Developing Accessible and Effective Learning Activities
A Guide for Settlement Workers

Developed for the Community Integration Network by
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the course of their work, settlement workers provide learning opportunities to individuals and communities. Whether it is within a training session or a one-on one meeting, learning is an important part of the exchange. In addition, they have interactions with people who have very different resources, experiences and needs when it comes to learning.

This self-guided learning workbook will provide an introduction to developing accessible and effective learning activities in a settlement setting using the Universal Design for Learning framework.

1.1 Learning Objectives:

After engaging with the text and completing the suggested activities, the learner will be able to:

- **Describe** the unique characteristics of learning activities in a settlement setting
- **Define** the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and its applications in a settlement setting
- **Apply** the Universal Design for Learning concepts to their own activities to increase their accessibility and effectiveness

1.2 Definitions

In the context of this document, these terms have been attributed the following meanings:

Accessibility: Accessibility refers to the degree to which learners can avail themselves of the information shared in a learning environment.

Diversity: Diversity describes the diverse factors that may influence the needs of the learners. Cultural diversity is a factor, but so are the learner's strengths, barriers and abilities.

Effectiveness: Effectiveness describes the degree to which learners can engage with, understand and apply the important information that settlement workers share with them.

Learners: Anyone who may be engaging in the learning activity, for example clients, co-coworkers, or community partners.

Learning Activities: Any activity where there is information being shared with the objective of supporting the settlement process.

1.3   Engaging in Self-Guided Learning

This document is designed to engage the reader in a self-guided experience. The reader is provided with different options to acquire information, reflect, and check their understanding.

The purpose is both to provide an engaging learning experience but also to provide examples of tools that settlement workers can apply within their own context.

- Informational text
- Reflection questions
- Links to short videos
- Links to articles
- Self-evaluation
- Additional resources

Activity: Read about Learning to Foster Autonomy: The Role of Teacher Education Materials Reinders, H., & Balcikanli, C. (2011). https://sisaljournal.org/archives/mar11/reinders_balcikanli/

1.4   Activity: Your Personal Learning Preferences

Please take a moment to reflect on your own learning preferences. Finish these sentences:

- **I learn best when…**

- **The tools and activities that work best for me when I am learning are…**

- **The tools and activities that are less effective for me when I am learning are…**

1.5   Everyone is a Unique Learner

Everyone learns differently. As you have preferences and greater ease with different approaches, so do the people you will be supporting in a settlement setting.

No matter what their preferences, it is important that learners

- are engaged in the activity,
- can access the content easily,
- have the opportunity to verify their understanding and receive support if they need it.

Activity: Watch Todd Rose-The end of Average, Harvard School of Education (VIDEO, 07:31) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GcJi4eaSeY

2.   LEARNING IN A SETTLEMENT CONTEXT

2.1 Activity: Your Own Context

- What types of learning activities do you or your organisation offer?

- Who are your learners?

- What are some of the barriers to learning that might affect your learners?

- In your experience, what are the consequences for learners if they are unable to understand or apply the information they receive?

2.2   Mission and Learning

Settlement organizations share the fundamental mission of promoting inclusion, offering support to newcomers to Canada, and developing their capacity to create a successful settlement journey.

Effective learning activities provide support and tools so that learners may reach their full potential, gain confidence and meet their goals. In developing learning that can be understood and applied by diverse learners, the organization is promoting inclusion within its activities.

2.3   Diversity: Learners, Activities and Barriers to Learning

Learning in the settlement sector involves meeting the needs of diverse learners, offering different activities, and finding solutions around learning barriers.

It takes place in many different ways and is not limited to traditional learning activities, such as classes. Learning can take place during telephone conversations, one-on-one meetings, sports activities, counselling sessions, conversation circles, informal chats in the library and in innumerable other ways.

Settlement agencies often have little time and minimal resources for learning activities, so planning is essential. Clarifying the objective, offering different ways to access the information and verifying outcomes is key. These will increase the likelihood that the activity will be accessible and useful to the learner.

Diversity of Learners and Activities in a Settlement Setting

Who are the learners?	What are their diverse characteristics?	What types of activities constitute a learning activity?
-Newcomers to Canada - Friends, loved ones or community supports -Parents -Teachers and school administrators -Students -Families -Professionals that support newcomers -Community Partners -Colleagues -Youth at risk -Seniors	-Physical and psychological strengths and limitations -Knowledge of the language of instruction -Level of formal schooling -Learning preferences and abilities -Cultural factors -Settlement experience -Previous positive or negative experiences with learning	-Parent meetings -Community kitchen -Job search workshop -Information session -Parent-teacher meeting -Individual meetings or counselling -Conversation Circles -Health promotion events -Community meetings -Volunteer orientation -Job training -Housing support

2.4   Learning Barriers in a Settlement Setting

Different factors may constitute learning barriers. Some of these factors can be directly related to learning, such a language barrier or level of schooling. However, others are related to environmental factors. They directly affect the clients' ability to participate in learning activities and apply the acquired concepts.

Settlement workers are very familiar with the many challenges that newcomers to Canada may encounter. The settlement process can be very demanding and it is often a period of great uncertainty. Newcomers may be facing personal issues such as a precarious financial or housing situation, loneliness, stress and other issues. They may be facing environmental factors like racism, sexism and discrimination.

Learning, making sense of information and applying information can be challenging under these circumstances. The role of the settlement worker is to ensure that they are creating learning activities that take these factors into account. For example: An organization discovered that they could have a well-attended information session on women's' mental health by integrating it into a community kitchen activity.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework provides concepts and guidelines that can help settlement workers plan learning activities that are accessible to diverse learners.

3.   UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING IN THE SETTLEMENT SECTOR

3.1   What is Universal Design for Learning?

Activity: Watch a quick overview of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) **Universal Design for Learning at a Glance** (04:36) (CAST, n.d)
http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.XoOJjNNKg_U

(Note: The language in the video refers to a traditional school setting but the concepts and principles are applicable in the settlement sector)

Universal Design for Learning is an educational framework that supports design for access. Its guidelines have been developed based on research on brain learning networks. (CAST, 2018).

- Each learner is different but all can access the information
- Design to minimize barriers and maximize learning
- Build up the learners' skills and autonomy as they learn

This framework is particularly suited to the settlement sector because it shares many of the same values and priorities. Universal Design for Learning values learner diversity, inclusion and building capacity for greater autonomy and self-efficacy.

3.2 The Neuroscience of Learning

Understanding how the brain works when it is learning helps us to design activities that address the needs of the learner.
Research shows that there are 3 networks that are distinct, but interrelated when it comes to learning. (Rose, Meyer, Hitchcock 2005)

- **Affective Network**   The "Why?" of learning
- **Recognition Network**   The "What?" of learning
- **Strategic Network**   The "How?" of learning

CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2. http://udlguidelines.cast.org

The Affective Network:

This network wants to know "Why is this information important? Why should I persist if it gets challenging? Settlement workers can provide different ways to motivate the learner by helping them perceive how and why the activity relates to them and their needs.

Three ways you can engage the Affective Network in your activities:

- **Set goals**: Invite the learner to set their own goal within the goal of the activity. Help them identify: Why is this activity important to me? For example, you could ask: "How is participating in this activity going to concretely help you in your settlement process?"

- **Provide pre-activity material**: Send an email before the activity with reflection questions and materials, like links to websites and articles. Some will not engage with these, but just getting them will give all the learners a better idea of the objective of the activity. Great learning happens on a continuum. There are things we can do before, during and after the activity that will facilitate learning.

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- **Ease the tension**: Integrate icebreakers; tension reducers and activities that help learners get more comfortable. Reducing stress will facilitate learning and help learners to be more engaged.

Activity: Reflect on the Affective Network and your learners:
What the priorities of the learners that you work with?
How can you leverage these to encourage them to engage in the learning?

The Recognition Network

The Recognition Network is concerned with the "what" of learning.
This part of the brain wants to know: What is it? How can I decipher and understand it? How does it work? Settlement workers should provide clear information in a variety of ways. This is especially important in a settlement context, given the diversity of learners' characteristics and backgrounds. Try to ensure that learners can access the information in two or three different ways. This gives them the choice to decide and select the one that works best for them.

Three ways you can engage the Recognition Network in your activities:

- **Present the information in various ways:** Verbal explanations, slides, videos (closed captioned), audio, hardcopy and online. Electronic documents sent ahead are particularly useful in this setting, as this will enable learners to translate the text, research words if they wish.

- **More than one language:** Offer the information in more than one language or, whenever possible, have formal or informal translation options available on the premises through volunteers or peer helpers.

- **Lexicon:** Offer a lexicon of definitions to promote a better understanding of jargon, specialized terms and concepts. This is especially useful to clarify definitions within specific contexts.

Activity: Reflect on the Recognition Network and your learners:
In your experience, what are some of the ways of sharing information that your learners find most accessible?

The Strategic Network

The Strategic Network is most concerned with the "how" of learning. It wants to know: Have I understood correctly? Is this right? How can I further master this learning? Settlement workers can offer activities that support informal and formal self-assessment. This will help learners to verify and consolidate their understanding.

Three ways you can engage the Strategic Network in your activities:

- **Integrate short and informal formative evaluations** half way into the learning. This will help the learner get a sense of how well they're grasping the concepts and will help you determine where the learners need support in a timely way.

- **Think-Pair-Share**: Invite the participants to share- with you or a peer/partner- what has resonated with them about the learning. Having them put the concepts in their own words will support the learning process and help you gauge their level of understanding.

- **Propose a 3-2-1 reflection**: Ask the learners to list the **3** most important things they remember about the information, **2** questions they have, and **1** thing they did not understand.

Activity: Reflect on the Strategic Network and your learners:
How do you currently verify the effectiveness of your activities? How do you know if learners have understood correctly?

CAST (2018). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.2.

Activity: Check your understanding

Which brain network might say: "Why should I bother learning this?"
   a) The Affective network
   b) The Recognition network
   c) The Strategic network

Which brain network might say: "I want to know how well I've understood this."
   a) The Affective network
   b) The Recognition network
   c)   The Strategic network

Which brain network might say: "Can I understand the words?"
   a) The Affective Network
   b) The Recognition Network
   c)   The Strategic Network   (Answers: a, c, b)

3.3 Putting it All Together: Designing the Learning Activity

Step 1: Get clear on the goal of the activity:

Before a meeting, workshop or other learning activity, clarify the goal and outcomes of the activity for yourself. If the goal is not clear to you, it will be difficult to clarify it and motivate the learner around it. What do you want the learner to be able to do? List the three things they must look for in a lease? Remember which documents to bring to their refugee hearing? Understand the risks related to credit card debt?

The goal is important before, during and after the activity. Communicate this goal clearly to the learners at the **beginning** of the activity. Help them identify why it may be relevant to them. **During** the activity, tie the information back to the goal as often as possible. **After** the activity, assess, and encourage the learners to self-assess, how well they have understood the concepts and their possible applications.

Step 2: Consider the barriers and opt for methods or tools that meet the needs of the learners:

What barriers might keep this individual or group from accessing the information? How can you ensure that they will be able to understand? Plan for a variety of ways that the learners can access the information-verbally, electronically, in person, online, audio, etc.

You are not expected to meet every single individual's diverse needs, but rather, provide a small selection of ways that they can access the information. The learner will be empowered to determine the best one for them and access it. This, in turn, will help them gain confidence and autonomy.

Step 3: Provide options to review and assess learning:

Integrate ways that help the learner determine how well they have understood the concepts, and help you determine how best to support them. This could be a quiz or a test or a less formal assessment. For example you could ask questions such as: "What's one important idea that you are taking away from this activity?" "How can you apply what you learned today in your own life?"

3.4 Activity: Action Plan for an Accessible and Effective
Learning Activity

Think of an upcoming learning activity. How can you integrate some of the UDL principles to increase its accessibility and effectiveness?

Name of the activity:

Leaning Goals: What will the learners know by the end of the session? What will they be able to do?	1. 2.

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Engage: How do you motivate the learner and maintain their interest before, during and after the learning activity?	
Currently doing…	Other ways I might explore …

Planning materials and activities: What are the different ways in which you present the information?	
Currently doing…	Other ways I might explore…

Assessments How do you invite learners to practice and demonstrate what they have learned?	
Currently doing…	Other ways I might explore…

Developed by Marisa Gelfusa, inspired by PBL Lesson Planner, Special Education Technology British Columbia, **www.setbc.org**

Pick one thing that you can easily commit to implementing for your next learning activity. In the space below, indicate

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- What improvement do you wish to see?

- How will you know that this has been successful?

3.5　Activity:　Self-Assessment: 3-2-1 Go!

In closing, take a few minutes and try the 3-2-1 self-assessment exercise mentioned on page 9. You may find it helpful to review the workbook before you answer the questions. The objective of this exercise is to support you in consolidating your knowledge by putting it in your own words and considering it based on your own priorities:

List 3 significant points you retained about creating effective and accessible learning in a settlement setting:

1.

2.

3.

List 2 questions that you would like to ask about the topic

1.

2.

What is one thing that you did not understand and would like to have clarified?

1.

To conclude, the most important thing to remember is to take it one step at a time. Many of these options can be integrated in the planning or the improvement of an existing activity, whether it is a one on one meeting or a group activity.

As a settlement worker, your schedule is already very full. Implementing one small change will go a long way. Pick something that you can do easily and see how it goes.

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A great place to start is by asking learners to finish the sentence: "I learn best when…" this will provide you important information to create accessible and effective learning activities.

4. RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Resources

CAST is a non-profit education research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals through Universal Design for Learning. Website provides information, tools and community— https://www.cast.org

Special Education Technology (SET-BC) Self-directed course in UDL
This course is designed to introduce the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) educational framework. https://udlresource.ca/2017/11/a-self-directed-course/

Office of Distance education and e Learning provides a great, short summary of UDL. https://odee.osu.edu/universal-design-and-accessibility

References

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