

Shining a Light on Engagement

Consider for a moment, two very different types of leaders. One leader, Ms. Micromanager, controls every aspect of your practice. Without even asking for your feedback, she dictates your professional goals, how your classroom is set up, and the protocols for your parent meetings. You don't find that level of support useful (that's putting it nicely), but you comply because, after all, she's your boss. Another leader, Mr. Autonomous, hires you because he believes you are capable of great things. He supports you with the resources and feedback you need to be successful, and he provides you with options for how to organize your classroom and structure parent meetings. Which boss are you willing to work harder for?

Objective: *You will understand how UDL's focus on student engagement and empowerment is what distinguishes the framework from differentiated instruction (DI).*

Rationale: Many educators view the UDL Guidelines and wonder, "Isn't this the same thing as DI?" The answer is no. Both approaches address traditional education's failure to meet the needs of all learners. But UDL focuses much more on designing for all rather than individual students. And it focuses more on student engagement and empowerment. This chapter will focus on the importance of focusing on engagement when delivering universally designed education.

In his 2009 book *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*, Daniel H. Pink discusses this crucial difference between compliance and engagement. He notes that, “control leads to compliance; autonomy leads to engagement” (p. 108). Engagement leads to motivation or “the desire to get better and better at something that matters.”

So, let’s step back and think about the weight of that. If we want our students to be motivated learners, we have to support their journey so they become autonomous and can personalize their learning. To do this, we have to focus on engagement and start with *why*? Empowering our students with options and the opportunity to personalize their own learning is one of the core concepts of UDL and what sets it apart from differentiated instruction (DI). Some teachers may see the Guidelines and say, “Isn’t this just DI with a different name?” The answer is no. Although the two frameworks share similarities, there are significant differences. To be clear, both DI and UDL are ways to differentiate curriculum to meet the needs of students. DI, however, is more reactive and teacher directed (the learning options are often controlled by the teacher) whereas UDL is proactive and student directed (which allows students to become autonomous learners). Table 3-1 provides a visual representation of the spectrum from traditional education to DI to UDL.

TABLE 3-1: Traditional, DI, UDL Education Scale (Adapted from Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation [2012])

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION	DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION	UDL
Static	Reactive	Proactive
Evaluates the curriculum	Evaluates the student	Evaluates classroom environment and culture
Follows scripted lesson	Adapts script when it’s not effective	Intentional
Teaches curriculum as design	Retrofits instruc- tion by providing accommodations	Designs instruction prior to students arrival with embedded choices

TABLE 3-1: Traditional, DI, UDL Education Scale (Adapted from Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation [2012]) *CONTINUED*

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION	DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION	UDL
Designed for the average students	Designed for different groups of students based on perceived ability	Designed for students of all variability
Does not consider students in the margins	Plans different learning experiences for students in the margins	Plans for all students
Ignores barriers	Works around barriers	Eliminates barriers

Traditional education was static and was focused on following a script. Teachers were subject matter experts, not learning experts, and the rigor of the content reigned supreme. For a long time, traditional education worked because students in the margins were educated in separate settings. If you reflect back to Psychology 101 in college, you may remember the bell curve (Figure 3-1).

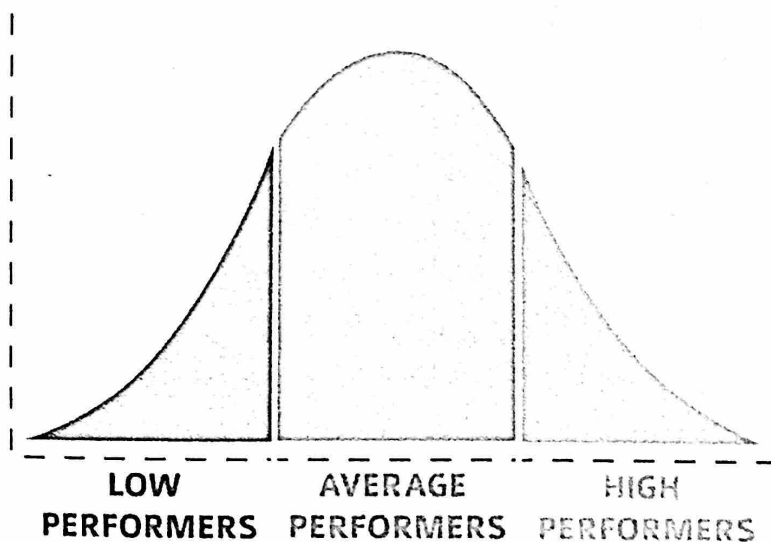


FIGURE 3-1: The Bell Curve

Before inclusion, the students in the margins (i.e. “low performers” and “high performers”) were often not educated with their peers. Because there was less variability in the classroom, teachers could deliver a lesson as it was designed and most students would “get it.” Granted, they may

have been bored out of their minds, but they were compliant, so traditional education prevailed.

Finally, after years of separate education for students in the margins, the nation embraced the concept of inclusion, which was a huge step in the right direction. With all learners in the classroom, teachers soon realized that the traditional education was not accessible to some students. As a result, DI was born. Teachers reacted to the needs of students and created differentiated learning experiences for students who struggled or who needed enrichment.

In this model, teachers looked toward individual students and provided entry points, learning tasks, and outcomes that allowed those students to access the curriculum (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003). In this model, teachers created different levels of expectations for students so they could be successful (Waldron & McLeskey, 2001). The limitation of this model is that all students do not have access to the same rigorous education. Choices are made for students and controlled by the teacher, without providing students with the opportunity to set their own goals, create their own strategies, and choose the learning experiences that best meet their needs. In short, DI provides multiple means of representation and expression, but does not provide for multiple means of engagement at the same level as UDL. UDL has an increased focus on building students' executive function and self-regulation, and engaging them throughout the learning process, while continuing to provide multiple means of representation and expression so they can become autonomous learners.

Many educators who hear about UDL for the first time are already familiar with DI. If that's you, don't feel like you have to start over. If you're already familiar with DI, you're in a great place because you're already teaching in an inclusive environment, and you're thinking about how to provide multiple levels of challenge to your students. You're on the road to UDL and all the work you've done to learn about DI is important groundwork for this next step. Now it's time to start with the *why* and empower our students to think critically about how to make choices about their own learning.

Why is at the core of the human experience. Simon Sinek (2011), an expert on motivational leadership, designed a graphic called the Golden Circle (Figure 3-2), which puts *why* at the center. Sinek explains, "Put simply, it helps us understand why we do what we do. The Golden Circle provides compelling evidence of how much more we can achieve if we remind ourselves to start everything we do by first asking *why*" (p. 38).

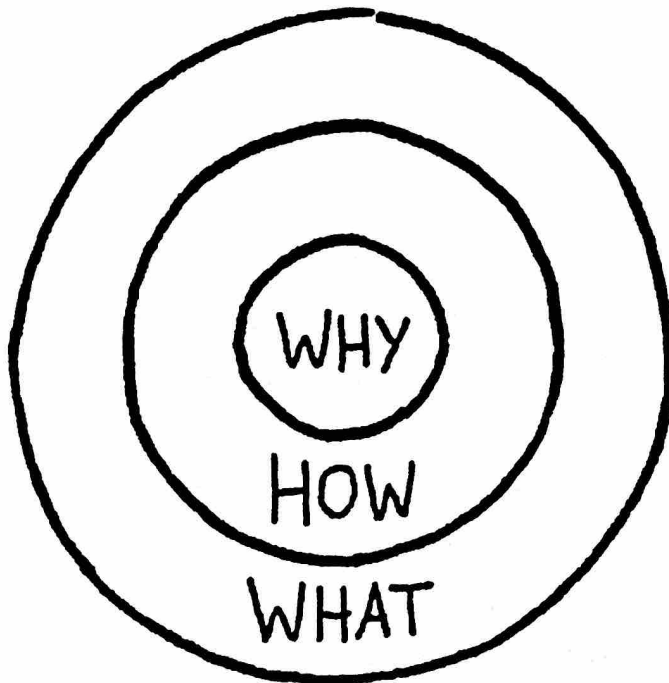


FIGURE 3-2: Simon Sinek's Golden Circle © 2016, Simon Sinek. Used with permission.

Our students need to know *why* they are learning and *why* it's important to persist when learning gets hard. And this is equally important whether learners are in pre-K or experienced teachers attending professional development. Let's examine the importance of *why* in a first-grade class, and then in a PD session, so it's clear that all learners are more engaged when teachers provide multiple means of engagement.

Imagine a first-grade teacher sitting in a rocking chair at circle time. The teacher opens the book *Kindness Is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler*, and starts with *why*. "Today, we are going to read a book about being kind. This is really important because as a school we have been preparing for World Kindness Day. This book may be challenging, but since you are all super-readers and have a growth mindset, you will be able to read all

about how Mrs. Ruler's class learns to be kind. You will have a couple of choices for reading. You can read it by yourself or with a small group, you can read it while listening to it on the headphones, or you can sit with me and I will read it with you. It doesn't matter what anyone else picks. You choose what is best for you, and don't worry—you can change your mind. For example, if you try to read by yourself, remember our tricks about 'just-right books.' Can anyone tell me how you can tell if a book is just right? That's right. If there are three words on a page that you can't read, you may want to change your strategy. Can someone remind me what a strategy is?"

While focusing on the *why*, the teacher builds engagement by giving students choices, minimizing threats and distractions, encouraging students to set their own goals, promoting expectations that optimize motivation, facilitating personal coping skills, and developing self-assessment. In UDL, start with the *why*.

Note in this example how the students are empowered through engagement. The teacher did not assign students to groups based on reading levels; she encouraged autonomy, and she challenged them to define their own goals and coping strategies when reading, all while creating a motivating, warm environment.

Starting with the *why* is not just effective for our PK-12 students. It's the best thing for all learners, including you. Right now, I'm going to take you through a short reflection. I want you to close your eyes (metaphorically . . . keep reading) and reflect on one or more terrible professional development experiences you've had during your career. Now, I want you to build an imaginary box called Bad PD. Take those memories one by one and place them in the box. You know the ones: the seminar where the presenter read PowerPoint slides until you were dizzy, the time the presenter was a complete know-it-all, and the keynote presenter who threw mini candy bars into the audience promising a big "Pay Day" if you adopt the newest teaching strategy. (True story. Hit someone right in the face.) When you peer into this Bad PD box, you will not see a lot of sessions that adhere to the UDL Guidelines about providing multiple means of engagement. Instead, you'll likely see all the opposite, the Anti-Guidelines if you will (see Table 3-2).

TABLE 3-2: The Anti-Guidelines for Engagement

PROVIDE MULTIPLE MEANS OF ENGAGEMENT	BAD PD: THE ANTI-GUIDELINES
<p>Provide options for self-regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation • Facilitate personal coping skills and strategies • Develop self-assessment and reflection 	<p>Does not provide options for self-regulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boils teaching and learning down to standardized test scores—not a big catalyst for teacher motivation • Doesn't provide you with optional resources that you can use to clarify concepts, such as sticky notes and markers • Only asks for feedback during the last 30 seconds when you're filling out the evaluation
<p>Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heighten salience of goals and objectives • Vary demands and resources to optimize challenge • Foster collaboration and communication • Increase mastery-oriented feedback 	<p>Does not provide options for sustaining effort and persistence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple times during the presentation you lean over to a colleague and say, "Why are we here?" • There is only one presentation with few options to review background information or explore application in relevant ways. • No group work. Just practice your listening skills. • Presenter doesn't provide you with feedback on how the PD relates to your practice.
<p>Provide options for recruiting interest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize individual choice and autonomy • Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity • Minimize threats and distractions 	<p>Does not provide options for recruiting interest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are required to attend. Period. End of story. • The presenter's examples don't relate to your grade or subject area. • The presenter yells, seems angry, or gets defensive when you question the relevance of the proposed PD.

When considering the importance of engagement, first-grade students aren't so different from us, as adult learners. We also need to start with the *why* of learning so we can make our own decisions and become autonomous learners.

Let's return to our two leaders from the beginning of the chapter—Ms. Micromanager and Mr. Autonomous—and put them in front of the classroom. Ms. Micromanager makes decisions for her students based on their abilities. Even if her decision is appropriate, a critical aspect of UDL is missing. Students never had the opportunity to set goals for their learning and they weren't given the opportunity to hone their executive function and self-regulation strategies. These are important if we want all our students to be successful in whatever paths they choose.

Mr. Autonomous planned similarly for his lesson. He created opportunities for students that reflected various levels of challenge and provided students with supports and scaffolds such as work exemplars, rubrics, and graphic organizers. The key difference is that Mr. Autonomous provided students with control of their own learning as he supported them with mastery-oriented feedback. Not only are students learning important content, but they are learning how to be learners, which is a lesson that they will carry with them forever. I will leave you with this question: Who are the students willing to work harder for?

SUMMARY

When delivering UDL lessons in the classroom, start with the *why*. The Engagement Guidelines provide us with strategies to motivate students and also allow them to develop perseverance and coping skills in the classroom. This focus on engagement and autonomy is a cornerstone of UDL and what sets it apart from DI.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Although UDL and DI share similarities, there are differences between the two frameworks. Imagine someone asks, "They sound the same to me. How are they different?" Practice your answer.
2. Think about all the teachers, coaches, and bosses you've had in your life. Which one is the most memorable? Reflect on how that person was able to engage you. What are some of the strategies he or she utilized? Bonus points if you can connect those strategies back to the UDL Guidelines.
3. With your colleagues, create a PD wish list by answering the following questions: What would PD nirvana look like? How would the PD provider build engagement with all learners?
4. Why is it important to start with *why*?