

**Transcript for Compassionate Planning for Neurodiverse Learners
Supporting Neurodiversity in Post-Secondary Education Series
BCcampus webinar hosted on February 10, 2025**

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BRITT DZIOBA:

Welcome to Compassionate Planning for Neurodiverse Learners. I'm Britt Dzioba, an advisor on the Learning and Teaching team here at BCcampus. And it's my pleasure to welcome Dr. Shendah Benoit, who will be leading today's experiential workshop. I met Shendah this past summer when I was in Prince George attending UNBC's teaching and learning conference. Shendah ran a session on compassionate planning for neurodiverse learners. And as someone who is neurodiverse myself, I really resonated with her workshop and was inspired by the level of care and research that she's put into her work. So when it was decided that we were going to run a month of neurodiversity events at BCcampus, I knew I had to invite Shendah to run a workshop. We will also have a survey for you all to fill out at the end. So if you can stick around for a minute for that, your feedback really helps us in shaping our program. So I'm going to pass it over to you, Shendah, to do your introduction and start your session.

SHENDAH BENOIT:

Wonderful. Thank you, Britt. And thank you, Helena and the team at Open Campus for inviting me. I'm so excited for neurodivergent, for all of us individuals throughout our country with the wonderful reception for this session. It gives me hope in where we're going to go in post-secondary in supporting flourishing practices for all.

To begin, I'm coming to you from the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh where the two rivers converge. I was so fortunate that my parents converged from French Canada and Ireland many decades ago, you know, allowing an opportunity for me to live, learn, and flourish on this land.

My intentions for our session today are that we're going to begin with a check in. We'll have small groups. I'm doing that intentionally so that we can create a sense of community and support each other as we polish our practice in developing spaces for those who are neurodiverse to flourish in post-secondary. I'm going to review the terminology that guides my practice so that there'll be an alignment in my intentions and my purpose, and maybe I'll enlighten others to see the avenues that I have to the work that I do. I'm going to share a short narrative. As a researcher, lean into case study. And so I'll just share a short narrative in the hopes that you find your own narrative to motivate your own change agency in, you know, developing your practice for neurodiversity. We're going to interact with some current research, and I think those documents have been shared with you. We'll be in a breakout room kind of delving into just some recent, just a dabbling of the recent research and how we might glean from that, how we can form our practice. They'll be a reflective write and share and an

invitation to make a commitment of change and share it out, knowing that it's that commitment sometimes that holds us accountable to ourselves to change our practice.

But to begin, to really create this community over our Zoom format, I'm going to invite you to take time, to ground yourself, to quietly reflect. And then in a room of four, share, each of you taking 1 to 2 minutes of uninterrupted sharing time, and then we'll end that Zoom room. But in your quiet reflection, I invite you to think through the questions, what is moving for you today? Is there any support that may be of benefit? And most importantly, what is your intention for this working session? So I invite you to pull out a scrap piece of paper, whatever writing utensils work for you, if that's your iPad, your computer, and do a quiet reflection for 4 minutes. And you'll find yourselves popping into your Zoom rooms. And once you're in those, you can create that space to share with each other your intentions for the session. I wish you a good check-in session.

I'll just give everybody just a few seconds to all return in. Great. It looks like we've all returned back to the main room. Thank you. And I hope that gave you an opportunity to create a community with your group as we'll move forward talking about our practice and how we can reflect on it throughout the workshop. So to begin, I want to talk about the term compassion. I was first introduced to this as a concept of practice in 2020 through work that's happening at UBC, University of British Columbia here in Vancouver. And it was, for me, guided through Joanne Schroeder. And she did a lot of her work rooted out of Senge & Boles work at MIT, and the compassion at awareness, a broader scope. But what we see in the literature is the understanding that compassion is noticing the suffering within someone or oneself, and then the desire to alleviate that suffering. And it's with that mindset, that disposition that I stepped into thinking about neurodiverse affirming practices. I also have always aspired in my own practice to develop a sense of creating learning environments where students flourish. You may have known from my written bio, but I should share it now. I come with 25 years of kindergarten to grade 12 leadership experience as the system in British Columbia moved from a special education system of segregated learning to an inclusive system. And I was really proud of the leadership I was able to take and the wonderful influences that led me to aspire to a K-12 sector where students flourished. And now for a year, I've been in the post-secondary sector, and I take that same desire. How can my students here, how can I work in a learning environment where those around me flourish? And I lean into the work of Segliman, "To find fulfillment in our lives accomplishing meaningful and worthwhile tasks and connecting with others at a deeper level." How can I support learning environments where this is happening? Singer from this field of social work, introduced the term "neurodiverse," you know, many decades ago now, in 1998, Botha and a team talk about how really the term neurodiverse is more organic, and there was different groups of people talking about a neurodiverse movement other than just Singer. But it's that recognition of moving away from the pathologizing, the understanding of individuals and who they are and what their characteristics are as a medical deficit as diagnosed through the American Psychological Association DSM 5. It's really looking at what were termed disorders as differences in our brain functioning, and recognizing that that variation in the environment is applauded. A diverse environment is a

good thing. That natural cognitive variations are akin to biodiversity, and they offer unique strengths and challenges. I think it's important to understand that the term neurodiverse incorporates a lot of people. It may incorporate individuals who identify as having autism. Individuals such as myself, who identify as having ADHD or a learning disability. It could be individuals with an intellectual disability, a developmental coordination disability, dyslexia, and others, and each of these are very different. And so I think that understanding is an important mindset to take into this work. They're, I'm not going to be able to share a recipe or a checklist of practices. If you do this, you'll be creating neurodiverse-affirming spaces because neurodiversity incorporates basically anything that is diverse, and really from an approach of appreciating, and I know as an individual, celebrating who I am.

BRITT:

Shendah, sorry to interrupt, but it looks like quite a few people were still in their breakout rooms when you started. So they missed the slide on compassion.

SHENDAH:

Thank you. Okay, thank you. Good. I will just double back because it's such a great concept. And so I'll actually begin because for those who have heard it already, I'll summarize back. I first heard this in a public workshop by Dr. Linda O'Neal, who I'm so fortunate to work alongside here at the University of Northern BC. And it was at a kindergarten degree 12-sector provincial conference, a hotel room full of people. And she was talking about the work that she led, and the research, a lot of it based in Seattle, looking at counselling through a compassionate lens. And I heard the term and it resonated with me. And now I'm seeing it so often in the research. And then later I came to see the work of Schroeder and Rowcliffe out of the University of BC, UBC, and there's aligns with Peter Senge at MIT and the Center of Systems Awareness. And it's this movement to develop professional dispositions so that we create environments where we can notice the suffering within someone or ourselves, and we can create spaces to alleviate that suffering. And there's a QR code there that leads to the Compassionate Systems Network that is housed out of at UBC, and through that network, are all the tools and different connections to different workshop and training to develop the personal mastery, to have the interpersonal skills to be able to ground oneself and acknowledge others suffering, be aware of our own suffering so that we can do step forward to listen, to break through assumptions, to check question our thinking, and develop a climate of compassion. It's a movement of doing that in a professional setting. How can we do this in our workspaces? And most importantly, in our learning environments, whether that's an elementary, secondary sector, or a post-secondary sector? Hamilton and Petty also talk of compassion in post-secondary for neurodiverse-affirming practices. So that may be a reading of interest to many.

Just to recap quickly, again, then flourishing by Segliman, that is the aspiration I take into my learning environments, to create spaces, and it's my invitation for each of you, to create spaces where we individuals can accomplish meaningful and worthwhile tasks, connecting at a deeper level. Much more beyond the transactional interaction of what learning could be, and really to a place of connection, meaning, and thinking.

And then I came to this slide, which I'm hoping you were all back in the room for. And it's just that beautiful rainbow of what neurodiversity encompasses. And I think the importance of this is understanding there will not be one set practice or a simplified change that we can make to create neurodiverse-affirming spaces. Spaces that celebrate some of my individuals may have hyper attention to everything that I'm doing, and others may have attention that is short and fleeting. And therefore, what I do in my practice will need to reach a wide range of individuals. But there is hope in the beautiful intervention of the universal design for learning, which we will cover in the workshop. So don't be concerned about how one's practice approaches such a rainbow of individuals. And when I say practice, I refer to our professional teaching practice.

And last, I think there's two intentions through compassionate systems that I hope to bring to our session today. One is, it's my hope through this Zoom platform to create a generative social space, where, you know, multitudes of us, I'm not sure how many participants are in the session at this time, can come together. So that we might nurture and flourish and really share with each other. Well, these are things I'm doing in my professional practice. What else may I try? How can I take small adjustments to what I'm doing to make the environment I'm hosting in my classroom more beneficial for a wider range of students and having a reciprocal relationship with those in the session so that potentially, by the end of our workshop, ideas will be created that are beyond anything I know or I'm able to just share with you today, but that we will generate through this workshop a dialogue that can create this hopeful process for our students and ourselves to flourish. And also then that you can reflect on how can I create a generative social space within my own practice? As designers of learning environments, how can we show up? Each day we come to a lecture or a seminar to create a space where there's compassion is how I step in. Although I'm excited about, you know, the subject area that I have, and I have control over and want to share that. How do I step in with intention?

So I'm going to invite you into a reflective space. Clandinin, a wonderful Canadian researcher in the field of education, which is my field, looked at teachers' practice and really started giving a methodology of research to case study to a story approach. She shares that lived and told stories, and the talk about our stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's insistence in building lives and communities. So I'll share with you the narrative of a student, a very privileged student that if one was to meet and see just the demographic outline of this individual. This student, I've followed for a few years now, and it was this individual that first had me lean in in a compassionate place to: how could our system change? Maybe, you know, because at a quick assessment, one would think this individual should flourish in post-secondary. They left a small community of 10,000 in British Columbia, and they were fortunate to be accepted and to study at McGill where they did a bachelor of mathematics and computer science. Ongoingly, throughout their degree, their perception of their experience was that they were not doing well, that they were not successful and that at any given semester, they may fail out. The Christmas of their fifth year, which was the final year of their degree, you know, they were coached: Well, what are you going to do moving forward? What might you do? And the individual, even though they were concerned that they may fail

out, was acquiring As often. Their GPA, I'm not sure exactly, but they were doing well. A solid, you know, 3.5 or approximately GPA. And for myself with an undergrad and an arts degree, I applaud anybody in the sciences and esteem the wowness of our STEM community. So I would listen to the individual baffled that that was their perception and their experience. So that Christmas, they were encouraged: What might you do? What would you want to pursue? You should apply to grad school. And they were like: Oh, no, you know, I'm not going to do well, perseverating in negative thought. That perfectionist tendency of I can't do this. In the end, they were encouraged to apply, and they were offered funding to two of our country's top 10 institutions. And even then a year after the first year of their master's degree, they were offered additional funding to continue in the second year. So what I'll share is some of the expressions that have captured. And I caution because this is just still a preliminary case study. I've not brought this through a research ethics board, but this individual has allowed me to share their story. "Yeah, I'm pretty sure I just failed out of the program. I'm going to do my best in the remaining classes and the take-home final." That was a semester in which the individual attained four As. I say that because this was my awareness as a professor to are the students I'm looking at in class realizing that I know they're doing well? What are their perceptions? To continue. They are a conversation. This was thinking about his conversations with his supervisor during the first year of his master's of science. "They are a conversation, but I don't think I'm normally on the same wavelength as him because I'm scared of difficult topics and complicated theory that I'll get lost in." And finally, a comment shared after a public sharing a master's presentation. "Yeesh. I don't think I looked very bright. All the actuarial statisticians were looking at me like I was a shoe shiner or a garbage man or something." And I'm sharing that with a smile and a glimmer because I know this individual's progressing forward. But those sediments are shared with the deepness and the self, kind of a, just a sense of I'm not doing well. That is concerning for myself and the profession. And it was my wake up call, My understanding of what can we really change in post-secondary so that those that we're teaching are not on the other side of our instruction, having such self-doubt. And so my hope is that each of you have your own case study, your own either personal experience as a neurodivergent learner or individual who you become curious about, looking for individuals who identify as neurodiverse, but yet are not flourishing. How can we change our practice?

What's the research say? The research says right now that we know those who are neurodiverse, who identify as neurodiverse in our post-secondary schools had negative experiences during elementary and secondary school, and that is profound. Research, though, also shares that the universal design for learning in higher education can reduce the ownership on individuals to disclose that they might need an accommodation or that they're not flourishing, that they require our support if we can design flexible academic environments. We're going to talk a lot about that research. And my reference section for this presentation that you'll have to take with you. It has a good bibliography, a good reference section of wonderful researchers in England in the United States that are looking at neuro-affirming practices in post-secondary. And it's really exciting. Each six months, I have time to get away and look at the research. Today's presentation has an article that I didn't know of in August from a group of occupational therapists, Cole and their team. And so I'm hopeful at the

promising research that keeps coming out. But today, I'm going to invite you to take time in your breakout room. And if you have not pre-read these articles, there was no expectation that you look at them. I think it's amazing that our group at Open Campus was able to share them. I thought that today would be your first chance to explore these articles. We're going to create the breakout rooms for 20 minutes. My suggestion is you'll be able to access the articles either through the email that was shared out earlier or they're being shared again through the chat. That you take, I'm looking for some nuggets, kind of query and question towards the articles. So you're not approaching them with a deep read, but just really looking through, both articles have been organized with great subtitles or tables. I draw your attention in Cole's article to table four or table seven. And just split the articles up, give yourselves the joy of 10 minutes of quiet scanning and jotting and highlighting. And then I invite you into 10 minutes of discussion. Sharing, what were the nuggets you found that you know, are things we could bring into our teaching practice, whether we're in small seminar groups of 15 or large lecture halls of 250. What are some of the practices that could come into our assignment design, our syllabus design, our communicating with student design? Look for those. Make a list, and I ask that you appoint one person as a recorder in the last minute of your 20-minute session to pull together your thinking, and we'll share those out in the chat at the end of the breakout room. So I'll just recap. In a moment, you'll be back in your breakout room, and you'll have approximately 20 minutes to go through the articles. As a team of four, you may want to divide those articles up, and you're just individually going to make a checklist of those practices that are suggested by either students in post-secondary or post-secondary researchers that we can embed into our teaching to make more neurodiverse-affirming spaces. I am excited for what you may find and what you can share back after your 20 minutes. Happy learning.

BRITT:

Just a quick question from the chat, Shendah. Do you know if the PDFs of the articles are accessible?

SHENDAH:

I do not think they are. And I say that because I do not know how to save an accessible PDF. But I will quickly put a link to those PDFs into the chat.

BRITT: Thanks, Shendah

SHENDAH:

Okay, so I'm going to bounce away and do that very quickly. Thank you. Thank you for that question.

Wonderful. Thank you, everybody, as you journey back from that quick scanning of research and conversation with each other. I'll give an opportunity to those that were the breakout room recorders to add, if there was hopefully time, a compiled list to the chat. And we'll just see what we may have shared in common. And I know our space is generative as far as I am concerned because one, I learned over our break how to make a PDF accessible, and it's quite an easy feat,

but it was not something I technologically realized was possible just simply by saving in a different format. And also, I'm grateful for the prompt to just slow down, and those are things that I think are my own neurodiversity, they're my own prompt. So, the space is very generative for me, and I hope it is for each of you, that my own practice continues to polish and develop. When I looked through the articles first in the summer, I looked at Spaeth & Pearson and Hamilton & Petty, as Britt shared, she was in the session with me, and it was different research that I had. I created the list on the left. And I think what resonated with me first was in Hamilton & Petty, the invitation to notice distress, because that was what I was noticing in my case study, was even though that individual was flourishing by what would be all accounts of just the facts, their perception was distress. They were distressed, and that was their perception. And that by creating a sense with my students that I'm here, I'm accessible, that I'm inviting students to share their learning needs. But the list on the right is the list that I just came to more recently when I found the article through Cole. As a researcher and an educator, when I support inclusion and diversity and equity in kindergarten to grade 12 in that sector, it's occupational therapists and speech language pathologists as a group of practitioners and researchers that really influence the multidisciplinary approach we take in education. The article by Cole, that team of occupational therapist students who identify as neurodiverse, I really thought there was a lot to take from that. The different surveys that they gave neurodiverse and neurotypical students and what the students themselves, what their voice was saying. And when I see that list, it's not beyond what I can control in my graduate courses. In undergraduate courses, sometimes there seems to be less room for autonomy because there's more of that linear progression of expectation that students will accomplish these learning objectives, where in my graduate courses, I really try and design more choice for my students, and I'll share a little bit of that after the break. So I invite you through the break, I'll leave my list up, to scan the chat and see what each of the groups came up with as what research is saying works students are indicating. These are things that are neurodiverse-affirming practices. And when we come back from the break, I'll share a little bit about what I'm doing in my own practice and give you an opportunity to think about what of these lists and the lists that were created might you include in your own? So we will take a 10-minute break. I have just a few minutes before 2:00. So we will join back at 2:10, wishing you a great break, 2:10 Pacific standard time.

All right. I welcome you back. And I'm grateful for the conversation in the chat that I've been reading the in-depth analysis of the articles. Thoughts that were coming to mind, as I read some of the discussion were: How much more work we need to do to elicit larger participation, larger sample sizes and continue this conversation. And I really resonated with the conversation in the chat that was saying, This is a lot to take in. And so I'm going to move in that direction as we continue through this second half of the session. I find my inspiration in a really concrete graphic, which I'll share on the next slide. And it's a website and a think tank, the Center for Applied Special Technology. It's situated in Massachusetts, and it's been actively designing principles for universal approaches to learning for over 40 years. I made an assumption, so I'm going to spend some time just in case my assumption that there may have been an understanding of universal design. But I'll briefly describe what that is. The ramp is often the

symbol that's used to explain universal design. But a ramp may have been originally developed so that those that were in a wheelchair could access a space that was only before a ramp accessible through stairs. But what we know through the design of the ramp is now not only do people with a wheelchair, are they able to access a space that had stairs, but a mother or a parent with a cart is able to access a space with that ramp. Anybody pulling a wagon or materials can access the space with that ramp. So when we design places, when we design accessibility, we don't even need to really know who am I designing this accessibility platform for, but that it will actually be amazed at how many individuals will use that accessible platform at different opportunities. And I think my case study student is the perception of my student and how they're understanding their own learning journey. And so what can I do as a professor to make sure that I have real clarity as an assistant professor on what I'm communicating to students about where they are on their learning journey? Meyer and a team have put through some simple questions to guide when we plan lessons, to guide us through what are three different pillars in universal design. Pillars for engagement, for representation, and for action. Questions such as how can I design a lesson so that my learners are regulating their own learning, that they can sustain effort and motivation, and that they're engaged. And how can I design my lesson so that they can think about the information that's presented in multiple ways? And lastly, how can I design opportunities for my learners to show me what they know through multiple avenues so that each can have success depending on that avenue. And those are some, I think, very large questions. If we're thinking of a lecture course of 200 to 400 students and a short 12 to 13 week semester. But how then, in my syllabus and lesson design, could I create some of these supports?

Here's the framework. This is the most recent framework that CAST has released. It's the third iteration of their pillars, their principles of universal design for learning, it just was released last year. As I was describing, there's the pillar of engagement, the pillar of representation, and the pillar for action and expression. Some simple practices that I've included into my design for developing multiple ways for my students to perceive what I'm teaching. And I am teaching bachelor of education students that are developing the ability to practice, the skills to be teachers, and masters of education students who are polishing their own practice to be inclusive designers of learning in kindergarten to grade 12 sector. And I'm very cognizant that I have to practice what I'm inviting them to think about. And it does make me very self-reflective about how I design my courses. I try and use real world examples and storytelling to make the information that they need to learn relatable and relevant. I try and repeat and rephrase key information so that there's clarity about the key ideas. And to incorporate diverse media such as infographics, podcasts, and video, and now moving forward to make sure that my PDFs are accessible. I guide students through goal setting and assignment planning by reviewing assignment expectations on multiple occasions. So I will review them at the beginning of the semester. And then two weeks before an assignment is due, I'll review it, and then again, the week before, which is giving valuable class time away, but it's what I know I need to choose to do. If I want my students to have success when they're independently showing what they know, you know, in the assignment process, which ideally is what that is all about. Students having that agency and that independence to show what they know. I work to try and provide clear

examples. And in the beauty of our international education system, I find that that stretches me. I can't just presume or assume that when I speak of a K–12 sector, kindergarten to grade 12 elementary secondary sector, that the analogies and the examples that I'm giving would be relevant to all my students because they have an international context and an international experience. So I have to slow down when I think of analogies to what would be relevant to all of my students. I'm able to do that better when I create time at the beginning of the semester. And again, this would be in a seminar of only 25 students to hear them share their story and their own experience. I design collaborative activities such as peer discussions and group planning sessions so that my learners can further enhance their organizational and strategic thinking about the material that I share with them. And in my graduate courses, I design assignments that cater to them both scholarly and as professional practitioners. They're very different trajectories. And therefore, I may design an assignment where some may choose to do a book review, you know, at a quality they choose to publish, and others may do a policy brief that's relevant to an intervention they're trying to launch in their school. Those are just some examples. When it comes to group work, I always try and design opt in and opt out. And my learners who are bachelor of education students have shared with me: Shendah, we prefer when you assign our groups. It just eliminates the whole complexity of group dynamics. And last, for multiple means of action, I'm sorry. That was just what I shared. So multiple means of action are those thoughtful approaches to my graduate students' work, opting in, opting out. And what we know is when students, such as mine, can choose the trajectory of their assignments, their motivation is much more... It is promoted. Profound.

The last concept I want to share with you today, and it speaks to what I was reading in the chat is a term that Peter Senge speaks about, you know, as long as 1990. It's been in the literature for a long time. And it's the concept of creative tension. And I have to, I learned of the term through compassionate systems, and I need to bring this to myself and my own practice. And it's that tension between recognizing there, you know, these are the principles. These are the pillars of universal design for learning that I want to embed into my practice. And yet I continually recognize how I can do more. And we know for those of you that are faculty that are teaching, that yet there's, you know, you're also just refreshing your reading lists. Like, it's an ongoing practice to just develop what are we bringing to our students each semester. When I step into this awareness of where am I and where's the vision of where I hope to go, I'm also aware that sometimes I step in with a critical lens, recognizing what I have not done yet, what did not connect well with the student that was maybe shared with me through a student experience of learning survey at the end of the course, and continually reflecting on, how can I do this differently? How can I, just in the small nuances of my practice, make adjustments? But I also intentionally set aside time to put an appreciative lens towards my practice. As a researcher, my background leans into positive organizational scholarship, trying to identify what are my strengths. What can I appreciate about what I'm doing well and continually promote that up to know that just small changes will make a big difference. And really, in creating compassionate spaces, generative spaces that are more open and more accepting to a wider range of students, if each of us starts making small changes, it will ripple, and we'll just start being able to share with each other what we're doing that makes a difference, and

listening to our students to hear what is improving their own experience in their learning. So I really do try and promote that appreciative lens when I'm aware of the creative tension between my vision of where I want my practice to go and the reality of where I know, I still, as we learn more about how we can support neurodivergent learners, how that sometimes will feel like it's stretching further than I wish. And I invite you to find time, reflective time to sit in that space for your own practice, that you can't hope to change a lot, that it's really by the moment by moment, small changes that we'll make to a core syllabus, to how we may organize the launch of one assignment, to how we may create an openness with our students to share if they're not understanding, or if it's not landing right for them, to notice concern,

So I'm now going to invite you to go back into your breakout groups for the last time. And to write reflectively again, to know you've set aside these 2 hours for your neurodivergent-affirming practices. What can you change? And I will go back to the QR code so that you could pull it up on your phone if you wish. The graphic for the universal design for learning. We've engaged with the readings. The big pillars are engagement, representation, and action and expression. So think about a time. When a lesson that you were part of, whether you designed it or you were the learner, it aligned with the principle of UDL. And I most specifically invite you, if you identify as neurodivergent, when was the time when you were like, I'm thriving. This is I'm flourishing. I'm having success with this environment. What was that practice? Please reflect on it. And then I invite you to bring it to your breakout room. So again, taking 4 minutes of quiet reflection to write about a practice in teaching or in learning that amplified engagement representation and action, so multiple ways for students to engage multiple ways for learners to represent what they know or to act upon what they know, and multiple ways for learners to perceive and understand. I may have flipped engagement and expression. Engagement is how they perceive. Expression is how they show. But I will bring it to the beauty of the graphic organizer, which I think simplifies that concept so well. So once again, Deborah will put you in your breakout rooms for one last 10-minute working session. And I will go back first to that QR code so that you can snap the UDL graphic.

I hope that was a positive invitation to reflect on when you can acknowledge things are working well when we've witnessed practice that is something that benefits our learners. So I invite you to take a moment and type that into the chat. So again, we can all share with each other those positive experiences or articles, other research that we've been aware of that are changing that experience in post-secondary for our learners. As you do that, I'll share an affirming practice for me in a session that I had in September. I was teaching a course for bachelor of education students on inclusion and exceptionalities, and I was describing to them who I am and giving them space to share who they were. And a student said to me, Shendah, I've never felt seen before, and I feel seen. And it just was my kind of the inception of this is what it feels like when I start putting neurodivergent-affirming practices into my teaching. It was just kind of that encouragement to continue forward. I'll just give another moment, if anybody's adding to the chat, the stories that were shared. Thank you.

And so now my invitation: Let's act. I would take one last moment of thinking, we have there's been lists of ideas, and I think it's important for each of us in our own diversity, finds those ideas that align best with us. For some individuals, making space to hear other story may not be comfortable, but potentially providing that formative feedback or designing our syllabus with structure and order may align with us. And I think if everybody starts putting more principles of universal design for learning into their practice, then we know our whole system will be more compassionate and that more systems will flourish. So think about an incremental universal design for learning practice that you could introduce, and I invite you to make a whole group commitment. Think about it and type it into the chat. I know, I'll share again that my commitment and it's coming this Thursday is I found that the surveys in Cole and the different things that the students had indicated were beneficial for all students in one of the tables, and then those that were more beneficial for neurodivergent students than those that were neurotypical. I want to bring that to a committee I sit on here at UNBC where we're looking at our student experience of learning surveys, and wondering, Well, are we asking what are the questions we're asking our students to give us feedback on? How could we align with what research is saying we should provide that, you know, how can we do that? So that's a small practice. I'm going to bring to a conversation on Thursday. I'm going to provide some quiet so you can think of your own practice and put it in the chat. And so now I'm going to stop sharing slides.

I'll show the next slide that will be sent out to you. It's just the references to the articles that I've been using in my practice most recently. So that will be shared out with you. And I just thought we could have space now in a larger room for any connections or questions that you may have as participants in the workshop. And good. Continue adding to the chat. Yes, please, Julia.

JULIA:

Hi, thanks, it's got my mind going in so many different places. This conversation. It's so valuable. And I think about the student experiences and the implementation of all of these ideas is to me, it seems very beneficial, very positive. And then I also think about the consistency of the learning experience as a student moves from one instructor to another instructor throughout a program. And that's, I guess why, what I put in my comment there is that if we're going to do this, and yes, it needs to be done to use UDL and to improve our ways of being in front of students and working with students. It really needs to be consistent. It feels like it needs to go up to this umbrella level at the institutional level where we say we commit to institution consistent practice for our students. That's where I feel like this is all so important and when do we really commit to it and how do we do that?

SHENDAH:

Thank you for that question. So I'll share with you a positive experience I had in the K–12 sector. So inspired by Shelly Moore, who, in our kindergarten to grade 12 sector is a provincial just mover and shaker for inclusion. And she had a lot of ideas. She taught me as a district principal. So I did have a leadership role and could influence change. But she encouraged me.

She said: Shendah, guerrilla warfare. We're going to go in not so much warfare, but go in grassroots and start changing practice with teachers moment by moment. Like, what can you do with... Go with the goers. That was her expression. And so if I had funding, so this would be for our centres of teaching and learning, if I knew that some were willing to adopt inclusive practices, I would say: Yeah, that's the sandbox I want to play, and what do you need to do that well? And funding is going to go that way. And what we saw provincially is astounding in the kindergarten to grade 12 sector, and it's what gives me hope for the post-secondary sector. Shelly Moore shared her thinking in Richmond, and she kind of mobilized the Richmond School District. I was in the Okanagan-Similkameen, a small jurisdiction, and it's easy to make change in smaller areas. Then another neighbouring school district Gold Trail, adopted on, and other districts kept adopting on. So it was teacher by teacher, district by district. And then we knew, provincially, if we really wanted to mobilize this big initiative, which was the competency-based individual education plan, how can we help our students be included in the kindergarten to grade 12 sector through what they're competent with their strengths. She said: We need to get Surrey School District on board. So she went over, made some friends with Surrey School Board, got them adopted in, and now throughout our province, most school districts adopted in, and the Ministry of Education has adopted the competency-based IP, kind of given it the brass stamp. But it started with a few school districts, and maybe most successfully in the tiniest of all, where I was the top, but of a school district of 2,400 students, where, you know, initiating change is easy, relative to districts of thousands. So I do encourage as change agents that although we need systemic change, that can be mobilized, I think, in my experience more effectively when we start doing it small at a time. And with some wonderful change, I brought in a small little town Osoyoos. We knew we were changing it at the classroom level. But what we knew is our students were going to almost demand that experience of their secondary school experience. So, although I don't want any colleagues around me to think: Oh, because, you know, students have this experience in Shendah's class, they're going to anticipate it in ours, I do want to create an expectation of: I had success this way. I want to advocate for that. And then potentially our faculty around us who don't have the space or place to learn right now to have this conversation, will listen and think: Oh, could I have explained that assignment differently? Could I have given more structure to my rubric? These are some of the things my own students will bring to me. That's just my encouragement that if your agency isn't at the system level, it's okay to just start lecture hall by lecture hall. We will bring the change. That's my hopeful encouragement. Other questions or comments, Yes, Manisha.

MANISHA:

Fantastic presentation. I just loved it. More of a comment. Like, I loved everything, you know, the way you designed. I'm so glad we did the reading at our own pace too. You know, I love the flow of information. I'm a student. I'd like to know, is UDL... Are UDL competencies mentioned in open education practices, competencies, you know, being an open educator. You know, the reason, what's the juxtaposition or link between OEP and UDL?

SHENDAH:

Thank you for that question. And I'm not sure of what OIP that refers to. And so is that?
MANISHA: Open education practices. It's open education practices.

SHENDAH:

Thank you. So this is the beauty of this generative space. I'm writing that down and you know that will be the rabbit hole. I beautifully fall into tonight. So open education practices, that's a new term for me. And so I can't comment how they align with universal design for learning. What it brought to mind is something that may be different. But I'm working to try and use more... Oh, now, I've lost the term. Finding language is not sometimes my strong suit, but accessible language documentation, and stepping out of the scholarly rhetoric that is not student friendly. Plain English, that is the term, and the principles of plain English. So I'm not sure if the principles of plain English are at all similar to OEP. And their work for a future session, but thank you for that terminology. Other connections, questions? I intentionally invite space for questions and connections because as a practitioner, I know this will help the knowledge that you've gathered in 75, 90 quick minutes to embed. And that's ultimately what we want is knowledge to embed into our essence so that we can change. Well, it is always better to end early than late. And so I once again thank Open Campus, BCcampus, sorry, for inviting me to share this workshop. I am excited for the synergy that was created today and very hopeful. I will pass over to Britt, who I know has closing comments, and I think a survey for us.

BRITT:

Thank you so much, Shendah. That was a wonderful session. And there was so much engagement in the chat, and I heard from colleagues that the discussion groups were very engaging, and there's a lot to take away today. And we did send out the slides, and we can send them. We will send them out again as well because there's lots of great links and references in Shendah's slides. So if you found today's session to be something that was really interesting to you and you want to continue your learning, we do have a few more events. So we have a panel discussion tomorrow around some of the amazing initiatives around the post-secondary sector to support neurodiverse students. And then we also have a two-part workshop series beginning this week as well. So I believe Paula will pop the link to register for those in the chat or can, or you can go to bccampus.ca and our events page. And we do have a survey as well. So we would love, if you could take a couple of minutes just to fill out the survey. That really helps us with our future programming. And if you have any questions or want to continue the conversation, please reach out to me. My email is there and my LinkedIn. And Shendah as well, if you want to connect with Shendah, I know she would be really excited to chat. Alright. Thank you so much, everyone. Hope you have a great day.