

## Pay Attention to the Man Behind the Curtain: The Potential of The Wizard & Emerald City! The NCCD, Adjustments, UDL oh my...

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Recently, I re-watched the beloved movie “Wizard of Oz”. It had been years, maybe decades, since watching it the first time. I couldn’t help find myself pondering the character of the ‘wizard’ and my feelings towards him as a loveable, yet ‘phoney’ man. As I all too often do, I started finding analogies relating my deep thoughts about the Wizard of Oz to special education (I know, I know, ... I need to get a life!)

During reflection of this classic, it became apparent to me that the Wizard was genuinely a ‘good man, gone bad’, swept up by the potential of what he thought he needed to do, versus what he should do, and then what he was willing to do (or not do)! I think the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) is a ‘good man’ and we need to make sure that ‘he’ doesn’t go bad! My question is what ‘should’ we do in collection of our data and implementation of ‘funding’ resources.

We are only two years since the inauguration of a new system, NCCD, to inform policy and future planning to better equip schools and education authorities to support student with disability. Time is of the essence in questioning what is working and what needs adjustment (or in many cases, development of professional development)!

Under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA,1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005), we know that all students with disability must be able to access and participate in education ‘on the same basis as their peers’. With this in mind, here are three points to consider:

1. The NCCD is designed to provide systems, schools and teachers with the data and funding needed to highlight the individual needs of each student with disability by focusing on the level of educational support to be provided to them at school.
2. Differentiation is a strategy aimed at addressing each student’s individual levels of readiness and interest, and learning profiles. The teacher modifies content and processes to address the needs of each student, directing students to specific activities to support their learning.
3. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a scientifically based framework for developing curricula that acknowledges learner diversity as a function of human variability, thus planning for it proactively. The teacher directs all students to participate in all activities through multiple means of representation, expression and engagement (CAST, 2019).

Research shows that when UDL strategies are in place, few specialised differentiation strategies are needed (Morningstar et al., 2015). When classrooms offer high-quality instruction combined with multiple modalities for accessing information and demonstrating knowledge, students are less likely to require individualised supports for learning - based on the idea that the more universal the classroom instruction is, the less likely a student needs ‘adjustments’ to be successful.

In a recent article focusing on the management of workloads for teachers based on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for Students with Disability (Independent Education, Issue 3, Vol. 49, 2019), ‘levels of adjustment’ and

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surrounding issues are discussed. My specific concerns about the implementation of NCCD and best practice are echoed, with specific mention of ‘Teachers in School A’ who start their lessons already employing greater levels of adjustment (I interpret as Universal Design through flexible design) than ‘Teachers in School B’. This article specifically addresses the issue that School A may not benefit from reporting the ‘adjustments’ they are already including in quality planning. While this may be true, concern lies within inadequate reflection, training and professional development in how to use NCCD data for planning for curriculum implementation (and conversely: how to plan for NCCD data collection) may negatively incentivise schools from utilising Universal Design for Learning.

As we, special education professionals, support a potentially positive funding program for all students with disability, we must advocate for procedures that will not only ‘tick boxes for funding’. We acknowledge that UDL supports ‘research to practice’ within the classroom. Therefore, more discussion on the connection between NCCD, adjustments and curriculum implementation is needed across university teacher preparation programs and school data collection and planning teams. With the risky assumption that ‘more disability’ equals ‘more adjustments’, we risk stifling national momentum to look past the ‘smoke and mirrors’ of the Wizard (i.e., data, funding, adjustments).



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## **References**

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