

UDL and Expert Learning

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The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence transforms public education so that every student is inspired and prepared to thrive as their best selves in the world. That's the vision here at CCEE. But what does that mean for students to be inspired and prepared to thrive as their best selves? And what's that gonna take? That's the challenge of turning vision into reality. And so we at CCEE started talking about what we were really trying to do. We quickly zeroed in on the word thrive. What does it mean to thrive? To answer that question, we considered another phrase in the vision, best selves, which led us to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

So Abraham Maslow, a psychologist, proposed that we have a spectrum of needs from our most basic biological imperatives, all the way up to our highest level of operation, actualization. That's what we all strive for. He theorized that we operate at different levels at different times. Sometimes we're higher, sometimes we're lower based on our context, what's going on around us and in us. In order to operate at a higher level, all the lower level needs have to be met. Thriving means we are operating in the higher levels, we feel good about ourselves and our place in the world, and we're continuing to develop in the pursuit of our best selves. Therefore, to have a chance at thriving, we need to have our basic physiological needs met, we have to feel physically and emotionally safe, and we have to have meaningful social connections. Otherwise, we're always focused on meeting those needs and we can't look beyond them. That's not thriving, that's surviving.

So what does it cost to have a place to live and food on the table in California? What does it cost to take care of yourself, to take care of others? What's the thriving wage? And what do you need to be able to do to earn it? There are a lot of jobs out there that will pay a thriving wage. Some require college, some don't. But they all exist within the world of work and the modern world of work requires people to be lifelong learners. The rapid changes brought by innovation, technology, and globalization require them to upskill, learn new skills that improve their performance in their current jobs, and reskill, learn knowledge and skills that allow them to do new jobs. Thriving wage workers need to be collaborative and to regulate their emotions and behaviors effectively especially when the work gets hard. They need to be critical thinkers, able to navigate ambiguity and to locate and leverage information necessary to solve novel problems. They need to think strategically to set goals, create plans to meet them, and shift those plans in the face of changing circumstances so they can still meet or exceed their goals. In short, they need to be expert learners, people who

are purposeful and motivated, knowledgeable and resourceful, strategic and goal-directed, or in other words, inspired and prepared to thrive.

Universal Design for Learning is a research-based framework that allows educators to create the conditions for expert learning and build student capacity to operate in that way. We want to move away from more passive approaches to learning and towards a world that is more self-directed, collaborative, and solution-oriented. The goal of Universal Design for Learning is expert learning. It's right there in the guidelines. Students need to be in environments where they're empowered to own their own learning. That learning is something they do and for them, rather than something that is done to them based on what someone else wants. They'll have to reflect on their learning and their role in their own success. They'll need to understand how to learn, how to locate and interrogate sources of information, synthesizing them from various places, and connecting them to their intent. They'll need to think creatively to find new solutions and to share their learning and their questions effectively using a variety of tools and mediums. They'll need to work on complex problems that have more than one linear path to completion. If we want our students to be their best selves in the world, we have to prepare them for the world they will enter. Universal Design For Learning allows us to intentionally support them so that they'll be inspired and prepared to thrive.

On behalf of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence and our friends at Texthelp, welcome to the UDL journey. We'll see you on the path.