

UDL and Blended Learning: Part 2

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So, I like to think about universally designing blended learning. And this idea is anchored in four key beliefs that are really at the heart of UDL.

The first is just the acknowledgement that learner variability is the norm, it's not the exception. And as soon as we recognize that, it makes sense to start questioning, why would we design a single learning experience for such a diverse group of learners? It makes a lot more sense for teachers to have a collection of instructional models they can leverage to meet that diversity of need.

The second is that the teacher really is the architect of learning experiences, and it's our job to really be thinking about what are the barriers that might exist in a particular learning experience or lesson, and how do we proactively remove those barriers? I think the simplest option is really just to build in student agency and meaningful choice. And student agency is a pillar of blended learning really trying to figure out how do we allow students more opportunities to decide what they learn, how they learn, what they create to demonstrate their learning?

The third kind of belief at the heart of this universally designed blended learning is the fact that all students are capable of reaching firm standard aligned goals, yet the path they take to get there might be really different. It's like going on a hike, right? Some people are gonna go from point A to point B on their own with confidence and very little support. Some are gonna need a detailed map and signage, right? Those are the scaffolds. And then some are gonna need a guide who's gonna walk alongside them, really working in a classroom closely with a teacher. So it's about figuring out how do we design learning experiences that allow students to walk the path that's gonna allow them to continue making progress.

And the fourth belief is that all students can and should become expert learners. And these are learners who are resourceful, they're motivated, they're strategic, and they're self-aware enough to kind of advocate for themselves as learners. And in a blended learning environment, teachers are truly partnering with students and sharing the responsibility of learning with them. And that's where we help them to develop that expertise.

What I think is really exciting about this intersection of universal design for learning and blended learning is that I think it makes it easier for teachers to kind of operationalize UDL in their classrooms, because we all value inclusivity, accessibility and equity and education. But it can be really challenging to figure out, how do we create those flexible pathways? How do we help students to

become those expert learners? And when we shift from that whole group, teacher led, teacher paced approach to learning, and we start to adopt these blended learning models be it station rotation, the flip classroom model, the playlist model, the whole group rotation, what we're ultimately doing is shifting that control over the learning experience to the learner, where they have agency to make key decisions, to choose the pathway that works for them.

They also, hopefully, are accessing more differentiated learning experiences where teachers in a blended room are free to sit alongside small groups and individual learners to support their progress. And also we're giving students more control over factors like the pace at which they move through information, or the pace at which they tackle a particular task. And building in things like metacognitive routines where we can help them to cultivate their kind of expertise as a learner, to get to know themselves better as a learner, and ultimately kind of advocate for their needs as a learner.