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## Designing accessible courses - a reflection on the use of UDL and OERs to create an open education course

### Student Dissertation

How to cite:

Ball, Danny (2017). Designing accessible courses - a reflection on the use of UDL and OERs to create an open education course. Research Summary for the Open University module H818 The Networked Practitioner

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## WED: Designing accessible courses - a reflection on the use of UDL and OERs to create an open education course (Danny Ball)

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[Danny Ball](#)

8 January 2017

Since 1974, disabled students in England have been able to apply for non-repayable grants, known as 'Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)', to assist with the additional costs incurred whilst completing higher education study (Willets, 2014). Such grants provided allowances for specialised equipment, non-medical assistance such as note takers and specialised tutors, books and consumables, as well as travel allowances (Disability Rights UK, 2015). In addition to the support provided by DSAs, the introduction of the Equality Act 2010 placed a legal duty on businesses and education providers to take positive steps, referred to as 'reasonable adjustments', to remove barriers faced by people, due to their disability (Citizens Advice, n.d.). This includes making changes to the ways things are done e.g. provision, criterion or practice; physical features of buildings such as entrances and exits; as well as the provision of extra aids or services such as: induction hearing loops, providing information in alternative formats etc. (Citizens Advice, n.d.).

Despite the reasonable adjustments implemented by higher education institutions (HEIs), the costs of the DSA provision have risen sharply from £101.3m in 2009-10 to £145.8m in 2012-13, an increase of 44% (Weale, 2015). In 2014, the Minister for Universities and Science announced a series of changes to modernise the existing system to 'rebalance' responsibilities for student support. Thus, ensuring that the limited public funding is available to those most in need, and provides the support they require (Willets, 2014). The changes are designed to move away from a system of individualised support funded by DSAs, to one where HEIs play a greater role in supporting all students, regardless of whether they have a disability or not.

With these changes coming into force from September 2016, HEIs within England have been required to review and, if required, revise their current student support arrangements to ensure they are prepared for these changes and can support learners effectively (McNaught, 2016). Whilst there are many small and simple changes academic staff can take to improve the accessibility of their teaching such as: providing information ahead of sessions, creating learning materials which meet accessibility guidelines and encouraging students to record teaching sessions etc. (Canterbury Christ Church University, n.d.), this does not resolve the underlying issues. As McNaught (2016) summarises '[t]eaching and learning pedagogies, practices and technologies can inadvertently create barriers for students with disabilities', to overcome these a different approach is required.

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To address some of the challenges raised by these recent changes and the need for HEIs to make anticipatory, rather than reactive changes, this conference presentation will provide an overview and demonstration of a short online course being developed by the author. Built using the Canvas open education platform, this short course aimed at academics working within UK HEIs, will provide a more in-depth overview of the changes to disabled student support, whilst also introducing delegates to two educational frameworks; Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Inclusive Curriculum. Building on research undertaken by Marquis et al. (2016), this course will utilise a flipped learning pedagogy; whereby the learning materials are placed online and classroom sessions are used to enable deeper exploration and discussion of the topics raised (The Higher Education Academy, n.d.). The work-in-progress can be viewed at: <https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1112741>

#### References:

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Disability Rights UK (2015) *Applying for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)* [Online]. Available at <http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/applying-disabled-students'-allowances-dsas> (Accessed 3 December 2016).

Marquis, E., Jung, B., Fudge Schormans, A., Lukmanji, S., Wilton, R. and Baptiste, S. (2016) 'Developing inclusive educators: enhancing the accessibility of teaching and learning in higher education', *International Journal for Academic Development*, Routledge, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 337–349 [Online]. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2016.1181071> (Accessed 21 December 2016).

McNaught, A. (2016) 'Minimising pain, maximising gain: top tips for supporting learners affected by DSA changes', *JISC Blog*, 19 February [Blog]. Available at <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/minimising-pain-maximising-gain-top-tips-for-supporting-learners-affected-by-dsa-changes-19-feb> (Accessed 4 December 2016).


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The Higher Education Academy (n.d.) *Flipped learning* [Online]. Available at <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/starter-tools/flipped-learning-0> (Accessed 23 December 2016).

University of Leicester (n.d.) *The social and medical model of disability* [Online]. Available at <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/accessibility/staff/accessibilitytutors/information-for-accessibility-tutors/the-social-and-medical-model-of-disability> (Accessed 2 January 2017).

Weale, S. (2015) *Government to cut funding for disabled university students* [Online]. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/dec/02/government-to-cut-funding-disabled-university-students-jo-johnson> (Accessed 2 January 2017).

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Willetts, D. (2014) *Higher education: student support: changes to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA)* [Online]. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-education-student-support-changes-to-disabled-students-allowances-dsa> (Accessed 2 January 2017).

## Extra content

[Final conference session poster with teaser trailer](#)



[Danny Ball](#)

13:47 on 8 January 2017

[Final accessible conference session poster with teaser trailer](#)



[Danny Ball](#)

13:48 on 8 January 2017

[Conference session teaser trailer with subtitles - YouTube](#)



[Danny Ball](#)

13:53 on 8 January 2017 (Edited 13:54 on 8 January 2017)

[Work-in-progress 'Developing inclusive learning and teaching environments' flipped learning course](#)



[Danny Ball](#)

19:54 on 30 January 2017

[Final conference presentation with speaker notes](#)



[Danny Ball](#)

19:28 on 14 February 2017

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## Embedded Content

[Accessible Alternative](#)

added by [Danny Ball](#)

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## Contribute

Discussion (16)

[Links \(1\)](#)

[Academic References \(10\)](#)



[Jude Toasland](#)

12:27pm 28 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Such an important topic and this is echoed within your accessible poster format. I particularly liked the teaser trailer - an inspirational idea. Will you be demonstrating the course or will you be asking participants to engage with it prior to the presentation? I look forward to the presentation with interest.



[Mary Howell](#)

9:01pm 28 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Danny - please see my comments in Open Studio

I am looking forward to your presentation



[Danny Ball](#)

7:53pm 30 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jude and Mary,

Thanks very much for your comments, these are greatly appreciated!

Based on the feedback received for my TMA02, I will be slightly adjusting my abstract and conference session title to better reflect my proposed session. Watch this space! Yes, accessibility of learning and teaching is an extremely important topic and is regularly being put under the spotlight. I hope to provide a short demonstration of the course during the presentation, particularly module 2 which focuses on the Universal Design for Learning framework, but do feel free to have a look around before the presentation and post any questions or comments you may have.

Kind regards,

Danny



[Stephen Gardiner](#)

11:50am 1 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Danny

Very interested in your conference presentation, we should have been working together on this as I think there is a lot of cross over. I am very interested in doing your flipped course - "developing inclusive learning & Teaching environments".

Which platform have you used for developing the course and how have you found the accessibility issues.

[Danny Ball](#)



7:33pm 1 February 2017 (Edited 7:34pm 1 February 2017) [Permalink](#)

Hi Steve,

Thanks for your comment, and yes it would have been great to have worked more closely together in the creation of our projects.

If you haven't already done so, you can view my work-in-progress course can be viewed at:

<https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1112741>

I initially was going to use The Open University's OpenLearnWorks, but I found the interface quite unintuitive and didn't have time to learn it. I therefore opted to use the Canvas VLE, which although required some learning (as it was new to me) I found it extremely easy to use. Like any VLE, I didn't find this offered any specific accessibility tools, apart from the ability to add alt text to images. Therefore, I have tried to keep this as accessible as possible based on my own knowledge/understanding of accessibility issues.

I would welcome any feedback you may have on the course,

Danny



[Heather Bloodworth](#)

3:26pm 5 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Danny, looking forward to hearing your presentation. All our powerpoints/teaching materials are on a VLE and are available to students (whenever possible) before the actual teaching session. We do also allow student's to record lectures and/or use their laptops/ipads. However, having looked at your online course on open studio, there's a lot more to consider.



[angela bonehill](#)

6:51pm 5 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Danny,

I'm also looking forward to your presentation, like Heather, all of our resources are on Moodle, we often cover classes and work with students without knowing their background or their needs. There is a huge lack of resources and training for staff and it is usually as a result of getting it wrong! In contrast to Heather, students can bring their own tools to the classroom, tablets, laptops, or recording devices providing they have accessed the permission from the tutor and the rest of the group.

All the best Danny



[Danny Ball](#)

9:02am 6 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Heather and Angela,

Thanks very much for your comments, its good to hear that you are looking forward to my presentation!

From the work I have done on this project, this is only really scratching the surface of accessible learning and teaching. Its great to hear that you both make materials available to students ahead of the sessions, wherever possible. This has the benefit of allowing students to familiarise themselves with the material ahead of the session, as well as customising this to meet their own needs.

The approach I am trying to promote through both my presentation and course, is the need to take proactive rather than reactive steps. Sometimes, this just involves taking a step back and reviewing the materials and approaches used in the session and asking yourself 'are these accessible to all students?', do I offer alternative and supplementary materials?'

Kind regards,

Danny



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

2:48pm 15 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Danny

Please find below the main questions and comments from your live presentation. It's up to you how to answer them, whether you wish to group them, or whether you wish to point to an answer already given above, for example.

Best wishes

Simon

- ▶ Will the course have deadlines if there are face to face elements?
- ▶ Yes, finding the OERs that 'fit' is time-consuming!
- ▶ Good to hear that your work is being drawn on in 'real life' within your instituton. Good luck.
- ▶ That's an interesting point about the time it takes to remix and reuse existing OERs - you must have felt it was worth the trouble in this case?
- ▶ It occurs to me that we want materials that 'fit' our overall design (visually, as well as in terms of tone, level). At the same time, 'smoothing' ersources in this way might lead to an element of spoon-feeding for students. I wonder if sending students out to find resources ('shell' courses) could be part of the practice?
- ▶ I have the impression that not many educators are using OERs in this way yet, so your course provides a really useful case study. Thanks for the opportunity to find out about it.



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

6:10pm 20 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Many Congratulations Danny! Your presentation has been voted by delegates to be one of the most effective of the H818 Online Conference 2017 and you are officially one of our H818 Presentation Star Open Badge Winners! Please see how to Apply for your Badge here: <http://cloudworks.ac.uk/badge/view/33>

Well done!

Simon

H818 Conference Organiser



[Danny Ball](#)

11:10am 21 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Simon,

Thank you ever so much! I'm blown away that delegates deemed my presentation to be one of the most effective of the H818 Online Conference 2017!

I have just applied for the badge and hope I have provided the correct URL.

Kind regards,

Danny



[Danny Ball](#)

11:38am 21 February 2017 (Edited 11:39am 21 February 2017) [Permalink](#)

Hi Everyone,

Apologies for the delay in providing a written response to the questions and comments raised during my presentation. I believe I addressed the majority of these during the question and answer session, but here are some expanded answers.

- ▶ Will the course have deadlines if there are face to face elements?

Yes and no, the online course will be freely available for review by anyone, without being enrolled. However, delegates will be enrolled in cohorts in order to complete the online activities and participate in the face-to-face sessions. This is to ensure that delegates are progressing at a similar pace and to allow asynchronous discussions to take place between the learners and the session facilitators.

- ▶ Yes, finding the OERs that 'fit' is time-consuming!

I agree! Whilst there are lots of high-quality resources available, it can be difficult to locate these due to there being no central repository. In addition, I found that some of these resources simply did not fit my project, due to them being set within different contexts i.e. the American postsecondary sector rather than UK higher education sector.

- ▶ Good to hear that your work is being drawn on in 'real life' within your institution.



Good luck.

Thank you. I am really keen to work with the Academic Professional Development team within my University to take forward this project and for this to be delivered as part of wider academic professional development initiatives and qualifications.

- ▶ That's an interesting point about the time it takes to remix and reuse existing OERs - you must have felt it was worth the trouble in this case?

Whilst it took some time to not only locate relevant, high-quality OERs but to also remix and reuse these, I feel this worth the effort. Not only did this help to introduce different perspectives within my project, I think I would have also found it very difficult to produce similar resources, especially in the timeframes of the project.

- ▶ It occurs to me that we want materials that 'fit' our overall design (visually, as well as in terms of tone, level). At the same time, 'smoothing' resources in this way might lead to an element of spoon-feeding for students. I wonder if sending students out to find resources ('shell' courses) could be part of the practice?

For my project, I wanted to deliver a specific curriculum to provide new insights and encourage changes to professional practice. However, the idea of getting students to find their own resources could be a really useful online activity, to further increase their knowledge and understanding of the topics being discussed.

- ▶ I have the impression that not many educators are using OERs in this way yet, so your course provides a really useful case study. Thanks for the opportunity to find out about it.

Thank you for your positive feedback! It was a really interesting experiment to build a course consisting mainly of OERs licenced under Creative Commons, as well as resources made freely available online such as YouTube videos. I think the non-use of OERs comes back to a digital literacy issue, do educators know how to find these resources? If so, do they also possess the necessary skills to be able to modify them?

Thanks again for your great comments and feedback!

Danny



[Leanne Johnstone](#)

12:33pm 21 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Well done Danny :-) Really well deserved.



[Sarah Adrienne Hughes](#)

9:46am 22 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Well done!

Sarah



[David Jenkins](#)

10:42am 22 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Good work, Danny! I need to follow up on your references re: the flipped classroom technique and investigate implementing it in my teaching.



[Pat Townshend](#)

8:28pm 22 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Well done, and thanks for your help

Pat

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