Becoming Architects of Inclusion: Faculty Growth, Support, and Systems Change through Universal Design for Learning

November 7th

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MC
CREATING SPACES WHERE EVERYONE THRIVES

About Me

I have served as a faculty member at Montgomery College for more than fifteen years and currently lead the Counseling and Advising Department as Chair. I am also a licensed and nationally certified clinical mental health counselor which gives me good foundational knowledge in human development, learning disorders, and brain based learning. Currently, I am in my final stages of my doctoral degree at Drexel University where I study Educational Leadership and Management with a concentration in Mind, Brain, and Learning. My research explores faculty preparedness in applying inclusive pedagogical frameworks and examines how artificial intelligence can serve as a tool and agent of co-intelligence to advance inclusive teaching practices.

A brief story to start us out…

This work is personal...

- We each have a story.
- You cannot "see" neurodivergence from the outside.
- We come from a place of empathy.
- Our job is to facilitate learning.
- The process of learning is different for everyone.
- Each person's brain is as unique as their fingerprint.
- The brain constantly changes based on our experiences. Your brain will be forever changed from today's Inclusion by Design Summit.
- Self reflection is important.

To understand how to be architects of change, we first need to understand the challenges higher education is facing in this moment?

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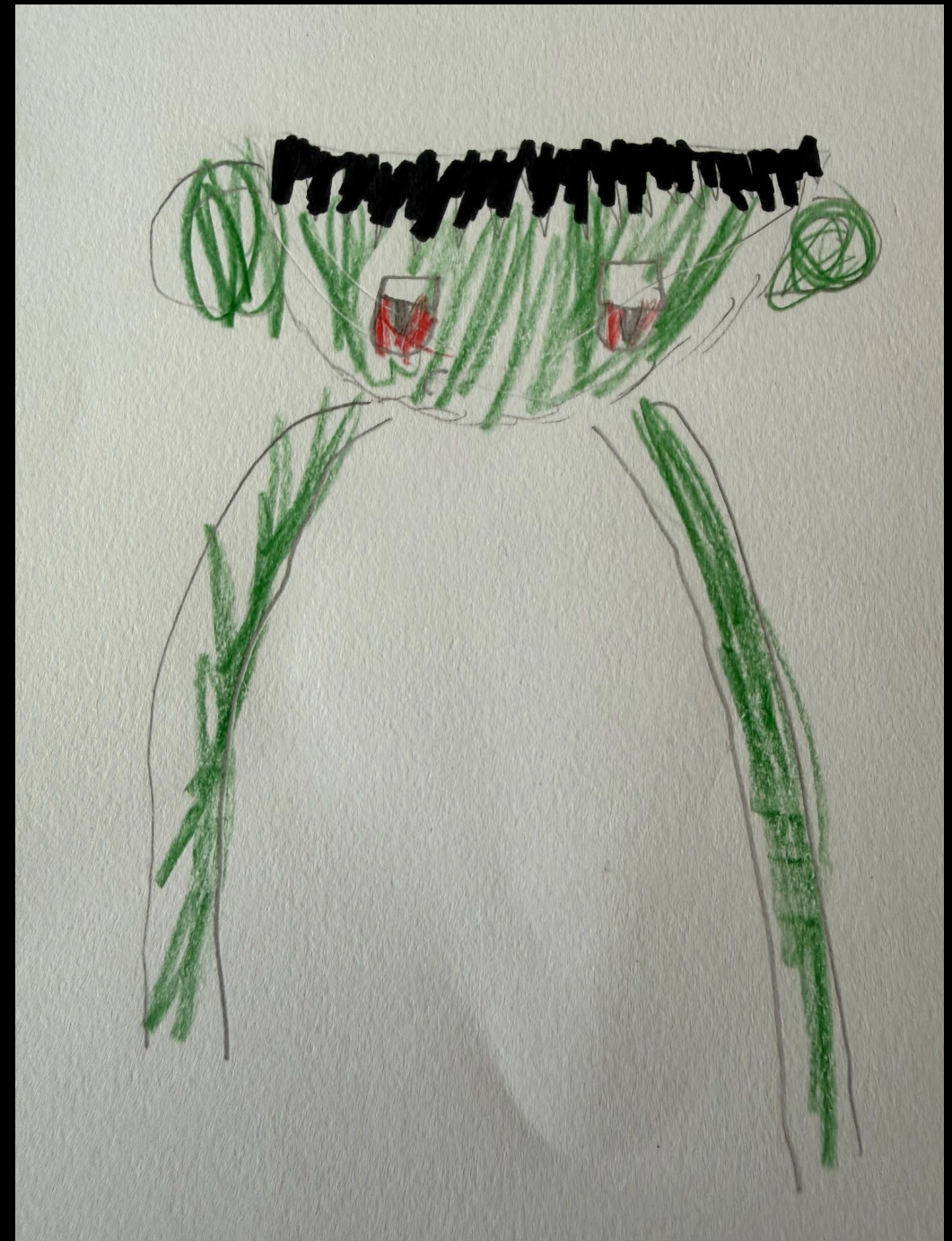
What the research says...

- Addressing Post-Pandemic Student Needs
    - In the near term, community colleges may experience the most urgency in responding to influences caused by the pandemic. **This could include increased demands for basic needs, mental health, and academic preparedness supports.**
    - These imperatives directly correlate with student well-being and persistence.

    Source: (EAB, 2024)

- Increasing diverse student population at community colleges including cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, and neurodiversity
  - Intersectionality of identities
- Neurodivergent students face unique academic challenges
- MHEC (2024) report states that less than a third of students who identified as needing accommodations in K–12 go on to receive similar services in higher education
  - These students experience a graduation rate 6.6% lower than their peers

- Universal Design for Learning is an inclusive teaching framework emphasizing flexible, strengths-based teaching approaches designed to meet diverse learner needs (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2021).

- However, community college faculty often lack sufficient training and support to learn UDL and implement more inclusive pedagogical practices (Tobin & Behling, 2018)

Barriers we face as faculty...

- Workload-limited time to redevelop curricula
- Lack of institutional support
  - Not looking at systems level change
- Knowledge gaps in what UDL is in action
  - Insufficient training
- Not viewed as important as content knowledge
- Evals and assessment tied to traditional teaching methods
- Part-time faculty already stretched
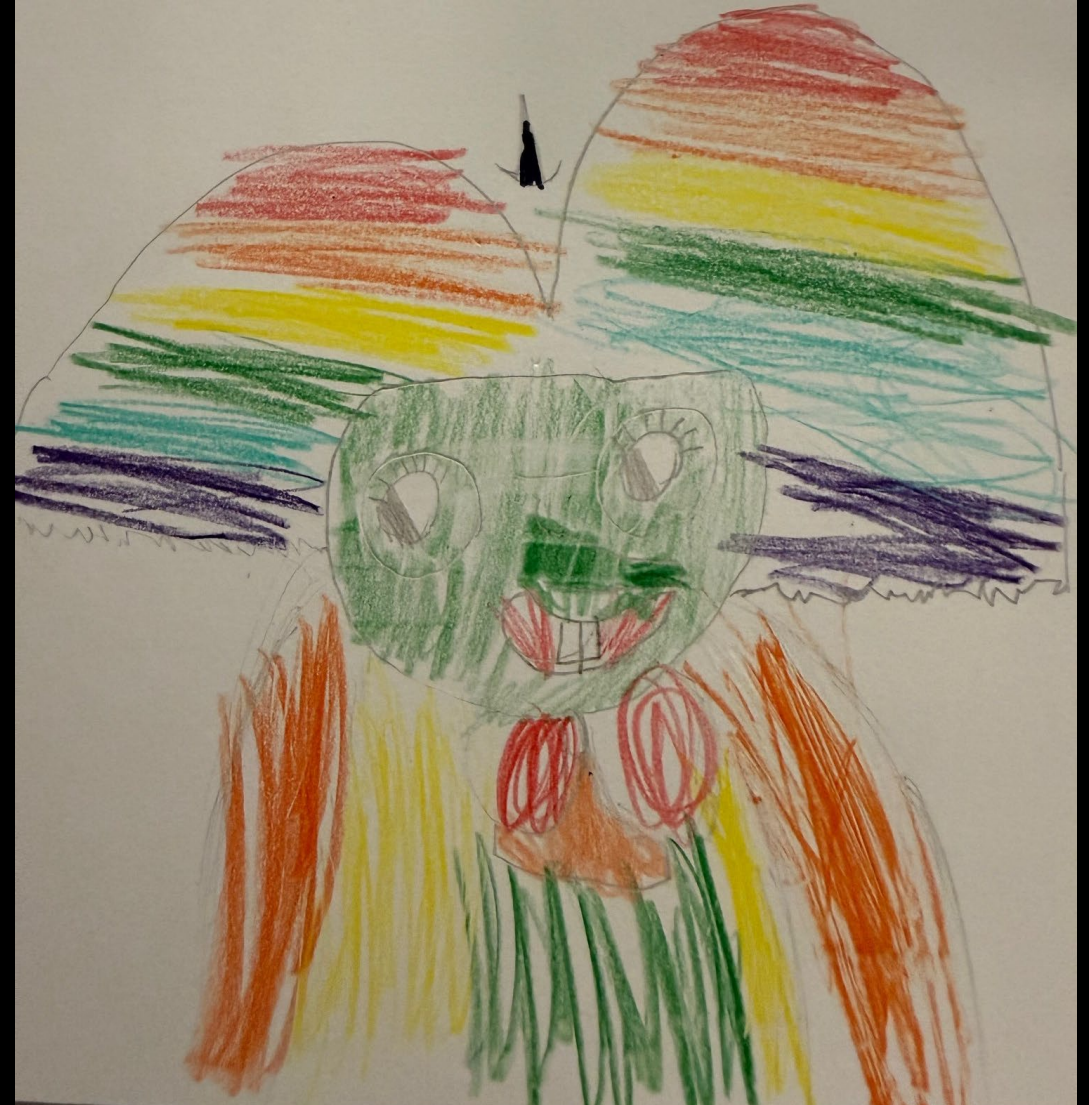
So...How do we become architects of inclusion?

"When we design for those who are most different, everyone benefits." – Novak (2016)

Create a Team

- According to Tobin and Behling (2018) the most common advocates of UDL on college campuses are those with disability support service roles.

  - Yet, those DSS providers are rarely connected to faculty development offices.

- A core, multidisciplinary group/team is needed to champion these efforts, understand the needs, organize efforts, and implement impactful change

- Example: a UCD (Universal Course Design) team was created at a community college in Boston after they received a federal grant to implement UDL.

  - The team included: Disability Support Services, Professional Development, the Center for Institutional Technology, and faculty

Implementation in the Classroom

Once you have a team...

Offer coaching to help faculty design courses with flexibility from the start...

- Start with manageable change
- Help with offering things in multiple formats/modalities

Use technology intentionally

- Leverage accessible learning platforms
- AI could be a helpful thought partner in reimagining assignments

Foster engagement and belonging

- Connect course material to students' lived experiences.
- Encourage reflection

Embed formative feedback and scaffolding

- Get comfortable with the concept of feedforward and low stakes assessments
  - *how to grow*, not just *what they did wrong or right*

Model metacognition and self-regulation

- Embed concepts of how students can plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning.

Systemic and Institutional Change

Systemic implementation involves strategic alignment, professional development, and policy reform.

1. Embed UDL in professional development and faculty onboarding

2. Incorporate UDL into curriculum design and program review

3. Connect UDL implementation to institutional goals such as equity, student success, and retention

4. Create integrated support structures and shared accountability

5. Evaluate and assess impact

6. Commitment at the leadership level to model the way

The Goal: From Compliance to Culture

- From **"accommodating individuals"** to **"designing for everyone."**

- Reframes inclusion as a shared responsibility and celebrates learner variability as a strength

- **It is a lens for organizational transformation**
  - aligning teaching, technology, and policy around equitable access for all learners.

What this looks like in practice...

- **SUNY Accessibility Advocates & Allies Faculty Fellowship Program**
  - A community of faculty leaders and champions committed to promoting and growing digital accessibility practices in and out of the classroom on their campuses
  - Commit to participating in the fellowship for a calendar year (2026)
  - Fellows are selected through a nomination and interview process
  - Each cohort includes up to twelve (12) fellows
  - $10,000 stipend
  - Develop a Draft a Faculty Engagement Plan to build or enhance a culture of access customized for the campus' unique characteristics

**Northwestern University Universal Design for Learning Practicum**

- Designed for faculty.

- A three week event which includes:
  - large group sessions, cohort meetings, and individual consultations.

- Each week contains a core session around one of the UDL principles of offering Multiples Means of Engagement, Representation, and Expression.

- Each participant is assigned to a cohort of other participants with similar UDL experience
  - cohorts are kept as learning communities after the practicum ends

- Routinely draws 80+ participants per iteration

McGill University

- From 2011 to 2015 a system-wide implementation of UDL.

- Their site offers in-depth explanations of UDL, faculty resources, video resources, information about universal design research, concrete tips for implementing UDL, assistive technology information, and they also offer workshops on request.

- UDL Audit paper:
  - Beck, T., Diaz del Castillo, P., Fovet, F., Mole, H., & Noga, B. (2014). Applying Universal Design to disability service provision: outcome analysis of a UD audit. Journal of Post-secondary Education and Disability, Vol. 27(2), 209-222.

More examples...

https://udloncampus.cast.org/home
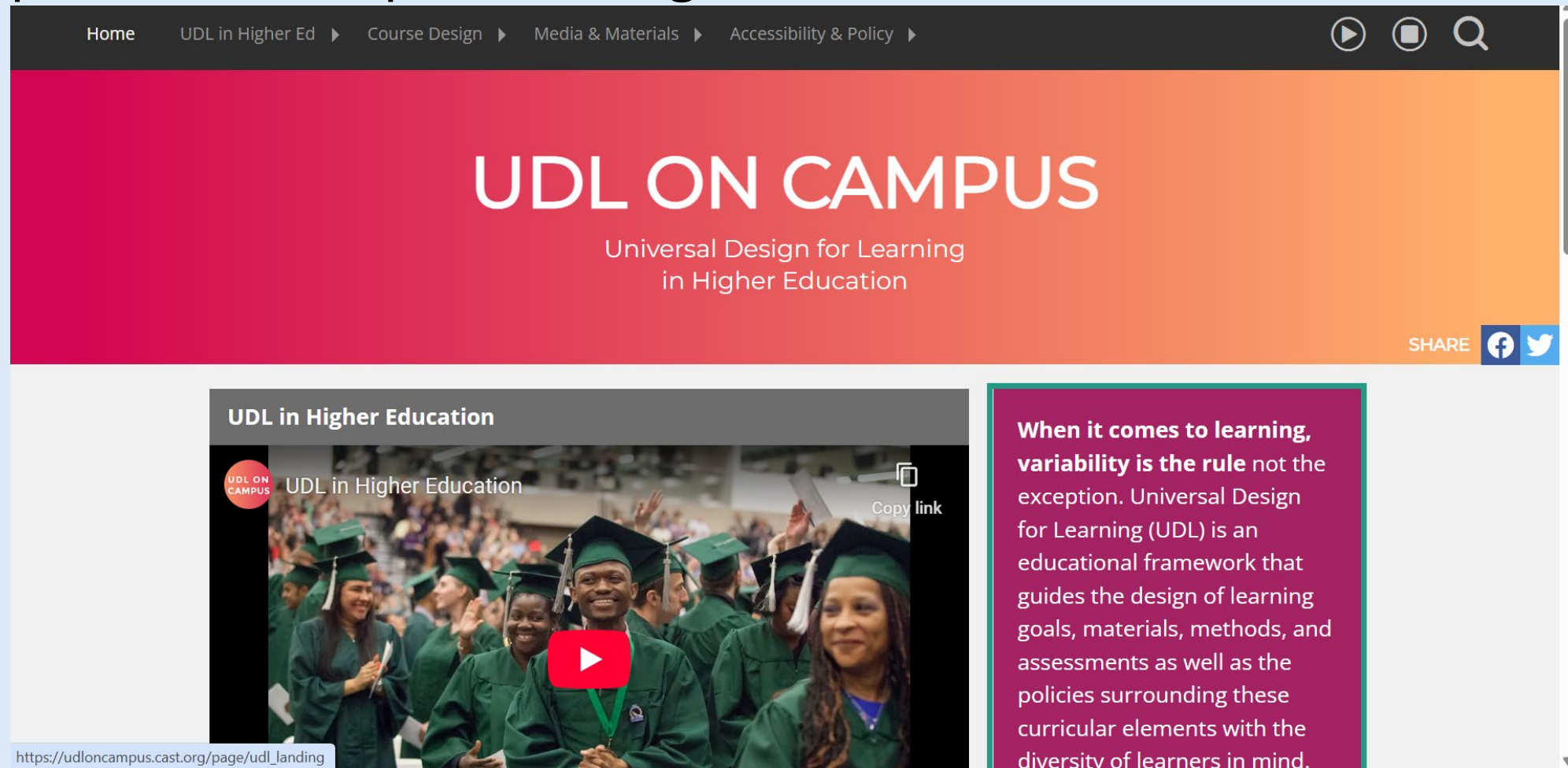
Resources to explore…


Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone
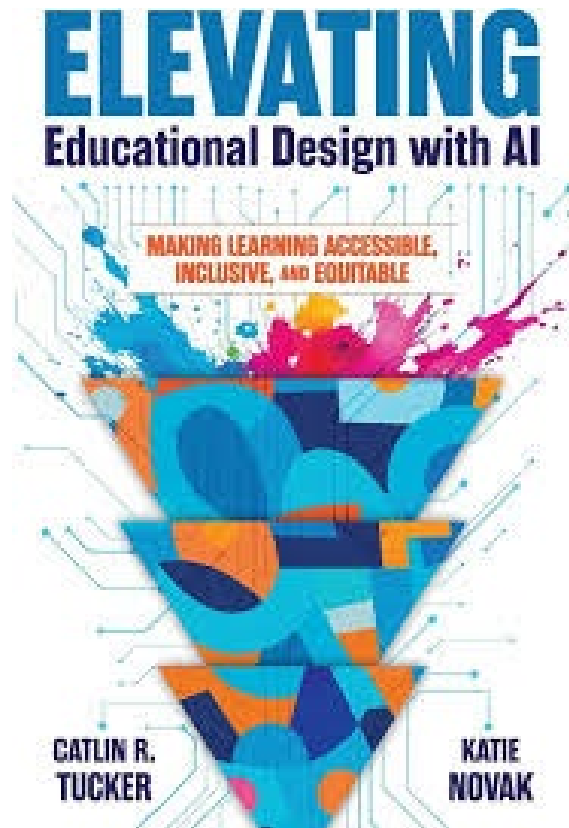Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education
Thomas J. Tobin and Kirsten T. Behling

- From *retroactive accommodation* to *proactive inclusion*
- It reframes faculty as designers, not just deliverers
  - Instead of "fixing" individual student problems, faculty are encouraged to design learning structures that remove barriers for all learners
  - Empowers faculty to see UDL as *creative craftsmanship*—a form of pedagogical design that blends empathy, science, and structure
- Offers Scalable, Realistic Strategies for Higher Education
- Acknowledges that most college instructors are overwhelmed, under time pressure, and often lack formal training in pedagogy.
  - **"Plus-one thinking"**: start small by adding *one more option* for engagement, representation, or expression rather than overhauling an entire course.
  - **Low-barrier implementation**: they provide examples like captioning short videos, offering alternative formats for readings, using discussion boards for varied participation, or building flexibility into due dates.
  - **Technology as a tool for inclusion**: they highlight how LMS features, apps, and AI tools can support access, but only when guided by intentional design.
- A design habit, not an overhaul.
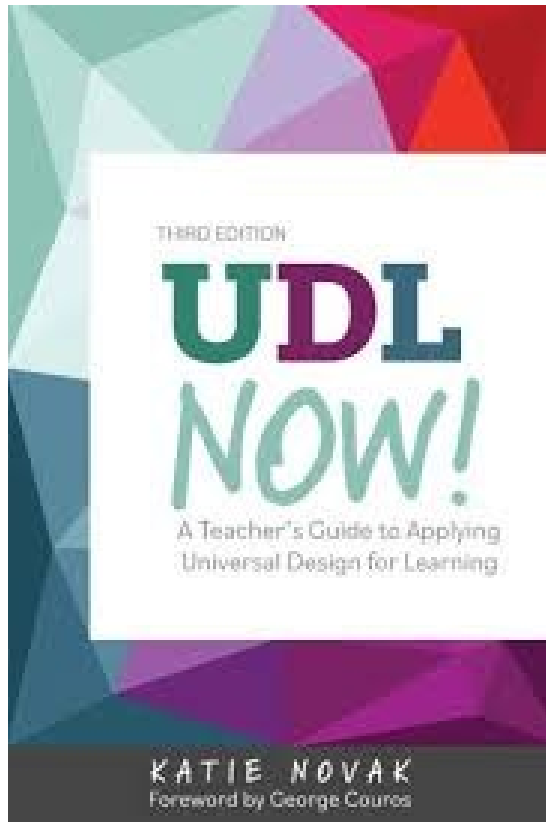
- Focuses on the educator's mindset and daily practice, helping instructors become architects of inclusive learning experiences.

- Designing from the start for variability, so all students have equitable opportunities to succeed

- **"Design for the edges"**—to ensure every learner, including those who think, process, or express differently, can thrive

- Turns UDL theory into **doable, everyday actions**
  - Gives practical ways to integrate the three UDL principles—engagement, representation, and action/expression—into lesson planning, course design, and assessment.

- She reframes UDL as **a tool for liberation**, helping both educators and students take ownership of learning

- She urges teachers to experiment, reflect, and iterate—using data, student feedback, and collaboration to improve design.

ELEVATING
Educational Design with AI

MAKING LEARNING ACCESSIBLE, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE

CATLIN R. TUCKER   KATIE NOVAK

- AI should *not replace* the human educator, but instead serve as a *thought-partner* in designing accessible, engaging, inclusive learning experiences

- The book outlines a four-step pathway for AI enhanced educational design: Identify learning outcomes, design equitable learning experiences, adapt/personalize instruction/support using AI, and cultivate resilient learners.

- Gives practical strategies, workflows, and tools for implementation

- Emphasizes using AI for routine or design-heavy tasks (e.g., generate multiple formats) so instructors have more capacity for higher-order work: coaching, student interaction, personalization.

"Teachers as transformative intellectuals are not merely concerned with how to teach, but with the purposes, values, and conditions that shape teaching and learning."
— *Giroux, 1988*

Thoughts, questions, ideas, etc.?

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