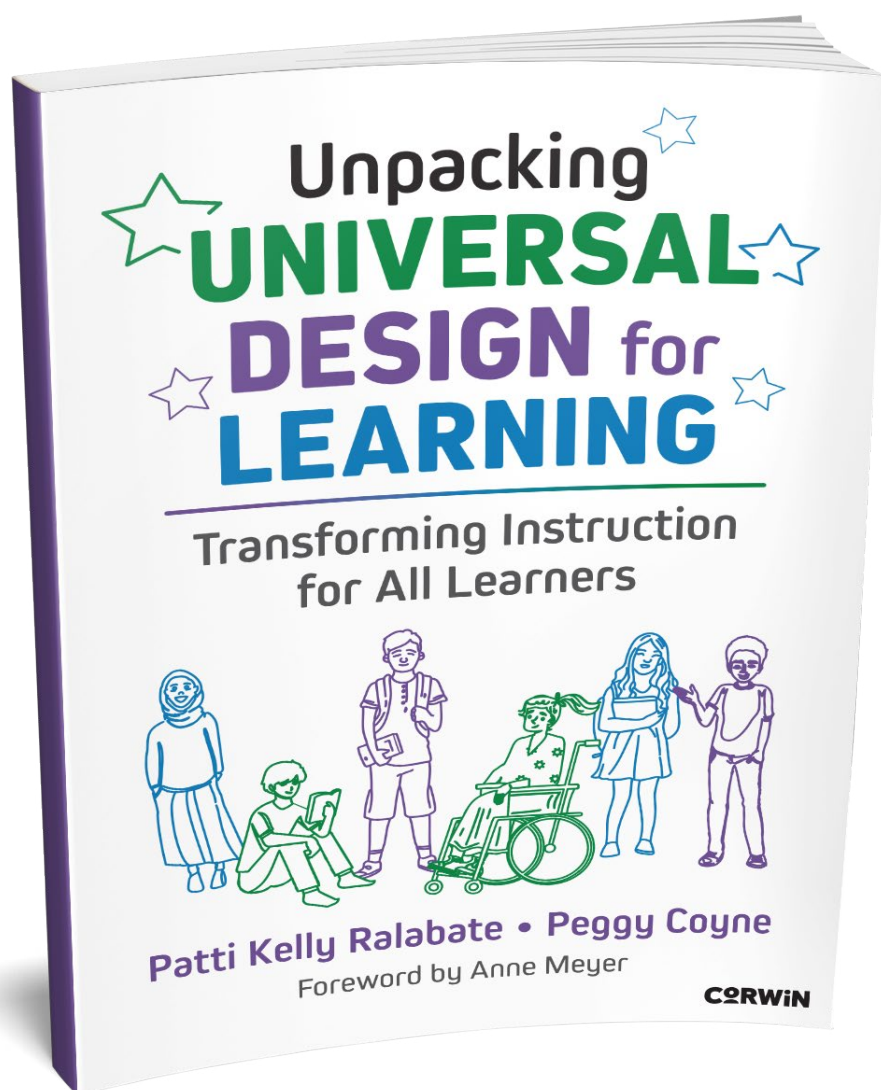


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Preface



WHY DID WE WRITE THIS BOOK?

Nearly 40 years ago, [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) was introduced by [CAST](#) as a conceptual framework that would help educators better meet the academic needs of all learners, including those with disabilities. CAST, originally known as the Center for Applied Special Technology, was founded in 1984 by researchers Dr. David Rose and Dr. Anne Meyer. Initially, the mission was to apply technology solutions to help students with disabilities. Through their continued research, their innovative idea transformed from “fixing the student” to “redesigning the curriculum.” In response, CAST developed the UDL framework in the 1990s to help educators and curriculum designers create flexible learning environments that support all learners (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Since then, UDL has become internationally renowned and is now recognized as an evidence-based framework for curriculum and instruction that provides access to learning for all learners, no matter their skills, talents, needs, or age (McKenzie et al., 2025).

As experienced educators, researchers, and providers of professional learning, the authors of this book have brought UDL to thousands of teachers and students. This book represents their collective knowledge of how UDL supports ALL students, regardless of who they are as learners. It demonstrates how UDL can impact the instructional design of ALL educators no matter who, what, or where they teach.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK?

Educators generally identify themselves by labels such as special education, general education, advanced placement (AP), elementary, middle, high school, or higher education. They may also include the specific content areas they teach, such as math, English language arts, science, or social studies. Sometimes these labels can be limiting. Educators may overlook learning about instructional frameworks or strategies if they don’t appear to be relevant to their teaching population or academic content.

This book is unique because it provides a framework for planning and instruction that benefits educators, no matter what their focus area may be or how the students they teach are identified. You will learn how the application of the UDL framework can be used by all educators to impact ALL learners regardless of their imposed labels or categories.

Educators who are new to UDL will learn how to take that critical first step of applying UDL to their practice. Meanwhile, educators who already have an understanding of UDL will broaden their UDL implementation by building on dozens of authentic vignettes and exemplars. Used as a resource for college-level coursework, this book will provide both current teachers and teacher candidates a solid base for understanding the relationship of the UDL framework to instructional planning. Used as a

resource for professional learning workshops and professional learning teams, this book offers experienced educators the opportunity to deepen their UDL practice and meet the instructional needs of ALL of their learners.

OUR GOALS

This book defines UDL and then unpacks it as a framework that (1) encourages engagement by activating motivation and validating a sense of belonging, self-actualization, and learner agency; (2) provides sensory and physical accessibility; and (3) supports understanding by offering cognitive accessibility for ALL learners regardless of age, skills, talents, or needs. Woven together, the chapters build on each other to provide a complete description of how unpacking UDL can lead to developing a “UDL lens” that provides a way of meeting the needs of all learners.

Features included at the end of every chapter assist you in building from what is known to new levels of insight, including examples that share authentic educator voices, *Key Takeaways* that provide a summary of main points, and *Ideas to Ponder* that present questions to expand learning. These questions also offer inspiration for professional learning teams or higher education class discussions. Additional resources for further exploration are provided in the *For Your Bookbag* section. A unique component of this book is the final chapter, Chapter 5, that provides 27 authentic exemplars describing how various educators embraced UDL and how it transformed their thinking. Definitions for words/terms that appear in blue text throughout the book can be found in the glossary.

The following overview describes the purpose and content of each chapter:

- **Preface**—The Preface provides an outline of the book, defines our goals in writing this book, and explains its various features.
- **Chapter 1: UDL and the Brain**—Chapter 1 defines the Universal Design for Learning framework and its components, describes its relationship to relevant neuroscience and learning science research, and provides an overview of two overarching concepts: (1) *All three sets of brain networks work together*, and (2) *Our brains burn different amounts of glucose as we encounter varying levels of challenge in different tasks and contexts*.
- **Chapter 2: Designing UDL Learning Experiences**—Chapter 2 takes a deep dive into a third concept—*learner variability is predictable*. This chapter not only describes the concept of learner variability but also explains how (1) designing for learner variability informs goals, assessments, methods, and materials; (2) proactively applying UDL to the design of learning environments and lessons enhances learner agency; and (3) aspects such as context and critical values intersect with developing learner agency.
- **Chapter 3: Maximizing Learning for All**—Chapter 3 outlines the types of barriers that can impact learning, defines the difference between scaffolds and supports, and highlights the importance of moving beyond learner choice to providing support for learning.

- **Chapter 4: How UDL Transforms Thinking**—Chapter 4 describes aspects of UDL implementation that go beyond providing learner choice and multiple means of representation and presents an example of how one educator understands how to address learner variability using the UDL framework.
- **Chapter 5: UDL Exemplars in the Field**—Chapter 5 includes 27 authentic stories written by general educators, special educators, higher education faculty, UDL coaches, and professional learning leaders. Each contributor explains how implementing UDL transformed their design of learning environments and lessons to better meet learners' needs and support learner agency.

You may read this book as part of a course assignment or as a member of a professional learning team. Or you may choose to read this book as part of a personal goal to expand your current understanding of UDL. You may want to read the sections of the book that are most pertinent to your current teaching situation. However, we recommend that you read each chapter in sequence in order to optimize understanding of how UDL implementation can extend learner engagement and cognitive growth, as well as ensure accessibility.

YOUR GOALS

Before we begin any professional learning experience, we ask participants to reflect on how our proposed learning goals relate to their personal learning goals. Thinking about what you want to learn has the benefit of focusing your learning (Beninhof, 2014). Take a moment to do that right now. Decide what you want to learn from this book and write it down. Your personal learning goal may focus on building an enhanced understanding of how UDL can make a difference in your practice. Or, more specifically, you may want to learn how to design instruction with a “UDL lens” that supports the academic progress of all of your learners. When you finish the book, review your personal learning goal(s) to determine what you learned and whether you met your goals.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



With insights gained from working with students with disabilities, CAST created Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an educational framework that would make curriculum more flexible and responsive for ALL learners.



Over the past 40 years, UDL has been adopted across the globe as a conceptual framework that supports ALL learners, regardless of imposed labels, skills, talents, needs, or age.



Developing a “UDL Lens” helps educators design instruction that meets the needs of ALL learners.



IDEAS TO PONDER

1. Why is learning about UDL important to you?
2. How can adopting a “UDL lens” for designing your instruction make a difference for all your learners?
3. What do you already know about UDL that you can use as a base for learning more?

FOR YOUR BOOKBAG

- Rose, D. H. & Meyer, A. (2002). *Teaching every student in the digital age: Universal Design for Learning*. ASCD.
 - Written by the co-founders of CAST, this book is considered the first comprehensive discussion of the UDL principles. It offers a plethora of research that forms the basis for the UDL framework.
- Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Gordon, D. (2014). *Universal design for learning: Theory and practice*. CAST Professional Publishing.
 - This book demonstrates the continued development of UDL as new research in the fields of neuroscience and education has evolved.
- Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Gordon, D. (2024). *Universal design for learning: Principles, framework and practice*. CAST Professional Publishing.
 - This book continues the development of UDL.
- Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Gordon, D. (2026). *Universal design for learning: Principles, framework and practice* (3rd ed.). CAST Professional Publishing.
 - This edition by Dr. Meyer and Dr. Rose provides an update to the latest brain research.