I still get blown away that we have this concept in academia that there isn’t that formal requirement to actually learn how to teach.

LILLIAN: No, we just expect through osmosis we’re going to get it.

DARLENE: It’s amazing. The next question is the why of UDL is a crucial aspect of your Podcast mission. Can you elaborate on why UDL matters in the context of creating an inclusive and equitable post-secondary education environment?

LILLIAN: So using inclusive and equitable in post-secondary education, yes. My answer to that is because I believe everybody deserves a chance to learn, not just a few that were allowed to do it previously, everybody should have that chance. If you let people into that university, and we should, we should provide the service everybody should be able to learn.

That to me comes down to everybody should be uncomfortable, I mean uncomfortable some of the time, not just the same people uncomfortable most or all of the time. If we stay in a very inflexible way of teaching and learning we are privileging the students who are really great memorisers but may not be able to talk their way out of something. Then we’ve got other students who could express their real understanding in a very different way that we’re not even asking of them, “Just take this multiple choice test and I’ll tell you if you’ve learned it”, “But I have learned it but I can’t fill out this form. Could I tell you?”, providing those things.

That’s why I say students should be uncomfortable some of the time because it’s when we are uncomfortable we are learning. There’s a great in a cultural competence kind of diagram that I’ve used before and teach about. It’s like a bullseye and in the centre is that safety zone, you’re happy, you’re content, you know everything, you’re not stretching yourself at all. Right outside of that is the learning zone where it’s like, oh, this is a new concept. Let me dip my toe into that. Let me see if I understand. Then outside of that is just too risky and it is outside of our comfort zone completely. In that middle ring is where we are confident enough to try and learn and so it’s hitting that area that’s not too safe and not too risky, that’s where we learn.

Offering those chances to be uncomfortable and to master a skill is I think what we need to do to learn some things. If we make only some people all the time super uncomfortable then that’s also not learning. Anyway, that’s the idea getting into a little bit of risk for everybody.

That means changing different ways, but it’s not all listening, it’s not all who can be the first person to answer this question, “I see your hand up, you’re going to get to answer.” You’ll get the same five students but we might have 25 other students who are slower processors and have a brilliant answer and if only we gave them a back channel, a poll or a mentimeter or something they could type in and we’d see it either on a Zoom chat or in some other way a feedback, we would find, “Oh, wow, everybody is learning this differently.”, or “We have all these other ideas but I only privilege the ones who are really fast and shot their hand up first.” That’s kind of that inclusive, equitable, looking at the variability of learners and making sure we have lots of ways for students to learn, interact and how we teach should also be variable.

DARLENE: Great, thank you. You’re very fortunate to interview a whole range of people right across this beautiful world, so looking ahead what are some of the exciting developments or trends in UDL that you see shaping the future of the further education sector going forward?

LILLIAN: Right now CAST who put out the guidelines they’re in this kind of 2.0, maybe it’s 3.0 at this point, that’s really broadening and thinking, and I think correctly, about more things that are part of the learning environment. That includes cultural factors like teaching across cultural strengths, different regions, ethnicities, languages, those sorts of things.

For example, much of higher education especially in the west and in western colonized places is based on a very European individuated framework. That means we start with abstract ideas, bullet points. I might give you, “Here’s the three points of my essay and I might give you a test for you to tell them back to me.”

That’s very different from an integrated way of learning which may include things like storytelling, thinking, feeling, sensing, perceiving, that it’s not necessarily the mind as the one and only way to process or the best way to process and learn. Perhaps it’s also with reflection, intuition and relationships. Those sorts of things can also provide ways for us to learn not just, “Here’s a list of facts. Here’s a book to read, a chapter, and I need you to really give me a somewhat detached understanding of it.”, that kind of idea.

That is really exciting for me that we’re thinking about different ways of how we really understand how we teach, like what’s the role of the instructor. Is it to give out all the information or is that role more of a facilitator, so it kind of depends on how you think of teaching and learning. I see UDL going outside of its beginnings which was only about, you know, how does our brain work. Well, you know what, our brains work differently depending on who we are and where we live, our culture, what we’re familiar with.

There’s a great article about how weird people are and “weird” means western educated, industrialised, rich and democratic. That’s where we have most of our studies from. Psychology was looking at all these like Stamford and Harvard grads, economics, but if you gave those same tests to a radically different group of people maybe in a tribe in South America, their economics rules are not the same. The way they would play a game where somebody else could get money if they took money is completely different and so I think we are broadening that definition.

I really appreciate the look at different cultural modes and that’s exciting for me. I know in Australia you’re bringing in more folks that have traditionally been outside of education, we need to be learning from those traditions as well. It’s not just okay, we’re going to make you just like we have been, how can we make ourselves understand our learners as well and incorporate that into our environment.

DARLENE: It is exciting. I know that many of our universities are working with First Nations people to put that lens through all of our learnings which is just brilliant to actually bring that into that higher education sector and I think it’s going to be quite impactful going forward.

We’ve only got two more questions to go. I have taken a lot of your time but I really appreciate it. Can you provide some insights into how Think UDL Podcast has evolved over time and also the impact it’s had on the UDL community. I know we spoke prior to this. The recording the umms and ahhs have got less. That’s one thing.

LILLIAN: I hope I’ve done a little better.

DARLENE: I’ve been in awe of how you spoke so beautifully today, but how has it evolved?

LILLIAN: It really has changed because I started out with kind of what is UDL, really basic, because I was still figuring it out in 2017/2018, so it was like okay, how are you implementing it in the classroom and it’s very focused on what’s a technique you use. I’d have people describe it or how they use it, early implementation. Then it moved outside the classroom, in the next two years thinking about larger ideas.

As I mentioned, the idea of neurodiversity was a deep dive for me and disability being an identify and a good thing. It’s not just this is bad, like disability cultural centres, really changing how we in higher ed. perceive of diversity, neurodiversity and disability. Now in the last two years also talking about systems and change in a large scale implementation. It’s definitely evolved from individuals, “How do you do UDL?”, “I try this.” “Okay, that’s really cool.”, and that’s what it was for a while.

Now it’s getting into this meta part even after the system says well, how is UDL changing itself, like this whole new UDL 2.0 learning from the environment, trying to incorporate more people, viewpoints and perspectives into what is UDL. It’s still evolving for sure.

One thing that’s unreal to me is it’s growing. I see that there are downloads. I see that there are numbers but then to see you and say, “What, you listen when you’re walking.”, it’s amazing. It’s amazing to think we’ve got around 80,000 downloads and it’s growing. It’s about 2000 downloads a month. You know what, people are interested and people are taking note and it is changing, the chatter, people know what Universal Design for Learning is and that was not the case about five years ago at least in the United States. I see Australia as a leader in this and Ireland certainly as a leader in large scale implementation and so we need to hear that over here in North America. A lot of Canadian friends are doing incredible work with UDL, so we need to be hearing that too. It’s grown and I think it’s still gaining some traction so I’m looking forward to talking to even more people.

DARLENE: That’s great and the internationalization of this is brilliant, I mean the relationships that we’ve been able to forge between countries is great in this journey so it’s wonderful.

I feel like I’m going to have sent people down a rabbit hole of getting into your UDL Podcast and I’m certainly going to go—

LILLIAN: I hope so.

DARLENE: It’s great. Finally, what are some of the up and coming episodes or topics that we can look forward to. Have you got anything planned in the future?

LILLIAN: I do, I’ve got several that I still need to get out in the next two months, a couple of months. One is my colleague and friend, Loui Lord Nelson who has her own Podcast that focuses more on K-12 and hers is called UDL in 15 Minutes whereas mine is usually 45 minutes long, so it’s a shorter version. She works more with the K-12 but she’s come up with this really great resource called the UDL Gears and it just goes deep dive into UDL and not in the same way that the CAST guidelines list them but thinking about it as gears and teeth that are intertwined with each other. It’s a new concept so I’m looking forward to that. That’s going to come out soon.

I think that’s my next episode and then also I’ve got an episode about Library Accessibility from the University of Kentucky, Rachel Coombs, and what I like about that one is that was a direct result of a listener who said, “Hey, I would love to hear UDL in libraries.”, and so I sent out an email and found some folks. This will be the second one that’s about how do you do UDL in library science that’s not necessarily in a classroom setting.

Then I’ve got another one coming out from Thomas O’Shaughnessy in Ireland about implementation and on the horizon, not recorded yet, but more from Australia, innovative tools and surveys, so a lot international to look forward to and I welcome if anybody says, “You know what, I would love to hear an episode on this, tell it to me, please send me an email or write to me.”, and I would love to find somebody and tell you more about it and learn myself.

DARLENE: Brilliant, thank you. All of that I found really fascinating. It’s really timely. I think your Podcast will probably come out after one of our webinars that we’ve got coming up soon which was around libraries as well.

LILLIAN: Good.

DARLENE: A collective of our library staff actually developed Books Without Barriers, a practical guide for inclusive publishing which we’ll put the link in the show notes as well. We’re actually having a couple of people talk about that which is great and one of my passion projects I’d like to do going forward is accessible publishing. I find we’re kind of behind here in Australia. I’ve actually talked to people in America and in the UK about what’s kind of happening there and I think there’s a lot more work we could do.

Well, Lillian, what a treat. It was great to wake up early to talk to you and I haven’t been disappointed. Your energy and enthusiasm for UDL and your passion for the work you do has certainly shone through in all your answers. I really appreciate the thought you’ve given and the time you’ve given to us. I think it’s really going to step our conversation up a gear if people listen to what you’ve said and unpack that, it’s brilliant, so thank you, thank you so much.

LILLIAN: Thank you so for having me and for the amazing work you’re doing already, also for giving an ear for folks to listen to the Think UDL Podcast. I appreciate it and I will certainly be working with you more, “Hey, about this one, tell me about this one.” I know I’ll be contacting you again.

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