Transcript for BCcampus Online Book Club: A Conversation with Dr. Seanna Takacs and Junsong Zhang (January 31, 2023)
BCcampus event hosted January 31, 2023
Host: Helena Prins and Leva Lee
Guest speakers: Dr. Seanna Takacs and Junsong Zhang

HELENA PRINS:
Welcome everyone and thank you for choosing to spend your time with us over the next hour. Leva and I, we are very excited to be here. We've planned for this book club long ago and so nice to see it come to fruition. We've really enjoyed the thoughtful and fulsome posts that we had in Mattermost. And really the reading of *A Comprehensive Guide to Applying Universal Design for Learning*. It's been a marvellous experience for me and Leva through this past month. Today we welcome Dr. Seanna Takacs and Junsong Zhang who co-authored this book. You'll get to meet them shortly. Leva and I have drafted some questions for them, but we will also have time for you at the end to ask them some questions. But we really want to keep this time informal and interactive. So whenever a question jumps up, you can put it in the chat. You can use the raise hand function. So just participate as you see fit. We are very excited that you're here.

So next slide, while we are in this virtual sphere and represent different regions and territories, I would like to take a moment to say thank you to the Lekwungen speaking people, which includes the Songhees and Esquimalt nations. I'm so thankful for their hospitality and for their stewardship of the Land and for the opportunity to continue my learning and growth here and the beautiful Vancouver Island. The picture I placed here is from one of my favourite local beaches. You are invited if you would like to, to also put your acknowledgement in their chat. Thank you. Next slide.

Here, we just want to have a little bit of fun during the first week about Mattermost discussions. We did ask about student engagement and how to just check in at the beginning of a session is one way of building engagement. So we thought we'll just try this one out. So how do you feel today on a scale of goat? They are so cute. So here again, you can feel free to respond by choosing Annotate that you'll find on the view options floating bar at the top of your screen. You could also just type the number in the chat if that's easier for you. And you're also invited to unmute and tell us which goat you choose, but then we might want to know why you chose that. goat. Let's see. Let's see. I see a 1 and a 3, 3 seems to be popular, Oh Claudine. Yeah it is cold. Mark it 8. A few 2s there. Tara picked 5. Is that contemplative? Shall we put a word to what number 5 is, Tara? Ready. Oh, I like that. I like that. Let's give it another minute to hear how people are doing. Anyone want to unmute and tell us? Pick number 7. Awe number 7 is cute. Which one did you pick?

JUNSONG:
Well, I picked number 3. Because it's adorable. It has a heart shape now. And I haven't had lunch yet, so I'm kind of hungry.

HELENA:
Good to know. How about you, Leva? Which one did you pick?

LEVA:
I picked 5. I think I feel a little bit like in a zombie zone. Busy lately.

HELENA:
It looks like and Tara picked the same goat. How would you, Dr. Seanna?

SEANNA
I think I'm the number 1 goat. I'm feeling happy and energized with things to say, which is nice. I hope that's what that goat represents.

HELENA:
It is what it is to you. Maybe number 9 too though. Yeah, I think Susan and I. She has number 9 too. I think Susan and I are on the same page. I'm very happy to be in this room with all of you and thank you for responding to our scale of goat and yes, bahh to the snow. But I love the snow because I know by today at 5:00, the snow is gone. Thank you, everyone. I'm going to hand it over to Leva for the next slide.

LEVA LEE:
So I just wanted to say hello to everyone and say that I'm really happy to be here in the BCcampus Library. I'm really glad that we can have this conversation. It does make me happy to be in a library. So to start things off, I would like to invite Junsong and Seanna to just say a few words about themselves to introduce themselves to the group. So I don't know who would like to start. Maybe Dr. Seanna, would you like to introduce yourself?

SEANNA TAKACS:
Okay. Thanks Leva. Hi, everyone. This is so lovely. I've been looking forward to this since we got the invitation and it's really nice to... I'm just really excited to hear thoughts and questions and really, really kind of thrash some of these ideas today. So a little bit about my background. So I'm actually Faculty and Accessibility Services at Kwantlen Polytechnic. And I am also a UDL and accessibility consultant. So I do work outside of KPU at different institutions, talking about accessibility policy Accessibility everything really. Bringing in UDL, talking about exactly what you've seen in this book. What are the places to start? What are ways of mobilizing UDL? How to develop ways of reflecting on UDL work. Yeah, So that's a lot of what I do. My background is in language and learning disabilities. So I've worked with children, teens, adults who are struggling in a conventional educational system. Yeah. So that's a bit of my background.

JUNSONG ZHANG:
Oh, thanks, Seanna. Guess it's my turn. Thank you, everyone, for joining us today. My name is Jun. I mean, Junsong is my full name, but feel free to call me Jun. And I'm currently a program manager of simulations at the Justice Institute of British Columbia, working at the Centre for

2

Teaching and Learning Innovation Centre. Seanna and I actually met back in Kwantlen. I was in Kwantlen. Then we have this opportunity to work on this UDL book. I really appreciate that the result, the process, and I'm really glad to be here and we'll chat with you today.

HELENA:
Thank you both for your introductions. And we want to also know who is with us in this room. I think that will help frame the conversation a little bit. So we've put up a slide here of the poll question, and Kelsey has also launched a poll. Let us know what is your role. And if you choose other, maybe you want to put in the chat what that is. Are you faculty or sessional instructor or are you instructional designer, developer. Are you in administration or what is your role? I do believe that all of us have a role to play in UDL, modifying the system. So everyone is totally welcome. Please let us know. And if you can't see the poll, you can just answer in the chat. Wondering, there we go. So for Seanna and Junsong, I don't know if you see the results too, but we have about 37% of faculty or sessional instructors. We have instructional designers, developers and administrators, and then quite a big number identify as other. I see there's accessibility coordinator, librarian, dual roles, learning strategy coordinator, accessibility advisor, and master of ed tech student. Wonderful. And whatever role we bring today, I hope that you find your place and how you can contribute to the system. So next slide, please.

LEVA:
In thinking about getting to know you better and some questions that Helena and I were thinking would be good to know some background about you. So one of our first questions is how you became interested and motivated in UDL. So perhaps we can ask Seanna again first and then next question Junsong. Seanna and Junsong, how did you become interested and motivated in UDL?

SEANNA
Sure, thank you. So a lot of the background in UDL is exactly what my PhD is in, which is educational psychology. So UDL is kind of a bit of a metatheory and I'll use that word. I keep finding myself using that word for a bunch of reasons. But it sort of brings together all of those, all of those sorts of theories. So there's that kind of academic theoretical stance that I have. But probably more profoundly as I, I've just seen, because I started my career working with students with learning disabilities, with dyslexia, with language-based learning disabilities, auditory processing difficulties, that sort of thing. Just really seeing how... And that was way back in like 2000, 1999. Really seeing how a lot of children were just, it was really like the haves and have-nots, right. It's sort of like here are the kids who can belong and get by. Maybe it's a bit of work, a bit of tutoring, bit of support, but they can largely get by in mainstream education. Then the kids that I was working with, they just struggled profoundly and no one knew what to do. And this is the time... The reading wars are still going on. But this was like peak reading wars. Like what is the teacher's responsibility in teaching reading? What should intervention look like? What can assistive technology look like? And I just really saw how cruel it was to have a child who was on the periphery of the education system. Yeah, so a lot of my work in UDL comes from a really compassionate, sometimes even thorny. People who've

3

worked with me really feel that push that I have around inclusion just because I've seen the cost, right? And that's the thing. If children aren't included in education, then they just aren't included in education. There is a no, Oh, down the line, it'll get better. It doesn't resolve itself. And now, as an accessibility advocate and faculty member, I just see that down the line, right. It's sort of like, well, here's the child who was excluded in grade 1 and didn't behave and didn't learn to read very well. And, you know, kind of fell through the cracks. Well, here's how it looks when they're 18 or 20, 25, 30, 40. So the problem doesn't go away. So that's kind of like the... I guess is probably the best way of describing the urgency that I feel around UDL, around inclusive pedagogy. I just really want to make things better for everyone along the whole lifespan. And now, because we have this lens on inclusion and we're developing much better inclusive practice. It's just lovely to be able to talk about UDL in lots and lots of different ways because it can be really theoretical, but it can be super, super practical. And it can really be done with a lot of care and love. And I just feel that's just critically important if we're going to take a really inclusive stance. So that's, yeah, that's me.

LEVA:
I'm really hearing your passion, there Seanna. Definitely. You can really hear that passion and your energy for this. So yeah, I really do admire. And how long have you, Junsong?

JUNSONG:
Yeah. Seanna is from an accessibility angle. But mine is more from a learning experience angle. So when I was doing my master of education at UBC, I was very interested in how do we improve learning experiences from both students' and instructors' perspective. Whether it's online or face-to-face or blended. Part of this is how to design stuff, but also how to engage students. That also comes from reflecting on my own experience as a student and instructor too, right. When I was at school, I usually do better if I have a voice about learning and if I could choose something that I'm more interested in within the scope of the course. Even simple things like group work or just go solo on my own. Or just the format of the assignment. Is it video or it is going to be a fairly quick instead of writing. Sometimes as a student, it's difficult to articulate those things because you could be shy or you're not super self-aware. And that's why even more important for us to create some space, to include students in the process, right? We didn't have a chance to look into UDL back then, but I found UDL later. And then I find it's quite a comprehensive framework and very useful when we think about learning from different directions. And that's really my motivation to learn a bit more and develop something that we can use.

LEVA:
Thank you. Onto the next question. So these are looking at questions that you're thinking, okay. How did you start being interested? And then next would be how did both of you kind of get together to get to write the handbook? And maybe I'll start with Junsong.

JUNSONG:

Yeah. I mentioned that we met at KPU back in 2018. It was just a fantastic short discussion about... because it's not always hosting a workshop. I'm like, Oh my god, this is going to be great But then I joined JIBC. Back then in our centre, I was working on a UDL project too. And I immediately thought about Seanna. I feel like there's a destiny. Why I met Seanna back then. And why Seanna and I do a UDL project. So the project was developed internal capacity in UDL. My team asked, Jun, if you're interested? And I went, Sure. So I went to conferences and we started project planning and I reached out to Seanna and asked if she's available to work with us on this. Being a mentor or helping us to build capacity, doing workshops and co-creating practical sort of workbooks that we can use. Yeah, I still remember the first time Seanna and I met at JI in the cafeteria, we talked about how we're going to do those, just creating plans. It was really exciting.

LEVA:
That's great. So now I have a question for Seanna then. So you wrote the book together. So what were some of the challenges and joys of doing this? Eventually publishing a book, a handbook.

SEANNA
Yeah, I wish I could say this was balanced. I've been absolutely spoiled. Like working with Jun, working with the team, working, doing the work of JI is just, yeah, I've been absolutely spoiled. It was, there was, you know, that sort of intellectual piece that was so good. It's really exciting where, you know, the passion and the urgency around inclusive practice meets design. I always found I would be able to write, write, write, write, write. And Jun would sort of go in and say, Well, maybe this is a better way and maybe this is a better way. And it was just so lovely, it was just such a lovely, wonderful process. And I think there was one point where Jun and I both got really stuck and we just kind of left it for a while and we came back and we're like, Why are we so stuck? Wow, what is this? And it was really, but we're kind of, we're stuck together, right? And so it wasn't, it didn't have that sense of fear or what if, or self-consciousness. It was just like, Oh, that's a really sticky problem. And kind of worked through that together and threw some ideas around and then released and then we were able to do the rest of the work. So yeah, it's been. It's been a really, a really lovely project for me.

LEVA:
Wonderful. Sounds very nice. very smooth and it was a great result. So two great results. Helena? I think we have some questions now.

HELENA:
Yes, there is a comment there in the chat about really appreciating the section for the case studies. I think that appeals to many people, so thank you, Sue, for that comment. Yes, I put it in the comment and I hope I spelled serendipitous correctly, because isn't that wonderful when you cross paths with someone that you can collaborate? And then here's a book that's touching many instructors' lives and eventually then students too as well. So we're going into the present

right now. What is it that excites you? What's happening currently in UDL and post-secondary that you can share with us? Let's start if you, Seanna.

SEANNA
I think what's exciting for me is I'm seeing up-close and personal, even this semester. And certainly examples last semester where instructors have really... At KPU, mainly in my accessibility work, they're sort of, they're meeting accommodation plans and saying It's all done. It's all done. Don't worry about it. You know, I read about working with interpreters. I've already got lectures recorded. I've already imagined flexible deadlines in this way, and I've already planned for students to take on a project of particular interest to them. Having that already kind of done is really, really lovely to see. But it's also really exciting when instructors themselves feel that they're teaching practice is really invigorated and they don't mind marking. And they really enjoy the fruits of their and their students' labour. Like planning events, planning menus, planning portfolios. Doing all of these really, really, really neat enriching activities and just seeing how... It's really, that is one of my favourite things is seeing instructors say, I just really, I really see my impact and I really see that I'm helping people develop. Like that's why people go into teaching as they like to, they like to see change and they like to support people and reinvigorating that sort of motivation for them with UDL is always really, really nice. So I see that as a really... We can really come at UDL as sort of like this is your obligation. This is what you have to do. If you're a good person, you'll do all of this and that's like, Alright, well there's the moral aspect of it. But there's also the other, the other side of it where it's like this can be interesting and fun and unusual and an opportunity to collaborate, an opportunity to refresh. And I really, I really like focusing on the latter, the latter aspect of it because it's just, it's so nice to see. And I think that's where a lot of the real promise lies in post-secondary.

LEVA:
That's wonderful to hear, Seanna. Thank you.

JUNSONG:
Anything that comes to mind for you that's happening right now related to UDL and post-secondary?

JUNSONG:
I think there's definitely more interest in UDL from a JI perspective because we are. We have a lot of sessional instructors, not full-time, but they just teach once or twice a year, that kind of stuff. Very practical for them. To them UDL seemed foreign in the past. Now there are more people mentioning it even during the design and development process. Because I still take on instructional design projects, solution projects. So people do ask, Okay, do we consider UDL here? I'm like, Wow, good for you. Mention something important. So I think there's still a way to go for people to start making small changes here and there. But once people start thinking about it, I think it's already a very good start.

HELENA:

That's so great to hear. And really I coordinate the FLO programs and we always ask for feedback and input. And we do often see a request for more training on UDL so people are... I would have to agree with you. I think there's an awareness and a greater curiosity about how do we implement this successfully. So we're staying in the current. The next question is, given your prominence in the world of UDL being published authors, do people share their UDL stories with you? The impact stories? Do you hear impact stories? Any story come to mind? And how can we share these impact stories more efficiently?

SEANNA

So now people do share impact stories. My mind is like there's... Yeah, there's a bunch that come to mind and a bunch in different ways from, again, from the student side of things. And it's sort of, I've been thinking about this a lot, and Jun, you'll have neat things to say about this. But it's that idea that when there's good design, it becomes invisible. So what happens is that sometimes with these stories where UDL is implemented, you don't necessarily hear, UDL were great in this course. You hear things like, Things went smoothly. Or I didn't have to ask for as many things or I just didn't, I just didn't feel as anxious in this course. Or yeah, I didn't have a problem grading, or I didn't feel as burnt out by the end of the semester. So it's oftentimes you kind of, that's the trick is that if it's designed well, that it's that affective experience, right? It's like, I just had a better time in my course, right? Just kind of overall. So that's kind of the curious thing. So I didn't know, Jun, if you've... You must find that all the time and you'll have a different sensibility around the idea of design kind of fading, right? You don't end up talking about the design. You talk about the ease.

JUNSONG:

Yeah. I mean, I wish people shared this with me a little more but, I don't have a lot of stories. I only remember two. It's quite interesting, I got poked and I'm like, Oh, you're doing this. One time, is that when we're doing design and development, so like brainstorming, one instructor said, Well, I actually downloaded the UDL book and I printed it out, I read all of the cases myself, and I shared with my colleagues. And it's just like, we love the assessment examples. So inspiring. Like when we're doing the assessment examples, we're actually pulling examples for different errors because we're having more collaborators like from JI giving us examples. But now it's time for them to read it and say, This is our example. But I'm like, this is actually from you. We just added a UDL lens here. Yeah, and also, I think definitely there's more people using the UDL workbook worldwide. I got a couple of email requests. Can we use this in our online program? I'm like for sure. This is open resources. And Dave, one of my colleagues, he's actually using these, creating a UDL session and then the 3D, instructional skill workshop and we go in to talk about it. So I'm not sure if there's an impact story because I don't have tangible numbers like student engagement, but I think these stories are something that I would find this initiative so worthwhile. And I love hearing more from you guys. If you find the book is useful or you have any stories.

SEANNA

I actually had an impact story from the other day and it completely blindsided me. At KPU I'm on the senate budget committee and that's, we meet along with the curriculum development, program development committee. Anyway. So for, I guess 2019 to 2021, I worked on revitalization of the Entrepreneurial Leadership. program because it was really failing and people weren't getting through and so on. So we did a huge overhaul, huge redesign according to UDL principles, and it gave students a way, options, not only within the courses, not only within assessment, not only within activities, which were there of course, but having choices as to how to navigate the entire program. So when you come into the program, what prerequisites will look like. What other kinds of prerequisites can look like. Giving those sorts of options, making the program a lot more open to folks outside of the School of Business. And there's huge uptake apparently from the Faculty of Science and Horticulture. So people who are interested in, because it's a polytechnic kind of approach. So we went along, and first-year instructors really notice those same sorts of things. It's just like teaching is just a lot more enjoyable. Students seem a lot more engaged. They seem to see a purpose better than they did before. And then we had our budget meeting last week and I saw on the agenda that the ENTR program is actually going to, they're trying to get status because there's been such uptake of the program. They're actually seeking program status in their own right. So that was really exciting. So it's kind of like that's what I mean is, you know, there's these reports. It's just feeling better and people are seeing a purpose and seeing a rationale. That's what we really want and education. We don't want to feel so alienated. We don't want to see it as this object that you have to conquer. You really want to see yourself as part of the educational process. Establish a purpose. That's really what we talk about with engagement in UDL. At the base of it, I think, it's really like I see myself here and I see where I can go and I see that I can make choices and I can, I can see pathways. I don't have to search and find and navigate gatekeeping all the time. So the ENTR piece is really, really, really exciting. So I'm going to gather a little more information on that. But I know there are always questions about how can you gather data on whether UDL worked. And I think that's one of the challenges is that the data points that you get may not seem to relate to the questions that you asked, right? So there's, it seems like there's a bit of like to put my research hat on again. Like there's some construct validity sorts of pieces, right? It's like I'm seeing whether learning has improved, but I'm getting all this feedback on how much more relaxed you feel and how much more. How much more you see a pathway in this course for yourself, right? So they don't necessarily relate and that's, you know, that's one of the things going forward. I'd really like to talk about more if we're going to gather data and if we're going to do some more empirical work on UDL.

HELENA:
We are ready to jump into the future, so that's a good segue.

LEVA:
So as we're on this journey, so we've looked at the past, the present, and now it's the future. So perhaps you may be considering your next UDL book. So we were wondering what would the topic be and what are the UDL areas that you think need to be explored more deeply and intentionally. So give that a thought and I don't know which one of you wants to answer first,

but we also want to invite the audience to annotate or add potential titles in the chat for topics that maybe they'd like to see. Seanna, would you like to take this first?

SEANNA
Sure. Yeah. I have a whole bunch of ideas. I would really like. So one of the things that I noticed, which I've mentioned already, is I would really like to understand the effect of UDL on the instructors, and because I'm, I can be heard saying that if you can't you have to you have to UDL the instructors. You can't just UDL the students, right? It's a system. And if instructors don't see, and I've had this feedback in a couple of other workshops that I've done recently. Where instructors say, well, we're not allowed to do that or our collective agreement prohibits that, or we don't have the time for that or that wouldn't be supported. So it's very, very hard for instructors who are highly constrained to create choice and rationale and engagement and multiple pathways for their students. So you do have to... it's kind of like talking about when we talk about being child-centred, but we don't include the parents or the grandparents. It's a system. It doesn't make sense to do that. So that's what I'd like to. I'd like to have more instructor stories. And really, yeah, really do some research on that piece. The experience of being a UDL instructor. A UDL instructor, and how that change happened, what that experience is. Because if I've learned anything, whenever you're implementing UDL, prepare yourself for surprises. Things don't, things always go in really unusual, unexpected ways and often really, really lovely ways. So yeah, so I think I would look at that sort of thing and working more with Jun on assessment. I think that there's just so much good work that can be done on assessment. And especially given Jun's worked on simulations, that is so interesting. It's so, and that's really the JI is so strong with that. BCIT. I've done some work with BCIT as well. Also, really, really interesting that, that sort of VR simulation, that kind of thing. I'd really love to. Yeah, that's kind of a neat pet project. I would love to follow up on.

LEVA:
There's a couple of very great comments in the chat. I would like to see UDL principles in professional development and in life or career-long learning. And then Claudine says, I would love to see how UDL intersects with different areas like Indigenous perspectives, equity, diversity, and inclusion, trauma-informed education, accessibility services. So there are some ideas for you to take away. Thank you. Do you have anything else to add in Jun? Very interesting because we will mention a little bit of what was discussed in our book club chat. And just exactly what you two are talking about is emerging of interest too So people that have been participating.

JUNSONG:
I think what Claudine mentioned is kind of like fitting what we're doing right now. I mentioned this, but we invited Seanna again to work with us on accessibility stuff. So potentially, I think UDL could put in some of those fit in with accessibility sort of idea. I also love to see how UDL as a design framework weaved into other ideas. So that's something we're going to work on in this year a little bit more. Yeah, absolutely. I think I've always been, I've been thinking about how UDL, multiple choices, representations, engagement works in different knowledge too. So that's

9

something we've been thinking about as well too. So I formalize a little bit because when you're doing a project like VR, it's difficult to infuse a UDL lens with a developer's 3D artist. There's a bunch of different people from different disciplines. They don't necessarily see or understand or quite get the idea. So definitely I think there's a lot of educational sort of dissemination of UDL, but at the same time we need to sort of craft it in a way that they kind of understand in their context too. So I think that the challenge is something that's potentially interesting to work on.

LEVA:
Okay, Well, it's been noted here. So we've got to Temaca, or I hope that's how you say your name. What might UDL look like in course design with EDIDA considerations, same as Claudine. Comment there. Thank you very much for that. It would be helpful to have a resource for helping students to think in UDL ways so that they can take it with them after graduation or if they're going on like universal design ways or in universal design ways.

SEANNA
Yeah, I think that's the idea of developing expert learners. And it's a different sort of approach with UDL because you're, yes, there's that kind of content mastery sort of piece. But what we really want to look out with UDL is that it's really developing expert learners, people who are resourceful, knowledgeable. And I would say there's that agility and flexibility piece. And acknowledging what is the environment that you're working in? What are the challenges? Are there opportunities to generate multiple pathways? Are there opportunities to ask questions about purpose and rationale? Carrying that forward. It's really interesting around career education. I think someone mentioned that in the chat as well. Really, really interesting in career education. So it can go, it can really go all over the place. Yeah, I think that's...

LEVA:
The expert learner piece was really discussed quite a lot and that actually was what a great segue for what we wanted to talk about next was just to touch on some of the things that were discussed in the book clubs. So some reflecting on some of the discussions were two concepts that kept coming up. And also as mentioned by a few people in the chat is the idea of experts, expert learners, and the principle of jaggedness. So there's a tricky tension that comes up as well when it's sort of like the system versus the individual. And I think, Seanna, you did allude to that are already where people are working. Instructors are working in a context where institutional policies and expectations are not always aligned with UDL principles. So it's often very challenging. So sort of all navigating this complexity. I guess I ask both of you, do you have some comments about that or maybe something helpful that you can offer before you write your next book and guide book that would address this?

SEANNA
Yeah, I think I learned a really... The whole other story is I've had to work on working out in a really different way in the last year. I've been following this workout guy on Instagram, Eric Roberts. And he's wonderful because he really talks about this idea. You have to be very careful

about instilling a sense of urgency in people without a toolset to come along with it. And I just, like it's so important with exercise, of course, right? Like if you're on some of those, like, your health is at stake. And this is at stake, right? And then it's sort of like, what do I do? And people get very frozen and they get very perfectionistic, which is really, really interesting. I kind of look at that, at UDL in that way. If you come at it with that, Well, this must be done or else, or you're failing students or you're not creating expert learners, or you're not creating accessible courses. You know that sort of panic without people having a toolkit that goes along with it, that just creates a lot of distress for people, a lot of distress. So we really want to dial down the urgency and kind of dial up the positivity and the tool creation. That idea of try something out, get some feedback. That's where the design process that we refer to in the book is so important. It's like try it, it's iterative, right? If it doesn't work, just try again. And if it doesn't work again, we'll just try again. And talk to people. Reflect, think about what you can do, find your community, that kind of thing. And it's really, it's a slow, gradual building. And then before you know it, you've tried two or three things. You've learned a couple of lessons and it's sort of like, Oh, look, all of these things that I am able to do and I wasn't even aware that I was doing them right. So really being, I think with UDL, because the framework is huge, it really has. I mean it's huge. It is a metatheory. It's like it's compiling 70 years of research in so many different domains. So it can be really overwhelming. And again, if there's urgency that's paired with tools that aren't necessarily developed. And you get that, you know, that panic. And I've seen it, right, then people get really perfectionistic. Well, this won't work, that won't work. The institutional part of this... And you get all this naysaying, it's not genuine naysaying. It's not, I mean, sometimes it is, but generally, it's not. Generally, it's just like, Oh my gosh, the expectations are so huge and I'm not really sure where to start or who to ask. And that's what we want to be really careful with, with any sort of learning experience, working on UDL. Anything you want to be gentle, go step-by-step. Try, empathize, get some feedback. Try again, be kind to yourself. You know, that was one of the pieces at BCIT that I talked about the very beginning. It's like some things are going to go well and some things are going to go badly. And we can't expect rainbows and unicorns all the time. We're just going to try things and see what works. And that's just, that's just super, super important with UDL.

LEVA:
And Jun, when you talk about bringing in design thinking, though, I mean it really is rather, is rather not a new thing to be doing that in post-secondary where we are, many of us perfectionists and honed into not wanting to show or do anything until it's like 100% done. And not used to the idea of things being iterative and experimenting as much.

JUNSONG:
Yeah. I mean, the idea of design thinking, it's been there for a long time. And I think, even if some instructors or one of these and it didn't go and learn. And specifically, they've been doing it because we've always been changing things here and there in our syllabus, activities, assessments and making it more fun, engaging. Instructors and designers do that all at the time. The design thinking comes to capture, captures and formalize that theory. Going back to the expert learner thing, I think UDL contributes to the cultivation of expert learner because looking

11

at ourselves, like my own growth. And I always think about how I've become more self-aware about what I do the best in courses or in social contexts. It's never a single thing. It's not like you go to class and the instructor somehow to be an option while you become an expert. I think that's like a simplified way to think about expert learning. We contribute to their growth. We contribute to, contribute to their own reflection. But a lot of it comes from their own experience and reflection and their interaction with the world. But what we can do in the classroom setting or in online learning virtual classroom, is helping to create that little bit of self-awareness, creating that little bit of agency, helping them to find a voice. And I think UDL does do that job by creating that space, offering options. I really love that some of the instructors do it without knowing UDL, but some of the instructors do it intentionally so that they do a little bit better in creating expert learners. I think it's also like openness, like you need to select the open to allow the discussion happening in your classroom, I think. And then providing that scaffold and with help. Sometimes as a learner, you don't necessarily know what you're saying, but you could provide some prompt or sometimes you don't know how you're going to get there and then they start to come in and give a little bit of help. I think a lot of it also is care. So UDL does play a role here, but it's not all. It's, like Seanna said, it's a framework. You can use it, but there's a lot of other factors that contribute to your own growth. As a person, as a student, as a mother, father, more self-aware, more, more understanding about what makes it more exciting for you, more and more engaging for you.

LEVA:
Thank you. Well, we definitely know the conversation started in the book club. We'll definitely continue and evolve as we'll learn more.

HELENA:
Absolutely. We want to get the audience to also participate in questions and one of the book club members, Taruna, who couldn't be here today. She did send us a recording out question for Seanna and Junsong. So let's have a listen.

TARUNA:
Hello everyone. My name is Taruna Goel and I'm a learning and performance consultant based in Vancouver. I also teach at the University of Victoria and I'm a facilitator with BCcampus. I'm sorry that I can't be there for the session. But here I am with my question. The Universal Design for Learning framework is widely used and well regarded. However, like any other framework, there are also some criticisms that have surfaced. One of the criticisms that I have read about is that UDL shares similarities in theory and operationalization with the debunked learning styles theory. Some also say that UDL relies on an over-generalization of neuroscience research. And while it is a good educational framework, it's currently not an evidenced-based approach. I'm wondering, what are your thoughts on the similarities and differences between UDL and the learning styles theory. And what are some of the other criticisms or perhaps limitations of UDL and how can they be addressed? Thank you for taking my question. I hope you're all enjoying the session.

HELENA:
That's a big question and we have a short time to answer that. But Junsong, do you want to go first?

JUNSONG:
Yeah. I think she asked a really good question. I think Seanna mentioned that earlier too, that if she got some, an opportunity to do more evidence and research and providing that data, which will be really helpful. I think there are definitely criticisms. They're comparing UDL learning styles. And criticism towards learning styles is basically saying that learning style doesn't exist because your content decides how you should teach. Like if you are teaching geography, you need to use maps because it's difficult to verbally explain where a country is. That's a valid concern and it's a good reminder for all of us that you're still teaching in a subject, in a specific discipline that has a specific units approach to certain things. I think we're only looking at learning styles and logical ways of representation in UDL. We might say, well they're similar and they don't really make sense sometimes. But I think UDL is bigger, it's more than learning theories. It's actually not learning style because learning style stresses the preferred styles of learning from students' perspectives. Whereas UDL addresses barriers, access, flexibility, options. Expert learners we just talked about. It's fundamental that UDL is actively addressing the barriers. We're looking at what the barriers are in the physical and virtual environment. The lesson plans and activities and assessments and by removing those barriers giving options, providing multiple ways of expression, representation, engagement, we find better ways to teach and learn. All of this is not to say that we disregard what we still need to teach based on the subject and content. Again, for example, learning styles of your students' identify that they prefer audio, audio learners. You might say, this makes sense because I have to use a visual aid such as the map, to point out where it goes. But under UDL, you'll say or think, maybe there's some barriers there. Where the student is asking for it in audio. And you look into it and you start to design, design thinking process, as you look into the users, you might find that your students are actually adult learners. Just an example. They're adult learners and have jobs. And they want that because they want something mobile and they can listen to it while they take a bus to work, right? Then it'll make sense for you to say, well I'll have to teach the content week with visual aids like maps, maybe I can offer something like multimedia so that there's a map, but there's also audio video, so that they satisfy what I need to teach and what is more accessible for my students. So for me, UDL is really a framework that we prefer approaching the author through a landscape design thinking. Which means we need to experiment and find out, learn more about learners, and then find out what makes learning more effective. And then we make changes, which is kind of what the criticism is about. we're going to make it more, make learning more effective. So yeah, so that's my journal of thought on that. Seanna, you want to continue.

SEANNA
I think with learning styles and I wouldn't even call it a theory. I think that's, you know, it was taking a very, very, very narrow, narrow cognitive research, highly controlled lab setting, cognitive research and saying, Oh, well, here all these learning styles. And it's really an attempt

to type people, right? And we always like types. It's always nice to know, well, I'm a visual learner and I'm an introvert or I'm a this. And UDL, actually, they have very different, very different missions. And what UDL, that initial synthesis was around saying, well, you know, when you develop highly specialized interventions and supports for students with disabilities. Oh, look at all the people that it includes. Look at all the other students who can really, who can really benefit from that. It really, it was what they found was really, it became more and more difficult to distinguish the people with the disability from the regular people. There's a lot more similarities than differences. And that bears out in a bunch of different cognitive research, including, including reading research. And it's actually a big problem in figuring out who you're disabled population will be. That was a problem in my own study for my PhD. So that bears out in a bunch of different ways. So I think, and I know, I was party to. I didn't participate in, but watched it unfold on Twitter. There was a huge throw down over this. Over, well, learning styles, UDL is just dressing up. Another educational theory, which I think is unfair. And it's kind of, I can see the point because from the teacher standpoint is like, another theory? Another approach? Now I have to wrap my head around that. But the mission and the impetus are quite different. And we're learning styles don't bear out because usually when we're learning, we're using all of our senses. We're never only being visual or we're never only being auditory. But we do know that there are preferences, right? If I'm given the choice between watching a video and just listening to someone, I'll far prefer just listening, right? And that's sort of a preference, right? It's just, so there's that sort of idea, I think. But yeah, in the wrong hands, they can be conflated and you have to be, Yeah, you have to be really careful. And I think Jun's point about barriers. That's the express mission of UDL is to say, well, what are the barriers to learning? And how can we use multiple, multiple modalities, multiple approaches to sort of navigate those kinds of barriers. That's a really key piece of UDL, which I think has to be remembered.

HELENA:
Thank you both. I really appreciate the question and the way you unpack the answer. So thank you for that. I didn't invite the audience in the chat. If they have any questions that they want to ask Seanna and Junsong. This is your moment. We do have a fun closing activity, but we'll let that go if we need to just to make sure everyone gets a chance to ask a question if they want to. You could also at this point, if you want to unmute yourself and rather just verbally ask the question directly to Seanna and Junsong. That's also an option. I'm going to give us a moment of silence just to see if there's someone that wants to ask a question. Okay. Leva, maybe you and I have covered all the questions that people may have had. I did see a question coming up, but we did have a fun little closing activity. And Kelsey, if you can bring up the first side there.

This is Junsong's poll question, two truths and a lie. Just some fun to get to know them on a different level. So Jungson, we ask that you read these three statements. Then the audience will get a poll question to pick which one they think is the lie. Observe his nonverbal cues.

JUNSONG:
I'll hide my face when I read it so you don't see my expression. There we go. The first one. When I was a kid, I wasn't there to communicate with dogs just through eye contact. Second

one. My cousin was a competitive swimmer and he has drawers and drawers of medals at home. Last one. In high school, I told the entire class that one of my dreams is to own a horse farm. So which one is a lie?

HELENA:
And if you can't see the poll, you can answer in the chat. Okay, shall we reveal the lie? It is very even. Some A and C got lots of 41% and a few people picked the cousin as the lie. So will you reveal to us the two truths and a lie? I voted the first one because the first line is a lie.

HELENA:
How about that dream to own a horse farm? How are you making out?

JUNSONG:
Nowhere. My dream changed. I guess. I still want to go on the land and do horse riding and all this stuff but maybe when I'm older because it's a lot of work,

HELENA:
It's marvellous how our dreams change. I came to, I left South Africa, thinking I'm going to make money to open a coffee shop. Here I am in Canada in post-secondary, so yeah, our dreams do change. Let's move over to Seanna.

SEANNA
Okay. Um, I'll read them through so A. I can smell when people close to me are getting sick. B. One of my best memories is cliff jumping into the Ottawa River and C. I met Wayne Gretzky at Maple Leaf Gardens.

HELENA:
Audience members. I didn't know. It looks like it was tough for you too. We've got again two numbers. One of my best memories and the one about Wayne Gretzky, they got 28. But the one that most people think is a lie is number one. So Seanna, reveal the truth.

SIENNA:
The lie is C. but I met Wayne Gretzky, Maple Leaf Gardens. Anyone close to me would be like, Yeah, right, because I really don't like hockey. Yeah. I'm a bit of a super smeller so I can, like when my kids aren't feeling well, my partner, my friends, I can sort of tell when things aren't well. It's nothing unpleasant. It's just they smell different.

HELENA:
So you're not afraid of heights, I gather, if you can just cliff jump?

SEANNA
Yeah. That was we went kayaking and they're like, does anyone want to jump off the cliff into the rapids? You have to be really good swimmer to do it. Blah-blah-blah. Me, me, pick me up.

I'll do it. Yeah. It was, it was thrilling. The river carries you a really long way. And like in swimming lessons, when they say don't try and swim directly to the shore, they really, really mean that, you have to really go with the, you have to go with the flow. A long way down the river.

HELENA:
How fun is that? Well, thank you. I'm going to let Leva. have the last word and wrap up this fun hour for us. Thank you.

LEVA:
Well, first of all, I'd like to express great appreciation to Seanna and Junsong for joining us today and giving us such a fulsome talk about everything to do with your handbook and the work that went into it. And we very much appreciate that you actually wrote that book and have provided that really good grounding for all of us that are trying to learn more and do better in UDL. So thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you to all the people who stayed and participated in the session today. And also I want to remind people about the Online Book Club continuing in the month of February. Our featured author is Dr. Tony Bates. And I think that we'll have really good discussions in the book club coming up, so please join us for that. And until then Helena and I again, well, we are very thankful that we had such great participation. So keep on learning.