What is UDL?

James McKenna	Hello. My name is James McKenna, Assistant Director for Professional Learning and Leadership Development at the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence. And if you're watching this video it's because you are wondering the answer to the question, what is Universal Design for Learning?

UDL is a framework for teaching and learning that is backed by decades of research and cognitive neuroscience and psychology. Developed by CAST, formally known as the Center for Applied Special Technology, UDL allows educators to design and deliver learning environments that are student-centered, assets-based, and offer equitable opportunities and support.

So, how does it work? Let's look at five big ideas that are the foundation of Universal Design for Learning.

One, emotional, intellectual, and strategic connections to learning. For meaningful learning we need to connect with the emotions, the why of the learning, the intellectual, the what of the learning, and the strategic, the how of the learning. Why gets our attention, keeps us engaged, and inspires us to keep learning. What is the knowledge we're trying to take on board and connecting it to what we already know as well as what we're trying to do. How is the pathway to applying that learning to solve problems, produce artifacts, and strengthen our ability to call on that learning at a later time.

Two, learner variability. Our brains are as unique as our fingerprints, and they are continuously changing. That means no two people connect to why, what, and how in exactly the same way. So, we need flexibility in our learning environments so that there's more than one right way to learn and show learning.

Three, barriers exist in environments, not people. People are variable, and so it's incumbent on us, the educators, to craft learning experiences that allow for that variability. When students struggle we have to examine the learning environment and pin down what's not working for them instead of assuming there's something not working in them. This can be daunting, but ultimately it's empowering because if we own the environment then we own the opportunity to be our students' biggest ally.

Four, firm goals and flexible means. We need to set clear, challenging, measurable goals for all students. These goals should communicate both high |

expectations as well as authentic value for meeting those expectations. With those goals in place we educators should think about the variability of our students and how they might encounter barriers to meeting the goals. Then we introduce options and supports that allow for flexibility in the pursuit of the goals, including flexibility in how students demonstrate their learning.

Five, expert learning. Expert learners are purposeful and motivated to learn and continuously improve. They're resourceful and knowledgeable, able to locate, vet, process, and connect information to what they know as well as their purpose for learning.

Finally, they're strategic and goal-directed, able to set goals, make plans to meet them, manage resources in pursuit of the goals, and shift plans based on the changing circumstances. The goal of Universal Design for Learning is to create and sustain environments that support students to act as expert learners by building their capacity and providing the opportunity and support they need to operate that way. We like to say that implementing Universal Design for Learning is a never-ending journey. There will be no mic-drop moment when you're done providing firm goals and flexible means, but like all great pursuits it starts with a first step.

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.