JUSTIN WYLIE: I'd like to welcome soon to be Doctor, Susannah French from ANU. And her topic, which resonates for me and certainly for a lot of other people, I'm sure, Navigating Inclusivity on a Shoestring: Casual Convenorship and UDL Implementation. So welcome, Susannah.

SUSANNAH FRENCH: Welcome, everyone. It's great to be here. I'm glad the Ritalin has kicked in so I can still pay attention and still have the energy. And I really appreciate ADCET for reserving the sensory room, so I wasn't a bundle of nerves and nonsense before doing this. Thank you all for coming. I know it's a bit of a slog trying to do this at 3 in the afternoon when you want to have a nap. Honestly, same.

So, first acknowledgment of country. So I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. So the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

I would also like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, the traditional custodians of the land on which I serve and live and work in Canberra, and I pay my respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, and also extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present today.

So as you can kind of guess from the title, so we kind of so a lot of us have probably worked in a casual capacity as well. You can probably relate to it, so I don't mean to upset and trigger everyone, but as we are aware, like we're all aware of those dual pressures of the administrative bureaucracy and that imperative to improve high quality inclusive education. And it's for a lot of diverse student cohorts and a lot of intersecting, you know, issues that don't necessarily work well. So you can't exactly cater to everyone.

So I look into the complexity. I didn't even know what a UDL was when I started teaching in 2014, but I always tried to make sure, like, okay, what would I have liked as a student? And just taking on the feedback as I go. There are also a lot of difficulties in trying to implement that. So when we think about UDL's inclusive strategy, so the multiple means of engagement, representation inaction, so those the rigid framework, administrative bureaucracy.

So it's just this very precarious balance we're trying to strike between fulfilling those institutional expectations and meeting the students' needs. So today I'll discuss more broadly the context of casual work. I would like to move the slide. A lot of this is based on some of the feelings I have had, some of the things I've tried to do. I will get into some of the activities I was able to implement, but also, just to be clear, not all of them are going to be best practice, but this is what we had at the time as well.

So just a bit about me. So I recently submitted my PhD in sociology. It was about the female experience of autism. So only slightly autobiographical. And I actually got diagnosed while I was doing it, while I was doing the thesis. So I have a whole chapter about my diagnostic experience as a sociologist and as a patient, and also feeling like I can go toe to toe with another academic person. So that was really interesting, and it's also my privilege that a lot of people can't exactly do or question it, or even think they can question it.

So I've been previously employed as a sessional lecturer and tutor. So I started tutoring in 2014. Started actually lecturing in 2018, and I stopped all that in 2022. And I'm now working as a Project Support Officer with the Inclusive Communities Team with the University Experience Division at ANU. So pretty much my motivation for getting that job was, oh, cool, I can earn a lot more money and work only half as hard and, yeah, why the hell not? Yeah. But then people keep asking, "Oh, Susannah, you're so good. Are you going to go back to teaching?" I'm like, "No, there's no incentive. You are happy to give me teaching awards but you don't want to give me a permanent job. You know, this is your own damn fault and you lost a really good lecturer as a result."

So that's the kind of argument we can make. It's like you lose good staff if you don't look after them. So I was 30 years old. That's way too old to find out that I actually have a particular neurotype, and I paid 4 grand for the privilege. I also have many things to say about being a neurodivergent casual, but I won't go into that right now. We can discuss that over questions or something.

Also, there's always one person in the room and I'm sorry this looks like it was made for ants I really was trying to make sure, but I will talk through it. There's always one person in the room and I would like to stop this right now, "Oh, but the casual loading is meant to cover sick leave", as if that was the best insight they could ever come up with, and it's absolutely unhelpful.

So honestly, you know, "we would like you to be quiet", and that is the most sanitised way I could think about it. The reason why we want you to, rather than getting aggressive, is because you've got to think about what the reality is for most people on a casual basis. So they're more likely to be renters. They're more likely to be working multiple jobs as well just to make one pathetic full-time job.

There was one Semester 2, 2018, I worked four different casual jobs at the same time. That is absolutely disgusting that I was doing it. Luckily I enjoyed the work I was doing because one of them happened to be a really cool advocacy role but, anyway, it was just way too much. Also, you can't exactly afford to take time off work. You've really got to budget it. So this would end up you know, you end up with the result that a lot of people would rather come to work sick than risk no job at all.

Things have changed with COVID, I guess, but not all institutions are implementing that casuals can get sick leave. Of course, we all know tertiary education have become increasingly reliant on casual and fixed term contracts. So making full time work a very rare and valuable asset. I had my privilege to be able to get through to that interview and actually get the current job that I did. Now I'm just trying to broaden my things now that the PhD is submitted.

Also, even if you do have a PhD qualification, it's still that feeling, not everyone may feel that way, and good for you if that's so, but you're still treated as a lower status compared to tenured and permanent staff. Often they're not the best people who understand how to run a damn class anyway. If there's a conflict between the two experts, the casuals are probably going to be worried about risk of job loss despite their knowledge and qualifications.

And then being on that perpetual casual basis, it makes it hard for me to put the brakes you know, it puts a lot of brakes on with life planning and all that. Like, if I wanted to have a baby, I don't get maternity leave. I don't get money over the Christmas break. I can't even you know, getting a mortgage or a rental place can also be challenging as well. Of course, not being invited to staff meetings and facing financial pressures when you don't get paid over that period as well.

So all of these things, they actually do cause negative psychosocial health consequences, and if you're working on your mental health strategies at your institutions, you really need to be paying attention to this. Yeah, even despite being so stretched thin, there is still an expectation because ANU likes to say they are the number 1 although we're number 4, whatever. There's still that expectation to provide a premium education to your students so they can be the thought leaders that we can put on their posters.

So we also really need to think about what jobs actually should be casualised and if you're actually going to create good career development for new students or are you just going to, you know, shove that work to an already overworked academic as well.

So they've got a few mismatched expectations with the UDL and casual convenorships. UDL is supposed to be the gold standard in higher education but there does seem to be a bit of an oversight in UDL training. You know, whether intentionally or not, at least that's my reflections of it, is that there seems to be an assumption that those who can implement these inclusive practices have the time and resources. Judging from the presentations I've heard today, we are all very aware how time poor we are.

While this challenge, of course, affects all academics, we have to think about how institutions are tenured. Staff have to set the standard but, to be honest, you know, it's the casuals who end up actually doing a lot of the innovative work for their tutors. So there's been times like off hours that I'd be trying to get my head around how am I going to make this really complicated theory accessible to a bunch of 18 and 19 year olds who don't even know what a Karl Marx is. And you're assuming that they did their readings and that they came to the lectures as well.

The other thing is, of course, there's the precarious conditions and that lack of time as well. Also we're only paid at least at ANU only paid two hours of preparation per week. When you consider the time required to design a course, that's if you're not actually taking on somebody else's work, and research the topic, especially if it's an unfamiliar subdiscipline like, you sort of know it, but you don't know enough, so you still spend a lot of hours researching it and organising the tutorials. Obviously, the preparation time is insufficient, and hopefully to most of you in the room this isn't new to you.

So you can see there's a significant amount of time consumed by the standard basic preparation tasks leaving little room to meet those sort of demands for inclusivity. When you think about other things that are done assessment moderation meetings, that takes up time; student meetings, often one on one we are almost on call. Academic integrity meetings where you get people trying to be smart. "But I wrote directly on my laptop this time. I usually handwrite it." "Oh, okay, that's a nice fairytale you gave me." You still have to be very nice about it and be like, "Well, if I got caught out, I'd lose my PhD. We've all got to set a standard at some point."

The other thing that's really shitting me and should shit everybody else is that university administrations often take advantage of the fact that many casual academics genuinely want to do well. We want our students to like us. We aim for good evaluations. Then many of us also then become trapped in that cycle of casualisation, and we try to go above and beyond to stay up to date and engage with, you know, how can we best get students to engage with complex course content.

But the reality is we don't earn enough to justify all this extra work and we're often doing it all by ourselves. Many of us are working, again, like I said earlier, additional jobs to supplement that income from casual teaching. You know, also you think about if you're a PhD you've also got to think about your thesis and milestones as well. So, yeah, ultimately what I would say that it is incredibly unfair and unreasonable to rely solely on the initiative and goodwill of individual conveners to provide students with a premium and inclusive education, and there needs to be institutional support, like actual proper institutional support which is not just fucking around with your terms of references to actually do it.

So, yeah. But there are some sustainable ways that I've managed to do it. Of course, just a caveat with the lockdowns, you know, so students, you know, particularly those who have had chronic conditions or disabilities, or just generally have a lot going on like, they might not even tell me but it was like they'd love to have hybrid classes because some of them are working, too. Youth allowance doesn't pay anywhere near enough. So having those hybrid classes would have been great. But it's like, "Well, these rooms are not fit for purpose to do this properly. I could either do online or I could do in person, but there was no way I could do both." It's like you could hear me fine, you know, on the microphone, but if you want to hear the discussion, you're not going to be able to hear anything, and those discussions need to flow. Rather than thinking, "No, I've now got to get up on the podium so someone on the other end can listen to me as well."

So the physical space is just really inadequate a lot of the time and it's taking a while. So these are just case studies of best practice of inclusive tutorial activity design that I've done. Unfortunately, I am not going to get into assessments because there's just not enough time and I'm already worried we'll go over time anyway.

I just want to be very clear I'm not expecting you to understand these theories. Even now, I'm trying to dilute the theory as much as I can so I'm not alienating my audience. But the point is to see how these UDL principles, even when you've got literally no money or resources to do it, can make complex theory a bit more accessible to first year sociology students. So I'm really sorry, I didn't expect it to be so blurry. What we did was we modelled Durkheim. So he's kind of considered the father of sociology with his functionalist theory and he's got two different kinds of solidarity he talks about. I have the cats to give you an idea, pretty much, with these sort of solidarity.

So all you really need to know about mechanical solidarity, its usually traditional, pre-modern societies, and it's characterised by homogeneity and shared values. And that uniformity, so people perform similar roles. You could probably think of a few examples of that. Then there's a very strong collective consciousness. So deviations are very harshly punished. Whereas, with the organic solidarity, the modern society, they're usually more modern and it's marked by that specialisation and interdependence. So it's not just if you were born in a family of bakers, that is all you will be. It's like, "Oh, I could be a surgeon, even though my dad's a baker."

Five more minutes already. Let's just get on with it. This is kind of what we did. So I got one lot to make a bug. Another lot with follow the instructions. This is kind of what we did. This one, the little one, was the one that was organic. The other one that was mechanical as well. We discussed a bit about the feedback as well. Some, of course, they responded to it being very stressful, but it was good to gauge these reactions as well. The slides will be up too.

So some really didn't like following instructions. It was way too stringent. Some people would do their own thing. We had room to discuss this as well. The slides are up there.

We also had the Goffman Spy Game, so getting people to understand all about Goffman, and just how people put on a bit of a front or how they perform. So a really tangible thing would be to do the spy game. There were just a few other post-game reflections as well. Just getting them to think about how do they manage themselves as well, rather than just reading a bunch of texts that were probably translated 50 years ago. It just actually made it a bit more meaningful to students.

Of course, the Koori IQ test, understanding that how in something like intelligence, taken for granted it's something you either have or you don't, actually understanding the cultural and social construction of it, especially with the Koori IQ test as well. So something that was cute where it was like most students knew who Deborah Mailman was if they watched Play School, or they knew The Secret Life of Us, and that she wasn't a postal worker. But if you didn't come from this country, you are not going to know who Deborah Mailman is.

So most students scored very low, and we discussed that arbitrary nature of intelligence and how that feeds into the social construction of racism. So these are some honourable mentions as well. We can talk a bit about that later.

As you can see, for the multiple means of engagement, diverse reactions, it showed that need for multiple engagement strategies is structured guidelines, all of that. With Goffman there was a lot more autonomy in choosing deception and it also increased engagement. Koori, we also discussed how culturally relevant content, so we don't just take for granted the same things all the time.

With the representation, again, we tried to accommodate different learning styles, trying to accommodate diverse knowledge as well, too. And multiple means of action and expression. So there was a bit of freedom and flexibility in how tasks were approached, because I wanted to know their feelings of it. Then distilling those feelings and applying it to theory directly. So then they understood what on earth they're actually reading.

I've got a great video but we don't have a lot of time, but it's literally RuPaul; "you don't need to reinvent the wheel, the wheel's fine." Pretty much like, look, when you don't have a lot of time and you've already got a lot of good content, it is important to take on the resources, but I do understand but this is what got me through. So it was kind of like, "Okay. We have our own informal communities of practice about what is actually good practice." Actually discussing this informally. We all do this all ourselves. And it saved a lot of mental load but it seemed the institution is still relying on mostly PhD students to do this as well.

And just let's think about why it is unacceptable to keep this work casual. So you can't really justify this idea that you want premium and accessible teaching, especially if you want to be a standard bearer of equity and inclusion, but if your staff is so under-resourced and under-supported and honestly, if I was paid for the whole year, I would be at level B academic. That's a lot of money. That's a huge difference. So I'd see my tax well, the income I got taxed on, and it was 50 grand for all the work I was doing and how much I was doing for free. A level B academic is over 100k, so we really need to think about that.

Please do not just cut out the casual staff and just dump it on to other people, but ANU have at least done something right. They've approved their new enterprise agreement that casual staff are now entitled to sick leave, annual leave and long service leave. Unfortunately, they can't do it in retrospect for the long service leave. So after all those years of casual teaching, no, don't see it.

And very rarely does casual conversion happen. I really would recommend that you look through my slides, if you ever do, but I also have the recommended resources as well so you know at least where I got my information and built on that.

This is all the list of people that I would like to thank, whether they were mentors or teaching comrades. We had a lot to discuss as well. Yeah, I think that's it. Are there any questions? I'm happy to go further on some of these, and I'm sorry for the foul mouth, but it's been a day so, yeah.

JUSTIN: Susannah, we won't have time for questions because we have the panel session going on now. But can I just say, a big thank you for your presentation. At CQU a casual academic is going to get a lot more support from me because I know the difference, as a learning designer, in terms of workload. So, thank you for sharing your perspective and your experiences about that.