Designing Together From Moment to Movement

A Faculty Framework for Access Online

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This paper will explore the role of collaboration to explain how a pedagogical reading group supported faculty and staff at an institution in Canada in the development of self-awareness and application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Within this social learning framework, a community of individuals, an educational developer, and members of the pedagogical reading group, were able to articulate and disseminate a process where learning together, as an experience of small meaningful moments, led to the possibility of larger wholescale movements as institutional change.

Introduction

Faculty and educational development are very much premised on the ability to build strong connections to instructor groups and being able to reinforce the importance of having evidence-based approaches to pedagogy regardless of the way the content is delivered. The ability to build connections is often difficult, and before the pandemic, part of connection building was linked to an awareness of the role and scope of educational developers (ED) and instructional designers (ID). As Tom Warhover (2020) states "we need to get the word out that what [IDs] do matters" (p.61). The work of faculty development and the role of teaching and learning centres is always somewhat in flux, and very much about meeting colleagues where they are in terms of their needs, their background, and their gaps. Ultimately, those who work in faculty development are invested in creating moments of connection that lead to larger movement towards, ideally, equitable and inclusive pedagogy and rewarding teaching and learning experiences for all.

This type of engagement addresses a common barrier to evidence-based pedagogical change – the prevalence of individual or pocket efforts in driving change – rather than a more wholescale movement on behalf of a majority of the faculty members (Tagg, 2012 as cited in Brownell& Tanner 2012). Studies discuss the tensions between faculty and ID/ED dynamics, the *Intentional Futures* (2016) report states "the number one obstacle that instructional designers face is a lack of faculty buy-in" (p.15). Thus, ID/EDs are always looking for ways to gain buy-in, and "humanize our work as instructional designers" (Grabau, 2020, p.41) to make ID's work and resources accessible to instructors from many different backgrounds, and increase the possibility of faculty buy-in.

Whether explicitly framed in such a way or not, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles underpin the work of faculty development and support a humanizing approach to ED/ID work. As outlined in Richardson et al. (2018), important elements to the ED/ID-faculty relationship are building trust and remaining flexible. UDL fundamentally supports flexibility as seen in the guidelines outlined by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). The nine evidence-based UDL guidelines are divided into three categories of multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. For the purposes of this article, we will be focusing on guidelines 7 (recruiting interest), 8 (sustaining effort & persistence), and 9 (self-regulation) as they are the most directly connected to reading group practice as instructor professional development (CAST, 2018).

UDL theory and practice is also framed around intentionality, which informs each professional development opportunity provided, or resource created and shared by an ED/ID, as ED/IDs support instructors where they are. It also engages faculty, regardless of their status within the institution. Anything that is provided should be open and created to have something that will be of use for tenure-track professors (at any stage of their career from assistant to full professor), teaching-stream professors, adjunct faculty, post-doctoral fellows, and graduate-student course instructors.

This intervention will highlight the use of a pedagogical reading group (PRGs) as a low-stakes activity to build community on a campus with many departments and stakeholders and to engage in the important work of exploring pedagogical theories and framing of praxis. It helped the individual participants pivot immediately to a remote learning environment (Meaningful Moments 1 and 2), and the ED design support programs at an institutional level (Meaningful Moments 3, 4, and 5). Bond and Blevins (2019) situate reading groups (book group discussions) within the larger social-learning framework of professional

development, specifically belonging to the category of learning communities (LCs). PRGs embody one of the key change strategies of LCs (as identified by Bond and Blevins 2019) namely the opportunity to listen to various perspectives and envision alternative teaching models. In addition, pedagogical reading groups (PRGs) address UDL checkpoint 8.3 "foster collaboration and community" (CAST, 2018). They also help open conversations and reflections on UDL checkpoint 8.1 "heighten salience of goals and objectives" and UDL checkpoint 9.3 "develop self-assessment and reflection" (CAST, 2018). PRGs help model the kinds of UDL structures that participants could incorporate in courses, whether the book being read together is about UDL or not. However, if the book *is* about UDL, as was the case with our reading group in January of 2020, and a global pandemic or educational crisis ensues, PRGs represent a meta-modelling framework for creating moments that lead to more in-depth reflections and holistic ideology that potentially spark movements.

Unsurprisingly, faculty educational development leads to positive impacts in the classroom. Wheeler and Bach (2020) assert courses taught by instructors who participate in ED programs "had significantly more learning-focused syllabi and active learning than courses taught by non-engaged instructors" (Wheeler & Bach, 2020, p.1). The professional development (PD) investigated in this study were, relatively, time-intensive: "a week-long course design institute (35 hours) with subsequent participation in a learning community (16 hours for the new faculty learning community and 14 hours for the STEM learning community)" (Wheeler & Bach, 2020, p.3). These are impressive findings, that are a direct result of a well-designed and committed approach to faculty development in which all the stakeholders came together with the specific goal of improving the student-learning experience. This is the kind of holistic approach that we would all like to strive for, but that is not always possible. In the absence of this type of time and resource commitment, we do not have to give up on high-impact ID/ED. One of the prized elements of the new faculty learning community in Wheeler and Bach's 2020 study was its ability to "engage participants in a *cycle of deliberate* [emphasis added] classroom experimentation, analysis of, and reflection on their experience" (Wheeler and Bach, 2020, p.3). This commitment to an iterative, intentional process to pedagogy can also be articulated and strategize in a less formalized manner. As such, we want to provide a "start here" mandate, one that employs UDI's *plus-one,* as seen in Tobin and Behling's (2018) and other's work, an approach that privileges the implementation of low-stakes activities (in terms of time and flexibility) that yield high-impact results such as community creation and support. As such, PRGs can be also be employed by EDs and IDs as a scaffolded activity that introduces a pedagogical teaching topic which is then continued as a more time- and resource- intensive activity as the ones outlined above in Wheeler

and Bach's (2020) study. This would effectively reverse the procedure of Wheeler and Bach's study in which the participants are required to enrol in a LC after the workshop and instead places the PRG as a foundational activity.

With the opportunity to read a text together and actively share in the learning process of its contents, faculty are able to experience a microcosm of the learning experience they wish to cultivate in their own classes. Participating in a PRG gives participants instant advantage by locating them in the learners' space. This article uses a narrative framework that models the reflection and discussion that is part of reading groups and social learning practices. It echoes what Jay Dolmage (2015) suggests in his work on UDL, that the "way to start this essay, then, would be to suggest that you not read it as an essay at all."

Teaching and Learning Collaboration

PRGs offered every semester are just one of the offerings supported by the Teaching and Learning Collaboration (TLC), which includes workshops, webinars, and teaching and learning grants. The TLC has been in existence in its present form since 2015. Funded and supported by the Vice-Dean, Teaching and Learning, the TLC programming and resources are administered and co-facilitated between the Associate Dean, Undergraduate and EDs. Pre-COVID, teaching and learning exchange lunches were also held where instructors met over lunch to discuss strategies and challenges in their teaching and courses.

Meaningful Moment 1: Pedagogical Reading Group

What are some of the barriers to creating a group of instructors who will meet several times over the course of the semester to discuss a book together? When you want a group to be inclusive of participants at different stages in their career, one of the biggest barriers is timing and schedules. Finding a time that is convenient to meet is one of the EDs' main goals in administering PRGs, and a reason for offering two groups a term to fit different schedules and interests. Instructors self-select which book they would be interested in reading, which models a UDL framework of choice, from a curated list of books created by the ED that supports inclusive teaching and learning.

As stated previously, the PRG addresses primarily collaboration and community building which are strong aspects of a UDL framework, but also an important part of seeing peers in different disciplines or different points of their career. These reading groups have increasingly become a common feature of many centres for teaching and learning, and are often cited as a "less formal, faculty-centered

professional development experience to promote best practices of teaching and learning" (Ramlo & McConnell, 2008, p.25). As part of the learning community to which it belongs, PRGs are indeed "a true gestalt [in which] the whole is greater than the sum of its part" as it promotes collaboration in an environment that is usually siloed in its respective disciplines (Sicat et. al, 2014, p.5). PRGs directly address many of the CAST guidelines and support key knowledge that successfully builds rapport such as the knowledges outlined by West et al. (2017) namely "knowledge of others, knowledge of self, knowledge of relational tools, knowledge of process, knowledge of teaching and learning" (p.49). Like the goals of the TLC in general, a PRG brings a community of like-minded individuals together in one space at a specific time creating an opportunity for the first meaningful moment. It is an example of Richardson et al.'s (2019) suggestion that "encouragement from the administration are also important factors in establishing instructional designer-faculty collaborative relationships" (p.864). Therefore, acquiring financial and administrative backing for such an initiative is important to community building.

The PRG started in mid-January reading Thomas J. Tobin and Kirsten T. Behling's (2018) *Reach Everyone, Teach Everyone: Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education*. We met every other week for an hour and had a specific reading schedule, usually two chapters every two weeks. This schedule was set to make the reading manageable but also so that the group could wrap up by the end of the semester (the end of March). The book was part of a curated list of accessible books that all faculty could easily engage with. The group consisted of five members: one was a teaching-stream faculty member, three were part-time lecturers, and one was a graduate student finishing their doctoral dissertation.

Acknowledging the barriers of time and schedules, a conscious effort was made to grant complete autonomy in terms of how the group members chose to interact with the text. The goal was to familiarize oneself with the content of the two chapters assigned for each meeting, and be prepared to discuss as a group. However, there were no restrictions on procedure to give choice and opportunity for all participants. Some annotated the hardcopy provided, others made separate notes, and some made no notes. Participation in the group was not prescriptive. Some chose more active and verbal contributions preferring to brainstorm out loud, while others opted to listen and observe the unfolding conversations and offer their opinions only when they felt they were fully-formed. Still others chose to take screenshots with their phones of any resources that came up in our discussion in order to refer to it later. In doing so, the need for any specific accommodations was removed, the negative emotional valence generally associated with it (Tobin & Behling, 2018, p.3). Regardless of the methods chosen

by the participants, the outcome was the same each and every meeting: content of the chapters was thoroughly discussed, examples of how to apply the content to their own teaching practices were exchanged and refined based on the suggestions and contributions of the group, and ideas were put forth as to how wholescale improvements could lead to systemic institutional changes that would benefit a larger group.

In the relatively short period of 60 minutes, we were able to consolidate our thoughts and collaborate on the real-world applications to implement in our own pedagogy and respective units and departments. These pedagogical changes were supported under the leadership of the group facilitator, the ED, who was able to provide instant feedback and supplement gaps in resources arising from conversation. We learned to privilege the quality of our engagement and not the quantity and how this approach could best serve our students by acknowledging this could only be accomplished through a commitment of intentionality in our pedagogical practices. Commitment to intentionality is mirrored in the very structure of Tobin and Behling's (2018) book. Among the many "aha moments" for our group, was the realization that accessibility was provided by modelling the UDL practices advocated by offering a layered approach to content through narrative examples, theoretical applications, discussions, summaries, and checklists. We experienced for ourselves how effective this approach and subsequent practices could be. Unknowingly, the goals of our PRG had aligned with the goals of Tobin and Behling's (2018) book, namely to reframe UDL so as to move the conversation beyond disability services. Tobin and Behling (2018) provide practical examples of how to implement UDL in individual course design and as well as at an institutional level beyond mere compliance with accessibility laws (Tobin& Behling, 2018). Moreover, it allowed participants to acknowledge the changing nature of the student population and employ UDL as an effective strategy to continue to serve it effectively and equitably. At the same time the very nature and structure of the PRG allows for reassessment of the "form and distribution of power in such collaborations" (Richardson et al., 2019) and opening of more possibilities for collaboration and trust in the future.

Meaningful Moment 2: Pedagogical Reading Group, The End

The second-last meeting of the PRG coincided with the last week's campus providing in-person instruction. We quickly moved from being in the same space as our students and colleagues to remote environments with Zoom meetings and poorly-defined boundaries. Just as quickly, we began to plan for our new pedagogical reality and the principles of UDL presented themselves as effective and viable solutions. As most (if not all) of us had no experience with teaching in

any other modality, essentially cut off from our students, immediate anxiety stemmed from the question of how to engage students without the physical environment provided through in-person lectures. We began to think of alternatives to the traditional single-source point of presenting information and solutions were found in a multiplicity of alternatives, via synchronous (e.g. Zoom lectures, webinars) and asynchronous (e.g. podcasts, videos) media. Which platform to choose? The answer could lie in discipline-specific criteria, but ultimately it was the learning outcome that dictated what medium would support the learning, as is seen in much of the design literature (Carbone, 2018; Limperos et al. 2015). The pivot to remote teaching and learning forced us to articulate *exactly* what we needed to communicate, and how this could be done effectively. Backward design, long-recognized as a fundamental principle of effective pedagogy, but unfortunately not as commonly put into practice, brought us directly in front of the first of UDL's main principles as articulated by CAST, namely the how of learning. We decided based on sound evaluation of the goals we articulated for students' learning in those final weeks and communicated these decisions through initial choices of our delivery-content platform. It was all done very quickly, and not without its share of logistical issues. The pivot was a sharp one, and not an ideal way to implement a massive-scale change, but good teaching is, essentially, format-agnostic. Shannon Riggs reminds us "[g]ood teaching in any learning environment requires careful attention to course design and facilitation" (Riggs, 2019, p. 4), and we were now given an opportunity to put this into practice on a larger scale.

By the time our final PRG meeting was conducted via Zoom, it became a reinforcement and a modeling of the principles addressed in Tobin and Behling's (2018) book. The last meeting was really the culmination of the momentum created and fuelled by the discussions we had had for the past two months, as well as our experiences with the quick pivot to remote delivery of the past two weeks. We all found meaningful solutions in the first application of UDL principles in our own courses and quickly discovered how the collective knowledge of UDL cultivated in our PRG significantly informed the facilitation of our emerging pandemic pedagogy plans. We saw opportunities, where some colleagues only saw challenges, because we had been working through for weeks in the PRG how alternatives and choices were essential to learning. In line with David Gordon's statement that there is "no single way of presenting information, no single way of responding to information, and no single way of engaging students [that] will work across the diversity of students that populate our classrooms" (Council for Exceptional Children, 2011, as cited in Tobin & Behling, 2018, p. 25), the members of the PRG were prepared to explore the multimodality of UDL in praxis.

The PRG resulted ultimately in the creation of on-the-ground UDL advocates for the larger teaching and learning community. In the current pandemic context and different modalities of teaching and learning, we had five practitioners plus the ED to give guidance and inspire more micro-meaningful moments in remote teaching.

Meaningful Moment 3: Pandemic and the Need for Emergency Training Support

Ending the semester with remote exams and final assessments meant that instructors had about three weeks to pivot their summative assessments online. From an ED position, this meant quickly assessing the overarching needs of instructors in a holistic way and creating training support to model UDL principles reflecting choice and different ways for faculty not used to online pedagogy. There was never a doubt that UDL had to be a foundational piece to the design and the delivery of this support, as supported by the work of Baldaris Navarro et al. (2016) The discussions and work completed as part of the PRG framed the transitional professional development offerings. This training was designed using feedback from the stakeholders directly engaged with this support including the instructors' instructor-gained feedback from students.

The modality in and of itself was a very obvious barrier to address. Instructors and students alike did not necessarily have the technology or the Internet access to engage with materials synchronously. Another barrier is meeting people where they are and ensuring that no one is lost in the transition, especially if they have technology, information, or knowledge gaps that mean they cannot access resources.

The approach taken by the TLC was to offer a series of four webinars on foundational online pedagogy concepts: Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate [ADDIE], learning outcomes and assessment alignment review, inclusive assessment design and academic integrity online, and syllabus review clinic for those teaching in the summer term. We also provided two webinars for teaching assistants. One focused on cultivating community and communication strategies and the other focused on providing feedback online. These were training pieces that were needed in that moment and had to necessarily have different ways for faculty, instructors, and teaching assistants to engage with them. Each of these webinars were offered synchronously, and were also recorded to be viewed asynchronously by those who could not make the time or would like to review the concepts. The slide deck for each webinar was emailed to the participants and was also made available in the institutional LMS with the recording for those who were engaging asynchronously.

The inclusive assessment design workshop introduced UDL and experienced some resistance against UDL fundamentals and associated pedagogical rigour, which is common (UDL on Campus by CAST, 2020; Novak, 2019). Often with the mention of multimodality, the cognitive barrier to address, with those who are engaging in the training, is the belief that multimodality means avoiding critical writing skills. One of the goals of the subsequent workshops, throughout the summer, was to demonstrate how UDL is in fact a movement towards an equitable and rigorous curriculum, one that is aligned with outcomes and features many ways to attain those outcomes. Pliner and Johnson's (2004) work has demonstrated how rigor is an integral part of universal instructional design, and yet there are still doubts that a pedagogy of choice could be a rigorous pedagogy.

This is where having conversations with students in terms of what they need, prefer, and engage with is an important part of supporting UDL in pedagogy and assessments. As Womack (2017) states "[e]ven though learning requires that material be accessible to students, educators often assume that making material accessible to disabled students threatens academic rigor" (p.497) and it is often this assumption that accessibility advisors and inclusive pedagogy proponents have to engage with daily. As Womack (2017) continues "[i]nclusion and rigor are only incompatible opposites when rigor is defined as exclusion and inflexibility. When rigor is defined as difficulty, they are complementary values" (p.497) and thus, the pivot to a remote teaching environment offered an opportunity to redefine concepts and move mindsets.

UDL's exploration of the how of learning became particularly critical in late March and early April as we collectively shifted our attention to assessments. How do we evaluate our students without the assistance of our usual tools, namely, invigilated final exams? Preoccupation with academic integrity became a serious stumbling block for many faculty and the potentially short-sighted solution of remote proctoring resulted in undue anxiety for faculty and students alike. The problem was not one of academic integrity, but the narrow definition of academically-rigorous assessments. As Tobin and Behling (2018) outline, most of us see the wisdom in providing multiple ways of delivering information, and motivating our students, but that wisdom is generally not extended to assessments, citing concerns of dilution of rigour and a reluctance to complicate the grading process (p.178-179). The discussions from the PRG allowed for an accessible way into many of these questions. The pandemic prompted many to ponder if the invigilated final exam provides the only means of demonstrating knowledge. In UDL terms, all were questioning whether our assessments have construct relevance, whereby "constructs are the knowledge, skills or abilities being measured by an assessment" (Tobin & Behling, 2018, p.25).

Construct relevance ensures we are evaluating a student's grasp of the *content* of the learning, not the *format* of the evaluation. The example provided by Tobin and Behling (2018) outlines the issues with evaluating math competencies solely through world problems as "[l]earners who have difficulty with reading may miss certain items even though they may have a good grasp of the underlying math concepts" (p.25). Just as we did when shifting teaching modalities, we needed to start with well-defined learning objectives that include criteria for measurement and evaluation of proficiency. For example, in one of the author's literature courses this past term, this was accomplished by rethinking the assessment plans to better operate within the testing structures afforded by the Canvas Learning Management System. As well as reconfiguring questions to align with higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, namely, analyzing, evaluating, and creating (Anderson, Krathwohl, & Bloom, 2001). Lower-level recall items were eliminated and short- and long- answer questions were prioritized that asked students to reflect upon and apply the core concepts covered in class. This assessment redesign eliminated the need for any virtual proctoring service and proved to be successful in minimizing the opportunities for cheating in a remote environment. It is possible to pursue format-agnostic assessments that are academically rigorous, if supported by construct relevance and well-defined objectives (Harrison, 2006).

Meaningful Moment 4: Accessibility Audits and Course Design

One of the concepts that the TLC programming hoped to embed with instructors is using aspects of critical pedagogy, specifically, reflection practices, as part of course design and review. The Teaching Assistants' Training Program (TATP) on the main campus of our institution already had a well-developed "access check" framework as part of their training. Informed by the social model of disability, the access checks are meant to be reflective spaces where learners can identify access barriers to learning and share these barriers in a comfortable manner with the instructor. The access checks model is very much about acknowledging accommodation needs, which is a good start to promoting discussions about access and inclusion but within a UDL framework. Access checks needed to go a step further as we move away from contingency planning to needing solutions for a permanently-altered educational environment. We needed to ask more longitudinal questions and shift to the affective brain network that probes the why of learning and how to motivate learners. UDL offers a solution by finding ways to connect with student interests through multiple means of engaging with course material (Tobin and Behling, 2018).

The TLC started using the terminology, *accessibility audit*, in relation to accessible course review and design. We promoted the access-checks model in our webinars

and started each with first, a land acknowledgement of the Indigenous land that our institution is on, and then, an access check for all webinar and workshop participants. Building on this access-check framework, an accessibility audit encourages educators to look at the many types of barriers that could be found in a course. These accessibility audits work for both face-to-face course delivery but also for remote and online course delivery. Supported by a self-paced, asynchronous, eight module mini-training resource, built on the Articulate Rise platform, faculty were encouraged to conduct an inclusion audit of their course design for the fall semester. These modules covered topics such as physical barriers [important for face-to-face delivery], technological barriers [important for remote delivery], and racial, cultural, age, gender expression, family, and class barriers that can be seen in any delivery mode. The purpose of these modules was also to introduce UDL principles as a way to approach inclusive design to reduce these barriers in course design and delivery. It also referenced Tobin and Behling's (2018) book. These modules were meant to make auditing courses for accessibility as one of the many meaningful moments that faculty would experience in the course design and delivery process. It was again another instance of micro affecting the macro, for each barrier, however large or small, that was addressed in a course, which meant a more inclusive, ethical, and rewarding learning experience for everyone.

Meaningful Moment 5: Collaborative Opportunities in Instructor Summer Camp

The accessibility audit modules were introduced as part of a four-day summer camp for instructors that was offered in July and again in August to assist in design of fall remote courses. This summer camp was built on UDL principles where instructors had a choice in terms of when to attend and how to engage with content because there were synchronous and asynchronous elements to the camp. The camp was also built to model the remote learning experience so instructors who have not taken an online course or experienced one previously could explore the environment in a safe and meaningful way, surrounded by a community of peers. The synchronous elements were given within a two hour block each day for four days. Throughout the synchronous block breaks were also enforced, again to model the kind of inclusive and accessible pedagogy that would support learners in a remote environment as indicated by evidence-based research.

The schedule was created in such a way to "provide options for recruiting interest" (CAST, 2018, Guideline 7), as well as "foster collaboration and community" (CAST, 2018, Guideline 8.3) through breakout groups, discussion posts, practice exercises, and reflection opportunities. Multi-modal aspects (CAST, 2018,

Guideline 5) were promoted throughout summer camp, but especially in relation to visual syllabi and using icons for signposting throughout the course materials and the LMS, a practice that the camp facilitators modelled in the Canvas course shell for summer camp. This strategy had widespread appeal.

For faculty who had participated in previous professional development webinars offered since March, it was an opportunity to consolidate that information and translate it into a viable pedagogical plan. For those who had not, the summaries, checklists, and other summative materials provided helped to forge a pedagogical plan and to benefit from some of the early expertise of their colleagues. The key was the collaborative, inclusive environment created by the Camp options. For as Richardson et al. (2019) state "collaborations between faculty and instructional designers are key to developing positive learning experiences for students" (p.872). The feedback that the TLC received from summer camp demonstrates that the experience was filled with meaningful moments for the participants. Many developed new skills from the experience and a new awareness of engagement opportunities and techniques built on UDL principles, largely because they had been modelled in the delivery of that material.

Conclusion

What makes this moment so particularly important for UDL is the near-universal loss of the face-to-face teaching delivery mode, where physical proximity is now a barrier common to everyone. We are working, in unison, to ensure an equitable online environment for all, in the wake of this loss, and it has brought to the forefront the issues of accessibility and comprehensive inclusion opportunities. We are cognizant of the inherent injustice that issues of accessibility and the accommodations that those in the disability community have been asking for years and have become a more focal reality in the face of a pandemic. We hope that this new-found empathy helps to harness this moment in time into a more momentous and sustained movement for access and inclusion.

There were many meaningful moments in the transition to remote teaching and learning, and these meaningful moments have a powerful radiating framework that support UDL adoption and practice institutionally. From the smallest micro moment of a focused on a UDL text to the macro implementation of a summer camp with participation of over 300 faculty, instructors, and staff from over three campuses institutionally and more than a dozen departments. There was a marked institutional shift seen in the discussion of how UDL as a theory could work in practice with concepts of rigour and academic integrity at the heart of the discussion. This experience has demonstrated how moments can create

movements and UDL has given us an opportunity to do so in the wake of immense pedagogical shifts.

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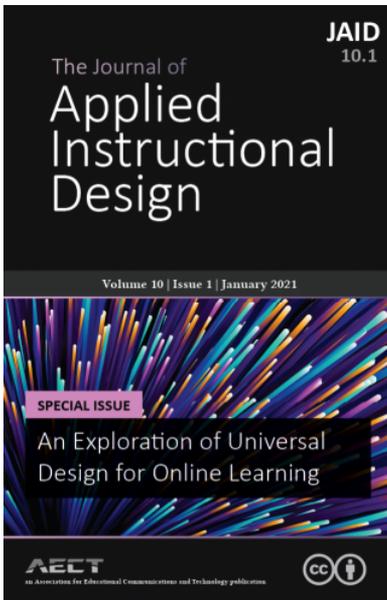
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