Reframing UDL: Plus-One

As a takeaway from this chapter, we want to show you how to think about UDL differently. Instead of adopting the mind-set that we must reactively address every access need, we can design our interactions so that the greatest number of people can take part in them without having to ask for specific accommodations. Fortunately for us, UDL doesn't require five different methods for each element in a course. Rather, it is an iterative process, where you and your colleagues create progressively more course content and interactions to be increasingly more accessible as you teach the course repeatedly. Instead of focusing on the three brain networks, think of UDL as merely plus-one thinking about the interactions in your course. Is there just one more way that you can help keep learners on task, just one more way that you could give them information, just one more way that they could demonstrate their skills?

This unlocks the plus-one mind-set. Having taught your existing courses repeatedly offers you one big advantage when it comes to adopting UDL methods: historical data. Think back and identify the places where your existing students bog down.

- Where do they always have questions?
- Where do they always get things wrong on tests or assignments?
- Where do they always ask for explanations in a different way from the one you provide?

Select these existing pinch points and adopt the plus-one approach at each point. Instead of providing all of the ways learners could get access to those materials, give just one more way to engage than exists now.

To add a plus-one approach to your day-to-day interactions within your class, think of the times where every class asks the same questions at the same point in the course. If you already have a text-based set of lecture notes, follow our psychology professor's example and record an audio podcast of the main content. For an existing video, provide captions or a transcript. Note that providing both captions and transcripts, while useful, might be overkill, especially as you start your UDL efforts.

To know whether to do captions or a transcript, think of whether viewers need to have the audio information at specific points of the video information. In a chemistry lab demonstration, viewers would definitely need to know when to add the chemical reagents and what the safety equipment looks like: since the audio and video content are linked, create captions. In a video interview with a colleague about the various types of banking models, the video content may not be tied logically to the audio, and so a transcript will suffice.

You can use plus-one thinking in assessments as well. For example, in addition to crafting a three-page written essay, you might also allow learners to record a video report, either for the final product of the assignment or as draft content (more on this distinction in the next chapter). Note that there is no requirement to allow students to create whatever they like and turn it in; just allowing them to have a choice about how they demonstrate the skill is enough to increase their sense of motivation in the course (Tobin, 2014, 20).

To keep learners engaged, your plus-one method might be providing breaks between parts of the course where they take in information and allowing learners to think, digest, and do. Schedule way-to-go or temperature-check messages to make sure communication keeps happening, not only about the content of the course but also about learners' progress and sense of accomplishment. It is likely that you are already interacting with your learners to keep them engaged, so offer them choices about how they stay engaged—they could watch your video recap of the unit's main ideas or read the e-mail message with the same content.

One caveat: some concepts and subject material are dependent on their format for understanding and application. For example, graphing

the mean in a mathematical set allows researchers to display relationships among disparate data points in a way that allows for visual interpretation in various ways; changing the display conventions for such data actually changes how the data sets can be interpreted (cf. Schneider, 2014). No amount of text-based tables can replicate the procedure of visual inspection for such graphed data. In such cases, where the format is the message itself, we are under no requirement to try to create alternatives for everyone; indeed, even accommodations for individual learners may be challenging. However, don't be lulled into thinking that every problematic situation is impossible either; there are often creative and useful ways to apply plus-one thinking to the places in your courses where students need alternatives the most. In other words, format requirements can outweigh UDL practices, but only if the format is a part of the assignment that is *assessed*.