

# The Medium is a Multitude of Messages: What Making a Podcast Taught Us About Inclusive Learning

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\*Recent graduates of Humber Polytechnic's **Teaching Excellence Program (TEP)** were invited to select and submit work from their time in the program to JIPE. This sample of reflective essays offers an engaging glimpse into faculty perspectives, their approaches to teaching and learning, and their experiences as Humber educators.

## Abstract

Two Faculty Librarians at Humber created a podcast called *BiblioJabbers*, with the first episode titled “A Crisis of Context” (<https://bibliojabbers.podbean.com/e/bibliojabbers-episode-1-a-crisis-of-context>) as part of their Teaching Excellence Program Professional Learning Plan. This exercise promoted the development of competencies necessary to better implement elements of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach to teaching and learning. The Educational Technology (EdTech) used in developing a podcast made available by the Humber and University of Guelph-Humber Library maker space (Idea Lab) engendered familiarity with hardware and software that can aid in multimodal teaching. Knowing how to teach in multiple modalities aligns with UDL's emphasis on making learning accessible for diverse learning preferences. Furthermore, the discussions that were held within the podcast reified the UDL call for representing multiple perspectives and identities to better recruit learner interest. Lastly, the podcast-producing experience highlighted the unique capabilities of the podcast medium to learn through lived experience, dialectic, and information sharing. Takeaways that would be of interest to educational professionals include the consideration of novel professional development spaces/communication channels for EDIB, leveraging podcasts as a medium for teaching and learning, and making use of EdTech at the Humber and University of Guelph-Humber Idea Lab to upskill EdTech proficiencies.

## Introduction

A commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) at academic libraries calls for the development of competencies to better implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The Teaching Excellence Program (TEP) Year 2 Professional Learning Plan (PLP) allowed us to answer this call as Faculty Librarians with a keen interest in putting EDIB into practice. We created a podcast centering on information literacy called *BiblioJabbers*, using educational technology (EdTech) in the Humber and University of Guelph-Humber Library maker space, known as the Idea Lab. In reflecting on our Professional Learning Plan, we will illustrate how the

development of the podcast deepened our ability to design for universal learning and thereby create more inclusive learning environments.

## Context & Rationale

In percolating potential PLP ideas, we were inspired by Vygotsky's Theory of Cognitive Development, which posits that cognitive development results from social interactions and contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). A learner's context includes the degree to which they feel included and represented. Thus, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Diversity (EDIB) is inextricable from creating a learning environment that maximizes learners' ability to achieve the learning outcomes of a program, course, or class. Though typically contemplated in a traditional classroom-style learning environment, this model of learning can also be extended to instruction in information literacy provided by Faculty Librarians. According to Vygotsky, learners move through increasingly complex "Zones of Proximal Development" (ZPD) via activities that test and challenge their existing mental functions. The ZPD is the gap between what learners can accomplish individually versus what they can potentially do with guidance from a "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO). This more knowledgeable other can be a mentor figure, parent/guardian, teacher, or indeed, a Librarian (Eun, 2019). In other words, learners benefit from scaffolded education and that is what ultimately drives maximal cognitive development. Everyone can learn; it's just a matter of giving learners the right opportunities and guidance.

Vygotsky's theory is typically applied to traditional classroom-based environments, but we wanted to consider it through the prism of Librarian-provided instruction. While our practice as Liaison Librarians includes teaching, it differs from the instruction provided by teaching faculty in scope and learning outcomes. Librarian-provided information literacy sessions impart research skills and strategies learners will need to succeed in their academics. In doing so, we also empower learners to be informed, global citizens by developing the critical thinking necessary to parse, comprehend, evaluate, and synthesize information sources. With respect to scope, we often only have one in-class session over the duration of a given course to achieve the intended educational outcomes. This means that we usually have exactly one opportunity to create the context necessary for learners to achieve the chosen learning objectives.

As educational professionals, we know that EDIB is inextricable from social context (Schuelka et al., 2025). If we want to maximize learning outcomes as per Vygotsky's theory, then we need to consider the contexts in which Librarians teach and make them inclusive to all types of learners and identities (Lee et al., 2022). A core element of EDIB in education is multimodal teaching, which is perhaps most comprehensively captured in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework. Another focus in TEP UDL promotes inclusivity by recognizing that any classroom will feature a diversity of learning preferences, and that educators must implement multiple means of engaging learners, representing and disseminating information, and application via activities (Quirke et al., 2023). UDL praxis can take many forms, and the exact elements will vary from classroom to classroom, but technology plays a critical role in its various instantiations. For instance, UDL calls for familiarity with different media types for communication (i.e. video, audio), in addition to open, accessible, repeatable materials like modules, videos, and transcripts (CAST, 2024). In mapping out the production process for a podcast, we identified opportunities to develop EdTech proficiencies in service of these UDL elements.

## Professional Learning Plan Journey

Producing a podcast requires the use of specialist audio-recording equipment, editing software, and visual design software. All these tools feature prominently in multimodal instruction, such as online classes and asynchronous learning modules. While we were familiar with the pre-installed audio equipment on our computers, the industry-grade podcast recording studio made accessible by the Idea Lab provides us with the opportunity to record clear, high-quality audio to better comply with UDL guidelines. Moreover, the podcast recording studio setup engenders collaboration with its multi-microphone configuration. Our collaboration on the Professional Learning Plan reflects a broader collaborative spirit at the library, so having access to this space and the know-how to operate it goes beyond the scope of TEP. For instance, the skills and knowledge gained from this project were later leveraged in the development of updated citation learning modules for University of Guelph-Humber students.

Furthermore, the podcast form by its very form is a dialectic approach—participants share their unique viewpoints, learnings, and experiences in a manner that is not meant to overpower other perspectives or assert singular truths, but

rather to bring about mutual learning and understanding. Listeners for their part enjoy the combination of lived experience and informed viewpoints that make podcasts in equal parts relatable and elucidating (Harter, 2019). Learning through lived experience necessitates an inclusiveness of different peoples and invites diversity as a strength. “The Medium is the Message” goes Marshall McLuhan’s most famous quote (McLuhan, 2001), and indeed our choice of this medium with respect to its inherent qualities and dimensions was a natural fit for the ensuing discussion. Some of the most memorable insights and learning moments do not come necessarily from a lecture, conference keynote, or professional development workshop. Indeed, while all those modes of learning are valuable and valid, some of our most poignant insights come from everyday interactions—hallway conversations, small talk over lunch, and so on (Lave & Wenger, 1991). We all have something valuable to bring to the table with our unique experiences and cultivated viewpoints, even if we do not have a platform to share such insights and their associated learnings. The Universal Design for Learning approach calls for multiple means of representation, to build knowledge via multiple ways of knowing and representing a diversity of viewpoints (CAST, 2024), and this is just as important for teachers as it is for students. Though we mapped out our talking points and topics beforehand, the discussions within the episode were spontaneous. In other words, as podcast participants we exhibited our vulnerable selves and in doing so, opened ourselves to learning from the other. By engaging with the podcast format as creators, we came to further appreciate their value as a tool for education and professional development.

The discussions that were had in the podcast episode prompted us as educators to consider how we can leverage UDL to create inclusive learning environments. Our first episode of *BiblioJabbers* titled “A Crisis of Context” (<https://bibliojabbers.podbean.com/e/bibliojabbers-episode-1-a-crisis-of-context/>) explores the applicability of Vygotsky’s theory to Academic Libraries, and how contextually appropriate learning environments necessitate an application of EDIB. One discussion centered on cultivating a sense of belonging in the classroom as an opportunity to promote information-curious behaviour that would invite students to the library space and to use Librarian-provided services (such as research appointments, where students receive greater, individualized support for their research). In sharing our experiences, we agreed that that a greater sense of

connectedness to lecture material encourages learners to seek the library as a key support and to see Librarians as guides in the information literacy journey. One way this can be accomplished is by using examples in class when modelling research strategies that reflect the diversity of learners. As a result, we are now more intentional about applying the UDL approach by authentically representing a diversity of perspectives and identities, helping to build stronger connections between learners and the library.

## Reflections & Impact

In reflecting on the PLP experience, there are a few takeaways that we think would be of interest to education professionals. Firstly, new spaces and channels for professional development can be a powerful tool for EDIB. For us that was a podcast, but different types of educators might benefit from different modes of information sharing. If nothing else, this experiment highlighted the unique qualities of a dialectical, non-hierarchical approach to building towards mastery in our pedagogy. Moreover, we deepened our appreciation for the podcast format as a learning tool. The levelling of hierarchies and invitation towards vulnerability makes podcasts simultaneously relatable and informative, and there might be applications for this format both as assignment and as course material. Lastly, our learning experience in the Idea Lab, scaffolded by fellow Library Team members, allowed us to move through our own Zone of Proximal Development under the guidance of more knowledgeable others. We thereby increased our EdTech proficiencies. The Idea Lab has a plethora of tools—audio and video recording studios, digital literacy tools, fabrication devices—which many faculty could incorporate into their pedagogical practice and/or learning journeys without any pre-existing technical background whatsoever.

## Conclusion

The Universal Design for Learning approach provides Librarians with a valuable framework for creating the social context necessary for EDIB. By engaging with the podcast format, we developed EdTech skills and dialectically reached useful conclusions about connecting learners to the library. While this project was ultimately experimental with no promise of perpetuation, we generated outcomes that continue to pay dividends in our professional practice.

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