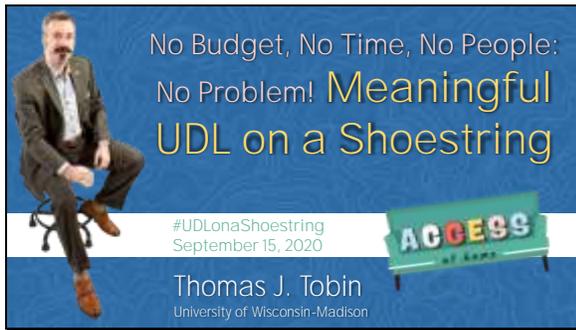


Slide  
1



Tobin, “No Budget, No Time, No People: No Problem! Meaningful UDL on a Shoestring.”

15 September 2020

[ACCESS](#) conference. Boston, MA: 3Play Media.

Slide  
2



Shrinking enrollments, customer bases, budgets, staff, instructors.

Pre-pandemic, we had already reached out to the obvious places to find new students: returning adults, college completers, non-degree students.

During the pandemic, we’re struggling just to keep things going. Many of our colleges and universities are cutting things we never thought we’d cut: tenured people, permanent staff, entire programs.

The one place we can all help to “keep the lights on” is in retaining existing students and learners.

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We need ways to combat the “freshman cliff.” You know, where you take in 2,000 freshman students, but you end up with only 1,300 sophomores. Or your company hires 20 new staff members, but only a dozen of them last for more than a year.

Why is that?

Well, the number one reason is financial, and we can’t do much with the design of our programs to address that.

But the second most common reason for student or employee melt is time: learners don’t have enough of it. And we can totally design our interactions to help learners find time for study and skill acquisition that they wouldn’t ordinarily have. That’s where universal design for learning, or UDL, comes in.

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Let's narrow our focus in order to find strategies that we can do quickly and easily—strategies that pay us and our students back in the form of lowered barriers, saved time, and better persistence, retention, and satisfaction.

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The official definition of UDL from the neuroscientists at CAST is providing learners with multiple means of

engagement, representation, and action & expression.

This definition is based on the three brain networks we need to activate if we wish to remember, retain, and apply any information or skill. But it's not the simplest way to do UDL.

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For that, think about the interactions that your learners have right now—with materials, with each other, with you, and with the wider world. If there's one way that those interactions take place now, add just one more way: that's "plus one" thinking.

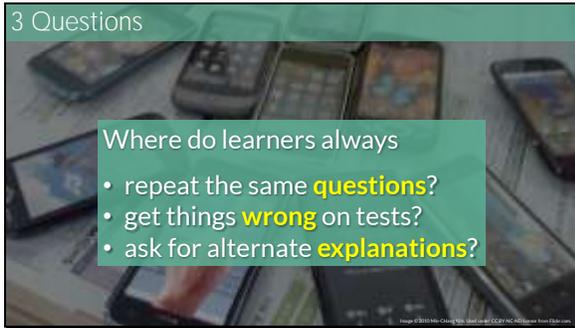
It's a simplified way to get started, and helps you to choose places to start applying UDL that will reward you and your learners most immediately.

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This time around, the ACCESS at Home event is all about using video. Video is one of the easiest, least time-consuming, and most effective ways to +1 your content and interactions. Best of all, video doesn't need to be all Hollywood glamor and special effects. The motion background on this slide is free to use under a Creative Commons license, and you can quickly create or find video resources that help to lower access barriers.

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Trying to create a video resource for every single document or interaction in our learning environment would lead to burnout quickly. To figure out where we can apply our “shoestring” resources, we should focus on the “pinch points” in our interactions.

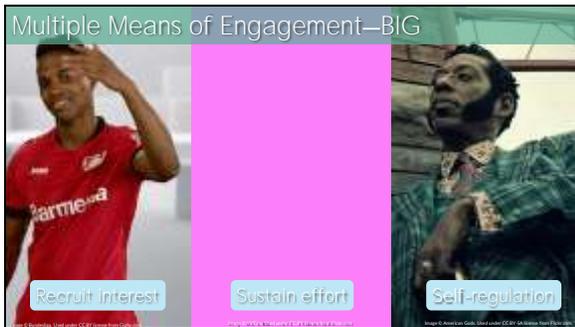
Where do our learners always ask or email the same question 700 times, each time we teach or train a particular concept?

Where do you always end up re-teaching or re-training because so many learners get an idea or practice wrong when they do an activity or an assessment?

And where do they always say “that was great, but I still don’t get it.”

These are places where adding video for engagement, understanding, and practice really pays off. Let’s examine some ways that we can incorporate video, both in big-programmatic ways, and in small, shoe-string approaches, too.

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The first principle of UDL is to give learners multiple means of engagement:

- Provide options for recruiting interest.
- Provide options for sustaining effort and persistence.
- Provide options for self-regulation.

The big, programmatic ways of doing this include having a studio environment for creating videos or using complex software to create professional-looking clips. Most of us don’t have that kind of equipment, time, budget, or expertise. We can’t hire sports stars to welcome learners, block out shots like we’re directing music videos, or create realistic sets to evoke past eras.

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So, instead of sending a camera crew into your house . . .

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. . . get learners interested using the tools available to you, like setting up your mobile phone camera to record your hands, books, and experiment materials. For example, Dave and Bonni Stachowiak have a great [YouTube video](#) for making a “shoebbox hug” camera rig for your mobile device.

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To help learners sustain their efforts, Dimitris Bertsimas from MIT recorded [quick videos](#) to share the key learning topics for each unit. Yes, if the mathematician from MIT can do cell-phone videos, you will do just fine on camera, as well. By the way, Dimitris is reading from his notes, so he *already* has a +1 version of the information in the video!

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The most important part of keeping learners engaged is helping them with organization, time management, and pacing. Recording quick videos that talk about HOW to be a learner in your course or training program go a long way toward heading off confusion and frustration later on. Post a text version of the how-to in the same place your learners will go for the video, and you've got a +1 all set up already.

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What is one way you give your learners multiple ways to stay engaged?

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This is what most people think about when they think about accessibility: putting captions onto videos or interactive elements (like this video-game screen), making alternative-text labels for images, and on and on and on.

This is good accessibility, and it will wear you out trying to design for every possible access scenario or possibility—especially when you create a lot of video, interactive, or screen-demo content.

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Here's a little secret, though: you don't have to caption all of your videos.

A text transcript is just fine for any video that does not require spoken information to be matched with a specific time stamp in the video. In other words, if you're showing people how to mix chemicals safely, you need captions, because the timing is crucial: people need to know the spoken/written information that matches certain on-screen visuals.

But if you're talking about the history of the Italian Renaissance, a text transcript can convey the same information as spoken audio without needing to be time-stamped. This means that most often, starting with a script, recording your video, and then uploading the script is good enough.

Oh, and by the way, for videos where you do need or want captions, let the pros do it. The auto-captioning features in many slide-software and remote-meeting tools are pretty good, but our hosts at 3Play Media are experts at doing captions the old-fashioned way (99.9% correct)—and they'll give you a transcript as a third option for learners, too.

By the way, you have access to a text transcript for this session; I made a handout ahead of time with the key elements!

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What is one way you give your learners multiple ways to take in information?

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When we think about the “big” ways to provide our learners with ways they can take actions or express themselves, we think about options within systems. This is learning how to allow learners to key in text or use the record-audio features in your LMS's discussion tool.

It's providing them with apps and software tools that allow them to communicate through various means. It's teaching them how to create videos or audio files using the “official” tools that your college, university, or organization supports.

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On a shoestring, though, give your learners options for how they take action, communicate, and express themselves, and be open to the tools they already have with them—usually the ones on their mobile devices. In our pockets, most of us have a way to create text, audio, and video.

We also have free ways to share those files: uploads to places like Dropbox, SoundCloud, and Vimeo can be shared just by copying the file links. Unless you're teaching multimedia techniques, allow your learners to create things in any format, so long as they can share their work in ways that everyone can see.

And give feedback or grade all of their work for a given activity using the same objectives and criteria: that's the secret about +1 design. It helps to create expert learners, who are ready to mix, select, and create in various ways—rather than expert students, who know how to do things only one way and aren't as prepared for novel situations and cross-application needs.

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What is one way you give your learners multiple ways to take action or express their skills?

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So, to recap, when we think about the “shoestring” ways of providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action & expression, we can use existing video as a way to connect with learners, create quick video resources from our existing text content, and allow learners to use whatever tools they have at hand to create their own choice-drive responses to our activities.

Slide 22



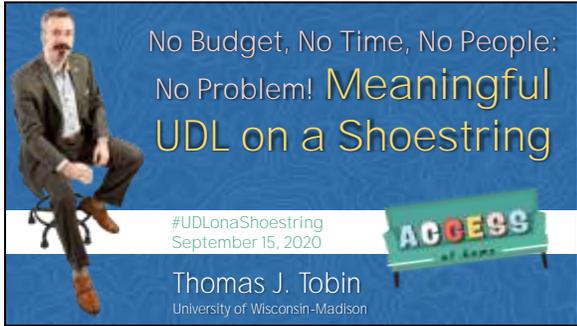
A side note: I speak and consult on issues of quality in education and training where technology is used to support or to host learning interactions. If you'd like to continue the conversation, my web site is <http://thomasjtobin.com>.

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After our session conversation, or if you've watched the recording, what is one thing that you will take away from our time together? One question you still have, a technique you'd like to try, or a piece of information you'll hold on to?

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Thank you very much for being part of this session, and thanks to our hosts at 3Play Media for inviting me to work with you all. Be sure to check out <http://3PlayMedia.com> to find more events, services, and help in lowering access barriers for your learners!