KATE ANDERSON: Hello and welcome to Naarm/Melbourne. It's my absolute pleasure to welcome you to the 2024 Universal Design for Learning Symposium led by the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training. This microphone is a bit tall for me.

This symposium today is co-hosted by us at RMIT University.

So my name is Kate Anderson. I'll be your MC for today. I am one of several Vice Chancellors Senior Research Fellows here at RMIT. My own research focuses on inclusion in digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and also educational tech. And I've been teaching about universal design for learning since 2015 and practising it for longer. I never pass up an opportunity to engage with this community of educators who are passionate about inclusion. Today we'll be asking speakers to describe what they look like to set the scene for any attendees who might not be able to see us. So I am tall, kind of skinny, I have a traditional Scottish pallor, brown hair. Today I'm wearing uncomfortably high heels, a colourful silk scarf and a crisp black dress who I inherited from my friend who is a corporate lawyer.

As I stand here today, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. I pay my respects to their elders past and present, and also extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders joining us today.

I also acknowledge this country's rich traditional educational origins over many thousands of years. Alongside other restorative practices UDL is a powerful way that we can explore reconciliation and respect, address educational inequity, and recognise learning traditions from the world's oldest continuous living cultures.

We gather here today not just as educators, researchers and professionals, but as lifelong learners who believe in the transformative power of education. We hope that this symposium will challenge your thinking, but also bring reassurance that universal design is within your reach, whatever your practice context might be.

If you're anything like me, a full day of learning from leading experts and inspiring presenters is going to leave you feeling a little bit overwhelmed by around lunchtime, maybe 2 pm. So forecasting this, I'd like to share an important take in message. You're probably already doing more than you think you are. As you learn about UDL today, consider which of your current practices already align with these values and which ones might be just close to reach. Which of your interventions that you've designed for one group might actually be helping another group of learners? These shouldn't form an end point for your UDL journey but they're a great place to start and to start documenting and building your UDL practice as well if you're new to this space.

So, every one of us here has a role to play in sharing our inclusive education future. Let's embrace this opportunity to learn, to connect with each other and to make a difference.

Without further delay, it is my pleasure to introduce our first guest, Wurundjeri man Colin Hunter Jnr Jnr, from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, to lead a Welcome to Country.

COLIN HUNTER: Thank you very much, and good morning and welcome. It is my honour and privilege to be here today. My name is Colin Hunter the 4th. I would like to start off with acknowledging that this morning we are on Wurundjeri country, home of my ancestors and also home to everybody here today. I wish to pay my respects to both elders past, present and emerging; elders from all nations, especially all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members with us here today.

Wurundjeri is a part of the Kulin Nation and the Wurrung language group. Wurundjeri country extends from the inner City of Melbourne, across to the Great Dividing Range, west to the Werribee River, south to the Mordialloc Creek and east to Mt Baw Baw. A big thank you to everybody who has helped make this possible today. Wominjeka, welcome, and I hope everybody has a fantastic afternoon ahead. Thank you very much and enjoy.

KATE: Thank you so much, Colin. It's now my pleasure to introduce you to Professor Sherman Young, who will officially open this event. Professor Young is Deputy Vice Chancellor Education and Vice President of RMIT University, where he's responsible for the strategic leadership of RMIT student learning from enrolment to graduation. He has a PhD from the University of Queensland and has been an academic for 20 years over 20 years with a research focus on the impact of new technologies on media policy, culture and industries.

As well as his university role, Sherman is Chair of the Board of the Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre in Melbourne's north. Prior to joining RMIT, Sherman was the Pro Vice Chancellor of Learning and Teaching and a Professor in the Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University. He held academic leadership roles in the Faculty of Arts at Macquarie where he taught new media theory and production. Sherman's research focuses on the impact of new technologies on media policy, culture and industries. That research focus has most recently been applied to the higher education sector. He is the author of The Book is Dead, Long Live the Book, and co-author of Media Convergence and Beyond 2.0 the Future of Music, all of which analyse the impact of new media technologies. He's published, presented, supervised and peer reviewed in both media studies and education disciplines. Sherman, over to you, and thank you.

SHERMAN YOUNG: Thanks, Kate. You make me sound way more distinguished than I am, so appreciate the introduction. And also thank you, Colin I think he's left now for that wonderful Welcome to Country. I too would like to acknowledge the people of the Woi Wurrung and Boonwurrung language groups of the Eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands RMIT conducts its business. And just reflecting that the theme from the recent Reconciliation Week was Now More Than Ever, which I think is something that remains a touchstone for all of us as we progress on our reconciliation journey.

So welcome guests, RMIT colleagues, both online I know there's some people online, hello online and those who have travelled interstate to visit us here in Naarm in Melbourne. For those of you who have travelled interstate, I'd like to apologise for the weather, although you'll note that the sun has come out so Melbourne's four seasons in an hour is doing us proud at the moment.

My name is Professor Sherman Young, as Kate said, and Deputy Vice Chancellor of Education here at RMIT. I am a look, I wouldn't call myself tall, but moderately heighted southeast Asian Australian gentleman, with a crewcut, glasses and a blue jacket. Unusually for me I'm wearing a tie today. That's who I am and what I look like, and it's my great pleasure to, on behalf of RMIT, both welcome you to this symposium, and also, I believe Kate, open it. So, you know, virtual scissors or virtual champagne against the bow of the ship, consider this symposium open. And it's a great pleasure to be partnering with ADCET to host this UDL Symposium here in 2024.

So why does universal design for learning matter? I think we're all in the education sector because we believe in the transformational power of education. The benefits and impacts that education has, not just on the individuals and their communities, but the broader society cannot be overstated. But that transformational power is only truly impactful if everybody, regardless of their background, abilities or preferences, has the opportunity and the conditions required to achieve their ambitions.

Diversity, we all know, is not just a strength, but a necessary strength, especially in the classroom. It contributes to rich and rigorous discussions, it draws on contexts and perspectives that we may not hold naturally and can lead to much deeper thinking by challenging biases, improving collaboration, enabling real ideation and more impactful outcomes for us all.

And it happens in the strangest of ways, but diversity is essential. A tiny anecdote from my experience, I was chatting to some students as part of my role about a year ago, and a student came up to me and said, "Thank you." I said, "What for?" They said, "Oh, for being Chinese in a leadership role." I thought I'd never really thought about that visible diversity, but I think it's really important that we embrace diversity in all its forms and ensure that that diversity is available and visible to everybody so that everyone has the aspirational challenge in their own lives and educational abilities.

As educational practitioners we play a critical role in supporting our learners to work, learn, interact and participate. And our role in the purposeful design of learning empowers all of our students, as well as all of us, to bring our whole selves to university. It drives engagement and aids in that widening participation and increasing success throughout one's lifelong learning.

But of course it's not just about educators. It's not just our responsibility to advance universal learning experiences. We have to work across the sector and within other sectors. The success and impact we have is dependent on our collaboration and cooperation with everybody who we work with. And the theme for this year's symposium goes to the heart of this: Cultivating creativity, connections and confidence in the Australian Tertiary Education Sector.

The last several years we've had tangible examples of how we've managed to connect and collaborate in new and innovative ways. COVID certainly taught us to react with agility, flexibility and innovation. And we've seen changes in the ways that learners and educators have been able to engage with curriculum, course materials and learning environments. We've had increasing aspirations around industry partnerships and connections, and new possibilities for what learning and teaching can look like and the recent Universities' Accord Report provides more incentive, not just to increase participation, but to build new pathways and connections as widely as we can. And of course, topic near to mine and Kate's heart is the rapid rise in new technologies and how we might be able to utilise and take advantage of where those new technologies might create new accessibility and inclusion possibilities.

Here at RMIT, it's a pretty exciting time. Our strategy really acknowledges the importance of inclusive support and experiences. We think about how we include everybody with our new idea framework, which we're committed to, and it commits to really embedding universal design approaches into all of the tools and resources that support our staff and the projects that they undertake.

We've implemented universal design for learning principles throughout our courses and where we have, our student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and so we know that it's a successful approach.

As part of the development of the idea framework, we consulted broadly, and that inclusion has really been embedded in how we construct everything at RMIT. We see implementing the universal design for learning approach as a standard practice and essential to what we do here at RMIT.

Of course, there's a long way to go, and events like this where a broad cross section of Australia's tertiary educators come together to collaborate and learn are important opportunities to progress that journey. In our shared pursuit of a more equitable and prosperous Australia, it's necessary that we all work together to level what is arguably the most important playing field of all, that of education.

So, again, I'll crack that virtual champagne bottle on that virtual ocean liner and declare the symposium open. Welcome to you all. Enjoy the symposium and make sure you take advantage of the opportunities to explore creativity and to make connections. Thank you very much. Now back to Kate.