

Chapter-1

WHO AM I TO TALK ABOUT RACE? WHITE ALLIES, UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING, AND ANTIRACISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY

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ABSTRACT

There are perceptions that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practitioners in neoliberal Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not doing enough to address systemic barriers affecting people of color. While UDL is recognized as a framework for providing options, choices, and flexibility to learners, it must go further to dismantle inequities affecting marginalized and minoritized communities. Events such as the CAST UDL Symposiums (2017, 2020) and works like Fitzgerald's Antiracism and Universal Design for Learning (2020) have highlighted the potential of UDL to address systemic racism and other barriers to equity. This chapter explores how white allies and accomplices can advance UDL through an antiracist lens, reflecting on lessons from a Community of Practice (CoP) established in 2021. It underscores the role of collaborative engagement in deepening the intersection of UDL and antiracism and offers insights for dismantling systemic barriers in HEIs.

Keywords: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Antiracism, Higher Education, Systemic Barriers, Community of Practice, Educational Equity, White Allyship

INTRODUCTION

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is gaining global recognition in higher education (HE) as a “promising framework for reducing barriers to education and developing equitable, quality learning for all” (Nelson et al., 2021, p. 5). UDL is often celebrated as revolutionary, creating more inclusive and welcoming campuses by “anticipating diverse learner needs, instead of plastering on ad hoc adjustments for individual learners later on when support needs are identified” (Qu & Cross, 2024, p. 2). It is also increasingly viewed as a vehicle to support diverse learner populations, including international students, first-generation students, and those who are disadvantaged, Black, Brown, and Indigenous (BIOPIC) (Fovet, 2021a; Bracken & Novak, 2019; Groseth & Dalton, 2019).

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