LARA RAFFERTY: Thank you all for coming to this session. I'm delighted to introduce Dr Samantha Poulos who is going to speak to us about using student voice to measure success and impact. We've got about 15 minutes of presentation and then about five of Q&A, so join me in welcoming Samantha.

SAMANTHA POULOS: Thank you. Hi everyone. My name is Samantha. You can call me Sam. Visual representation; I'm wearing a caramel coloured shirt. I'm a sort of tallish female presenting person. I do use they/them pronouns. I have a lot of brown regrowth on my pink hair. So I can't quite accurately describe what my hair looks like, other than a mess that's tied back. And today I will be talking about using the student voice to measure success and impact of UDL and it's just going to be a very informal, very casual talk and a snapshot of some of the ongoing projects that we've got at the University of Sydney. How do I go to the next slide? There we go. Okay.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which RMIT stands. And I would also specifically like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the land on which the University of Sydney is built. It's the Gadigal of the Eora Nation. It is on their lands that this work was conducted and I pay respect to elders’ past, present and any First Nations people in attendance or on Zoom. I can see you all from there.

As we share our knowledge, teaching, learning and research practices within this space, may we also pay respect to the knowledge embedded forever in Aboriginal custodianship of country. And as we think about this idea of including student voice, we have to think about what that means; who these students are; how are we inviting their voices? Are we making sure there is space for voices to be heard? And then once these voices are heard, what are we actually doing with that information? So we'll go to the next slide. Oh gosh. I actually don't know how I'm supposed to go to the next slide. Is it the clicker? Okay. Great.

So what does measuring UDL look like? Okay, I can see I'm not really in the camera focus either. The UDL Reporting Criteria (the UDL RC) was created in 2017, and it's a way of it was created as like a checklist of things that we can use to measure UDL implementation success. I had a bit of an issue while applying this sort of reporting criteria to tertiary education, specifically because teaching and learning at the university level, or at least at Sydney University, is forever changing. And what I mean by that is that we don't get to work with our academics for a very long time. Units change coordinators, there's 13 weeks in a semester, sometimes we get to talk to them for the two weeks before and then after that they kind of disappear. Units are transferred to different coordinators depending on semesters. Sometimes we'll work with a coordinator in semester 1 and then we won't see them again for six months until semester 1 the next year. So it makes it difficult to track what success looks like, what did the UDL implementation what was actually effective and what wasn't.

So we also encounter this question of measuring success is am I measuring the success of UDL being implemented in the courses at the university? For example, are we measuring the use of UDL language of the unit coordinators? Are we measuring the success being that they're offering opportunities and options for students? Is it that they are having alternative assessments? Or are we trying to measure if and by how much UDL implementation has helped accomplish the University of Sydney's 2023 Strategic Goals and bridging achievement gaps?

So this is asking instead what's the success of our ongoing project? And when I say, "our project", I'm talking of the work that myself, Ella Collins White you've definitely seen Sarah Humphries running around Kria, Kimberley is also here what we do in educational innovation. Are we trying to measure the success of our project? And what that means is a changing mindset and improvement on teaching and learning at the university. Good news is I don't have an answer, so I'm not going to have an answer to which question am I asking either so there's going to be a lot of questions happening in this talk.

So as previously thought of and I've got a quote to support this there's no consensus in the UDL community about what exactly UDL is and what it looks like in application, which is just great when you're trying to measure success on any front. So what we've decided to do is measure success in our own ways and measure them in specific to each unit of practice that we're working with. So what I'm thinking here is how are we measuring the success of the UDL in each unit rather than the success of our practice overall.

And what this looks like is having a clear indication of changes already implemented in courses with a clear statement of learning design and measuring the impact and success of these changes.

So what this means is we get to go in and work with units. We go, we talk to the academics, we talk them through what we call the designing for diversity process, so questioning who are your learners, what is your context, what are the barriers that they're facing, what solutions can we implement, and how can we iterate and evaluate?

So on projects that we've already worked with, we then try and include a statement of learning design on our Canvas home pages saying this is what active design elements have gone into this course to improve teaching and learning. So we're making it very clear to the students here is what we've done. You know, we're not keeping secrets from the students. We're making things quite explicit. And then what we can do is measure against these changes. Rather than saying, "Were there any changes made?" We can say, "Yes, we've made changes." Can we measure to that? And that's a way to find measures of success.

Here is another quote for you all from the UDL Reporting Criteria, is that UDL provides guidelines for addressing learner variability and designing learning environments that are supportive for all learners, which we all know. So what we do is set measures of success by inviting student voice. So it's not enough for us to assume what will be successful. We actually have to ask the students what worked? What did you like? What didn't you like? We told you in the statement of learning design that we've included PowerPoint slides to be available so that you can, you know, read the material before you come into class. Was that effective? Did you find that useful to your learning? Rather than us making assumptions about what students need and want, we actually need to be asking them, "Did this help? Was this useful?" Let me just check my notes.

Here's a couple of projects that we've worked on. One of the case studies I've been dealing with this semester is two first year economics units. Context and who are our learners, they're two first year economics units, extremely large cohorts. The students are feeling very overwhelmed, there's a lot of new information. Economics has a lot of jargon that they're dealing with, but in particular I'm working with the unit coordinators. And the barriers that we found with the unit coordinators is that they already felt that they were at capacity. So one unit coordinator actually said to us, you know, "I don't know what more I can be doing." So this is what we're coming up against. Another unit coordinator when we said, "What are the barriers your students are facing? What changes can we be making?", said, "I don't know. I can't think of any changes that I could possibly be doing. What barriers are there in the environment?"

There was actually a little bit of misplaced identifying of barriers saying that the barrier was the students, actually. "I've done everything I can; the students need to meet me halfway", which we know is not necessarily the most useful or helpful way to think about these things. So when we're approaching a project like this, obviously we don't know where to start. So let's start with the basics. So for one of these units, which is where the unit coordinator felt like the issues were his students, we said, "Well, what actually is the problem here?" He said, "I get too many emails. All the information that the students need is on the Canvas site and they keep emailing me about it." We said, "Okay. What if we put a FAQ, a frequently asked questions page on the home page? What if we synthesize all the information you already had, but put it on the home page." We're not actually thinking about big changes here. We're just saying can we just do this one thing in your unit? We don't have to touch more. You don't have to think about this. We'll put it on there and then we'll ask students about it. That was the intervention that we made.

Then we also, for the next unit so we ran surveys in both of them they're sister units, 101 and 102. For the other unit where the coordinator felt he was doing all he could, he was sending weekly emails to students of wrap ups of "this is what you're you learnt, this is what you're going to prepare for next week", and he was like, "I'm doing everything I can." "Okay, well, why don't we ask the students do they like those emails? You're seeing click through rates, but what does that mean? You're seeing students sometimes open them, sometimes not open them. Rather than us making any more changes because you're already doing what I think is quite good practice, setting up these expectations of next week we're eliminating threats and distractions, we're saying here is what you've learnt setting up goals for next week, you're already doing great practice. What if we ask the students is it effective, is it working?"

We ran a survey it was an anonymous survey open for a week to both cohorts of students. When they entered the survey, they were entered into a lucky draw to win one of ten $50 vouchers. That's twenty $50 vouchers across the two units. And despite all of that, we still had incredibly low numbers of submissions. The units had over 500 students and we only got about 60 surveys per unit. So it's incredibly low, but what it gave us was targeted feedback. So in the one where we put the FAQ, we directly asked, "Did you like this change on the home page? What other Canvas sites do you like?" Because we have access to look at all the Canvas sites across the university. We're like oh, five minutes. Gosh, I've talked a lot more than I thought I would.

All of this to say, quickly wrapping up there, is asking students directly about the changes we've made gave us ideas of what to do next time. These unit coordinators are actually not teaching this unit again. Classic economics, they change coordinators every semester. So any changes we want to make to the unit we have to actually ask the students because we're going to have the same students, effectively, next semester. So what we're going to do next is use these to create markers of success for our next iteration. So we're going to say we made these changes based on what the students came before you said.

Another case study we've been working with is a large first year pharmacy unit. They've already undergone the designing for diversity process, so they're a little bit later stage. So they've got the statement of learning design. They've already made changes. We've talked about UDL ad nauseam with their coordinators. And what we decided to do here was run focus groups with the students and we paid them, again $50, to come and give us direct feedback on the Canvas site, and their feelings of belonging. This is a key goal of this iteration of this unit and a key goal of the University of Sydney's strategic plan is to create feelings of inclusion and belonging at the university.

So we asked them directly. And it was a great way to get students to bounce off each other, to tell us, because we're not associated with pharmacy, we work university wide so they were able to be quite frank with us. And it was a great way to measure the success of the project that we'd done and then also find out did the changes make impact? So one of them was, "We introduced an activity about belonging. Did you like it?" Students were like, "Oh, I felt like I belonged, but actually I didn't notice that that was an activity", because we named it, we were like, "Did you enjoy the welcome to Sydney?" They were like, "What was that?" We were like, oh, okay, so it was effective but it wasn't effective in the way we thought it would be.

It also gave us barriers to consider in future interventions. Students were like, "The class was really interactive but when I watched the recordings there were no headings, I couldn't see the slides, the unit coordinator didn't speak into the microphone." Those aren't things we would have noticed beforehand and that's not an issue that the unit coordinator could come up with. So this is a way for us to come up with barriers to consider in future interventions and come up with more successful projects by asking students what will actually benefit you?

Lastly, what I wanted to say and this is speaking to the success of UDL implementation across the University of Sydney, so success of, perhaps, our project is that the unit coordinators being open to student voices in itself is a success. These surveys and focus groups, a direct invocation of student voice, shows a commitment from the academic staff to putting students first. It's a measurable impact of UDL implementation. It's a way to say, "Well, rather than you having to be the sage on the stage and the sage coming up with the successful breaking down of barriers, we can co create our learning environment." It's actively encouraging that UDL co creation.

Another quote for you all: "Thinking of comprehensive use of UDL includes a consideration of design and learning environments for all, an essential aspect that distinguishes UDL from incidental use of varied supports for learners."

So rather than these teachers just incidentally doing good practice or incidentally applying, you know, the academic plans for some students, what we're trying to do is show this intentionality by having these conversations and having these unit coordinators be open to conversations and to being challenged by their students. And actually hearing from them, we're seeing the sort of success in the UDL implementation. So being an intentional change in consideration of student needs, not incidental and not just an accidental good teaching.

So as I started out, I said I wouldn't have any clear answers, and, as I've said, I actually don't. What I've got is just some examples. So we've got some examples of what it is to measure success in the projects that we're working on, in the units, and what it is to try and measure the success of our long-term goal of designing for diversity, of implementing UDL at the university.

the conclusion, therefore, is that it's an evolving process. It's never ending. It's always a project that we're going to be thinking about and trying to evaluate. And that evaluation can't come from us. We can't just sit down and say, "Well, it looked like a success, it was a success." We have to think about who are we asking, what voices are we including, and then how can we use those voices to find points to change in the future and then measure against. So these are the citations that I used. It's the reporting criteria and the validation of the reporting criteria. If you have any further questions about the projects or anything I've talked about, this is my email address. That's it for me. So any questions?

LARA: Gorgeous Samantha, right on time. We love it so now we have questions. Jessie from my team is bounding up the stairs to hand a mic over.

>>: Hi. Thank you for that. That was really exciting to hear. I'm a learning designer at Monash College and last year we did a similar, maybe smaller scale thing where we had an action research project where we asked yeah, we took a few units that we'd kind of intentionally integrated UDL principles into and then we asked students if it had landed, basically.

But to do that and it was really great. We did an adapter user testing process, which was great, and it gave us really rich data, but our question now is, I guess you know, that was very intensive in terms of our time and students' time. So I'm curious if you have any insights about how to make just that process of getting the student feedback more sustainable? And then maybe in addition to that, how and if it kind of links into because we have the student evaluations at the end of each unit, but that is currently kind of separate, I guess, from getting feedback about the design and the UDL parts.

SAMANTHA: Again, unfortunately I don't have answers on how to make it more sustainable. We're very fortunate in the project that we are working on falls under the University of Sydney's Strategic Goals. So there's currently a little bit of funding in there for us to actually, you know, have these labour intensive conversations, to pay our students. And this is it, even though we offer them $50 to talk to us, they didn't do it. So thinking about, you know, it's obviously there are barriers even to doing that. So I don't have a more sustainable way, I'm just very thankful that I have the opportunity and the time to commit to doing this work. And I wish eventually we do all have a more sustainable and easy way.

And also the fact that, yeah, you're right, it doesn't align to the end of semester feedback forms because this information comes to us, the educational innovation team. It does not go back to the unit coordinators. We act as conduit for it. We get the student feedback, we write up reports and then we talk to the unit coordinators about the project. So there is a bit of a mismatch in that. Again, it is only through the thankful benefit of us having this time in this project to be able to do this work, but it's not synthesized yet and this is like the first time we've actually started thinking about, well, what is the end goal, what is the success, how are we evaluating what we're doing. Another question here?

>>: Thank you. I've been doing some research on students and students studying who have poor mental health, mental illness, depending on how you frame that. One of the ways that's worked I mean, I've got a whole bunch of ideas and strategies for that, but because that's a difficult group to ask, and get through ethics and all the rest of it rightfully so but one of the things I found would get responses if you disclose. I mean, I can do that. Not everyone can or wants to. And so when I was asking them about that, and even in my subjects, I flag "I'm neurodivergent, I've had poor mental health from time to time. This is how I've designed the subject with that in mind", blah, blah. And I get emails before I ask them anything because they're grateful that someone has opened that conversation and care enough to ask how you can help them in a non-judgmental way.

Now, that doesn't help the whole another subject coordinator comes along and all the rest of it, but that openness and disclosure in a way that feels safe for you has enormous impact because suddenly you're safe or safer at least, and you're asking from an empathetic perspective, not a you need to tell us all your all that kind of stuff. So for what that's worth, that can help, and I'm not sure what how the students respond to that.

SAMANTHA: I have personal experience of this. I was a I casual tutored in the English department and FAS generally for a few years before I moved into this role, where thankfully I don't have to come up with teaching plans anymore, and I do feel like being vulnerable to students in a way that you're comfortable with you shouldn't be disclosing any information that you as a professional are not interested in disclosing, but that does help students feel welcomed and be able to communicate with you.

And one of the Welcome to Sydney activity that I mentioned earlier, the activity itself actually invites the teachers to talk about their journey to the university. And what that means is rather than just being like, "Oh, I did my PhD and now I'm a smart academic", it's "I failed my first-year philosophy unit and now I'm here." I always tell my students "I actually got told not to continue English studies at HSC level because I was so bad at poetry and now I teach Intro to Poetry at the University of Sydney, this could be you." So actually having those activities where we try and foster that feeling of belonging at the start lets students be more open. It was those students, actually, that we heard more from because they felt more open and responsive. Some of the students in the focus group were saying to us they were like, "I don't want to name names." One of them had quite a not great experience in one of the lectures and they were like, "Oh, one of the lecturers", and then in the group everyone is like, "Oh, that teacher, yeah, okay." I was like clearly you all know something that you're not telling your teachers. Thankfully, because we're in education innovation we're not part of their faculty, so we're like, "You can tell us stuff. You can tell us secrets and we won't tell them." So from that we found out a teacher was using a laser pointer and pointing at students, which is just slack, but like those are things students wouldn't tell their teachers, but that's something they would tell us because we came in and we said, "We're here exclusively to hear from you because we know we could be doing better and because we know there are things that you talk about with your friends that you do not tell your teachers and that is the stuff that we need to find more of and give space to hear from."

And I think starting out that feeling of belonging and that when we think about valuing student voice as well is showing a commitment to you telling me this information will be used. You're not just going to tell me this happened. I'm going to say, okay, next time we will make sure this doesn't happen, or that this happens differently and we'll see how that changes. Are we running out of question time? I talked too long. Please feel free to find me in the lobby. Anyone online if you want to hear more about me, email me, find me on LinkedIn, I'm apparent on that now as well. Otherwise, thank you all for your time.

LARA: Thanks so much, Sam. What a great thing to finish on, that sense of genuine inclusion and belonging and really valuing and affirming the diversity of our students. So thank you so much.