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Inclusive Didactic

# UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

UDL GUIDELINES FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE  
PEDAGOGY RESPONSIVE TO STUDENT DIVERSITY

A. Fiorucci, P. Auer, F. Bocci, B. De Angelis, S. Dell'Anna, E. Ghedin,  
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6

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[edited by]

# Universal Design for Learning in Higher Education

UDL Guidelines for Promoting Inclusive Pedagogy  
Responsive to Student Diversity





**Italiadomani**  
PIANO NAZIONALE  
DI RIPRESA E RESILIZENZA

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	13
<i>by Andrea Fiorucci, Petra Auer, Fabio Bocci, Elisabetta Ghedin, Annalisa Morganti</i>	
1. Purpose of the volume	13
2. A dual format, print and digital	14
3. Structure of the volume	15
4. Weaving Colours: A Visual Map of UDL in the Style of Kandinsky	17
5. A utopian workshop for an accessible and inclusive university	17

## Part I.

### Charting the Routes: The UDL Model as a Compass for an Inclusive University

<b>Universal Design for Learning as a driver of inclusive transformation in Higher Education: toward New Cultures of Difference</b>	23
<i>by Andrea Fiorucci</i>	
1. UDL in Higher education	23
2. The fragility of the average Student Model: from the norm to human variability in learning	24
3. UDL: Principles and Guidelines	28
3.1. The Principle of Engagement	30
3.2. The Principle of Representation	32
3.3. The Principle of Action and Expression	34
4. UDL as a Faculty Development approach	36

**Part II.**  
**UDL Guidelines for Accessible and Inclusive University Teaching**

<b>Designing Multiple Ways of Engagement</b>	<b>45</b>
by <i>Andrea Fiorucci, Stefania Pinnelli, Francesca Baccassino, Alessia Bevilacqua, Elena Abbate, Ludovica Rizzo</i>	
1. Designing Options to Embrace Interests and Identities	46
1.1. Optimize Individual Choice and Autonomy	46
1.2. Optimize Relevance, Value, and Authenticity	48
1.3. Nurture Joy and Play	50
1.4. Address Biases, Threats and Distractions	51
2. Designing Options to Sustain Effort & Persistence	53
2.1. Clarify the Meaning and Purpose of Learning Goals	54
2.2. Optimize Challenge and Support	55
2.3. Promote Collaboration, Interdependence and Cooperative Learning	57
2.4. Foster a Sense of Belonging and Learning Community	59
2.5. Provide Action-Oriented Feedback	60
3. Designing Options for Managing Emotions	62
3.1. Recognize Expectations, Beliefs and Motivations	62
3.2. Develop Self- and Other- Awareness	64
3.3. Promote Individual and Collective Reflection	65
3.4. Practice Empathy and Conflict Resolution through Error Analysis	67
<b>Designing Multiple Ways of Representation</b>	<b>69</b>
by <i>Fabio Bocci, Barbara De Angelis, Ines Guerini, Philipp Botes, Martina De Castro, Aurora Bulgarelli, Andreina Orlando, Barbara Centrone, Virginia Benedetti</i>	
1. Options for Perception	70
1.1. Provide Opportunities to Personalize the Presentation of Information	71
1.2. Support Multiple Ways of Perceiving Information	72
1.3. Represent a Diversity of Perspectives and Identities in Authentic Ways	74
2. Options for Language and Symbols	76
2.1. Clarify Vocabulary, Symbols, and Linguistic Structures	77
2.2. Support the Decoding of Texts, Mathematical Notation and Symbols	79
2.3. Foster Understanding and Respect among Different Languages and Dialects	80
2.4. Address Biases in the Use of Language and Symbols	82
2.5. Illustrate through Multiple Media	84
3. Options for Building Knowledge	85
3.1. Connect Prior Knowledge to New Learning	86

3.2. Identify and Explore Patterns, Essential Features, Big Ideas and Relationships	87
3.3. Experience Multiple Ways of Knowing and Creating Meaning	89
3.4. Maximize Transfer and Generalization	91
<b>Designing Multiple Ways of Action and Expression</b>	<b>95</b>
by <i>Elisabetta Ghedin, Annalisa Morganti, Moira Sannipoli, Francesco Marsili, Giulia Moretti, Federica Pasqual</i>	
1. Provide Options for Interaction	96
1.1. Vary and Respect Methods of Response, Navigation and Movement	96
1.2. Optimize Access to Accessible Materials, Technologies and Universal Tools	99
2. Provide Options for Expression and Communication	100
2.1. Use Multiple Media for Communication	100
2.2. Use Multiple Tools for Construction, Composition and Creativity	102
2.3. Develop Skills with Graduated Supports for Practice and Performance	103
2.4. Address Biases Related to Modes of Expression and Communication	105
3. Provide Options for Developing Strategies	107
3.1. Establish Meaningful Goals	107
3.2. Anticipate and Plan for Challenges	108
3.3. Organize Information and Resources	109
3.4. Strengthen the Ability to Monitor Progress	111
3.5. Challenge Exclusionary Practices	112
<b>Universal Design for Learning: annotated Glossary of terms for theoretical and operational orientation</b>	<b>121</b>
by <i>Andrea Fiorucci, Francesca Baccassino, Alessia Bevilacqua</i>	
<b>D.A.N.T.E.-U: A Web-Based Platform for University Faculty Training on UDL</b>	<b>141</b>
by <i>Andrea Fiorucci, Francesca Baccassino, Alessia Bevilacqua</i>	
1. The Formative and Generative Function of the Platform	141
2. The Faculty Development Perspective	142
3. Platform Architecture and Content	143

**Part III.**  
**Exploring the University Context: Tools to Assess Educational Needs  
and Teaching Innovation**

<b>Addressing Student Needs through UDL in University Teaching: Integrated Tools for Assessment and Self-Assessment</b>	<b>151</b>
by <i>Andrea Fiorucci, Stefania Pinnelli, Elena Abbate, Alessia Bevilacqua</i>	
1. Purpose of the Tools	151
2. Structure of the Questionnaires	152
 Appendix 1. University Students' Needs & UDL Approach Questionnaire – Faculty Version	 153
Appendix 2. University Students' Needs & UDL Approach Questionnaire – Student Version	 165
 <b>Fostering Reflection and Self-Assessment in University Faculty for Inclusive Teaching Innovation: The Index for Inclusion in University Teaching Questionnaire</b>	  <b>177</b>
by <i>Andrea Fiorucci e Alessia Bevilacqua</i>	
1. Rethinking Higher Education through the Index for Inclusion	177
2. Purpose, structure and dimensions of the Index for Inclusion in University Teaching Questionnaire	181
3. The <i>Index for Inclusion in University Teaching</i> Questionnaire	183

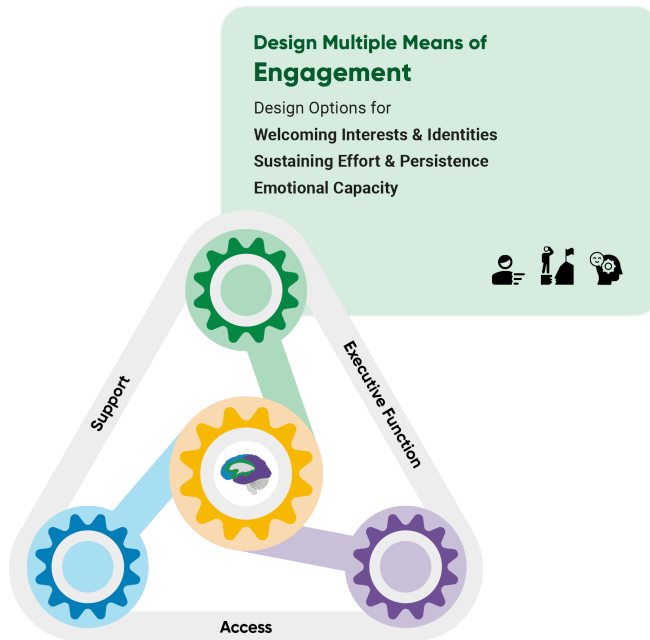
# Designing Multiple Ways of Engagement

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Designing diversified approaches to motivation and engagement means acknowledging that individual differences significantly influence how each person relates to learning. In the academic context, this principle highlights key aspects of the university experience, such as engagement, motivation, participation, and sense of belonging. These factors play a crucial role in shaping students' connection to

their educational pathway. Research in the field shows that students who are more engaged, motivated, and active are more likely to achieve academic success, with positive effects also on personal satisfaction, continuity of studies, and the reduction of dropout risk. Moreover, a strong sense of belonging and inclusion within the university environment supports students in maintaining focus and investing more consciously in their learning journey. This, in turn, strengthens their ability to cope with challenges, fosters the development of positive relationships with faculty and peers, and reinforces their bond with the academic institution.

## **1. Designing Options to Embrace Interests and Identities**

To foster engagement in the learning process, it is essential to recognize and value students' unique interests and identities, drawing on dimensions such as culture, gender, ethnicity, language, individual functioning, and contextual specificities. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge the wide variability in the factors that attract and engage students, as well as those that contribute to creating a learning environment that upholds each individual's dignity. This variability not only differs from student to student but may also evolve over time and across contexts. As students grow and acquire new knowledge and skills, their interests change, as does their relationship with the various dimensions of their identity. Experiences, environments, and developmental trajectories continuously shape how individuals relate to learning and to others. A learning environment that values these differences and safeguards the dignity of each student is essential to ensure active participation and equitable access to the learning process.

### **1.1 Optimize Individual Choice and Autonomy**

One possible strategy to enhance university students' motivation is to offer, in relation to the learning objectives explicitly stated in the course syllabus, a range of choice options. These may concern the personalization of content, tools, recognition methods, or the timing and management of activities. Such strategies, aligned with students' interests and preferences, enable them to take greater initiative in starting a task and, at the same time, to attribute more attention and significance to the outcomes achieved. In doing so, students are supported in developing autonomy within the learning process.

**Recommendations:**

- to provide a variety of assessment methods (e.g., written exams, interactive presentations, oral examinations) in order to address different learning styles and preferences;
- to make a wide range of study and in-depth materials available (scientific articles, presentations, audiovisual resources, graphic representations) to facilitate multimodal access to content;
- to promote collaborative learning experiences, allowing students—individually or in groups—to select topics from those addressed in the course;
- to ensure the accessibility of content and information presented, in accordance with the principles of inclusive design and current regulations;
- to allow for the definition of personalized deadlines for intermediate tasks and assessments, promoting flexibility and accountability in individual learning paths;
- to support student autonomy by encouraging the formulation of short-term, measurable, and verifiable learning goals;
- to offer optional in-depth modules or activities aligned with individual interests and preferences, in order to broaden and personalize the learning experience;
- to introduce flexible time management measures, provided they remain consistent with the achievement of final learning objectives;
- to encourage practices of self-monitoring and peer tutoring, fostering responsibility and co-construction of knowledge;
- to plan dedicated periods or sessions for consolidation and in-depth learning.

*Examples of activities:*

- Students choose the format in which to present/share their work (e.g., video, podcast, report, PowerPoint, etc.).
- Faculties offer students the opportunity to participate in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) as an optional and supplementary activity. University students may choose to join the project and personalize their academic experience. For example, they may attend lectures delivered by a professor from a foreign university, participate in international working groups with students from other countries, or eventually turn this online experience into an Erasmus outgoing mobility opportunity.
- The faculty member may propose activities with flexible deadlines, encouraging students to take responsibility for managing the submission of assigned tasks. For instance, a reflective assignment could be submitted within a three-week window, allowing each student to choose the most suitable submission date, as long as it does not exceed the final deadline.
- Faculties provide self-assessment rubrics that allow students to track their progress toward short-term goals, promoting self-directed learning.
- The teacher may propose a range of extracurricular activities such as webinars, hands-on workshops, or guest lectures to support students' diverse interests and allow for a more personalized academic pathway based on individual preferences and goals.
- Peer-to-peer help desks – A collaborative support system where experienced students (tutors) assist less experienced peers (participants), fostering learning, integration, and motivation. This activity enhances students' autonomy and self-awareness throughout their academic journey and contributes to building a sense of community and belonging; it also helps prevent confusion and dropout, especially among first-year and international students.
- The teacher may propose optional weekly activities, including: guided review sessions using selected materials (videos, articles, exercises); in-depth exploration of personally relevant topics related to the course; participation in online forums or study groups; creation of self-correcting quizzes or flashcards; and production of creative materials such as concept maps, infographics, or podcasts.

## 1.2 Optimize Relevance, Value and Authenticity

One of the main questions university students often ask themselves is: “*Am I really interested in what I’m studying? Will it be useful in the workplace and in everyday life?*” The perception of a gap between academic education, personal interests, and professional needs can impact motivation, engagement, and, in some cases, even academic success. For this reason, it is essential to rethink the role of the university not only as a space for theoretical learning, but as a meeting point between knowledge, work, and real life. It is important that the objectives and content defined by university members are authentic, relevant and meaningful.

### **Recommendations:**

- to integrate practical activities that simulate real and professionally relevant situations for students’ future careers, such as virtual internships, problem-

solving tasks based on authentic or plausible cases, and project-based learning pathways. These activities allow students to engage with concrete and interdisciplinary problems;

- to provide structured networking opportunities with companies, institutions, and organizations, aimed at fostering direct contact with the professional world;
- to use authentic and realistic assessment methods—such as portfolios, project work, or public presentations—that highlight applied and transversal skills;
- to organize classroom meetings with alumni who have completed their academic studies and pursued a professional career, enabling students to engage in dialogue and ask questions related to doubts, curiosities, and career development prospects;
- to value students’ real interests by involving them in the selection of study topics that are meaningful and relevant to their cultural, social, or personal contexts;
- to promote situated learning experiences aligned with the academic curriculum and capable of strengthening the connection between academic knowledge and real-world applications.

*Examples of activities:*

- Students are invited to engage in authentic research activities by exploring current, socially relevant issues. Each student collects first-hand accounts that reflect the concrete needs of real communities through interviews with residents, local activists, and industry workers.
- Students address a given topic starting from well-established scientific studies and evidence-based cases, enabling active participation, in-depth exploration, and experiential learning, while enhancing their analytical and reflective skills.
- The university faculty presents students with a series of problem-scenarios featuring critical situations they may encounter in their future professional lives. Students are encouraged to practice problem-solving by formulating concrete solutions to these challenges, drawing on both theoretical knowledge and practical skills acquired during the course.
- The university lecturer organizes situated learning sessions through the development of networks between the university and local institutions. A number of lessons may be held in specific settings such as libraries, museums, archives, correctional facilities, schools, and other relevant contexts.
- In student mentoring programs, each student is paired with an experienced professional mentor, who supports their academic and career orientation both in Italy and abroad. Monthly meetings are scheduled to discuss future prospects, doubts, and goals. The mentor helps students identify and enhance their strengths, prepare effective CVs, and navigate the transition to the job market, fostering self-awareness, personal growth, and professional development.

### 1.3 Nurture Joy and Play

In a university setting, fostering enjoyment and pleasure in learning not only positively impacts students' motivation but also supports the development of key transversal skills such as creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving. Creating learning environments that cultivate enjoyable experiences in various forms—such as interactive games, hands-on activities, storytelling moments, and opportunities for reflection—helps transform the university into a space where students not only acquire knowledge, but also find joy in discovering, exploring new ideas, testing their abilities, and building a sense of community.

#### **Recommendations:**

- to use gamification techniques (badges, virtual points, challenges, missions, team games), experiential workshops, simulations, educational escape rooms, and interactive storytelling to make learning more engaging;
- to foster a positive classroom climate by using respectful humor to reduce stress and enhance students' sense of belonging;
- to share student outcomes through structured reflection sessions, digital exhibitions, online repositories, and creative presentations to encourage sharing and build a sense of community;
- to create a positive feedback system: during lessons, students can receive real-time feedback through digital platforms or during group discussions;
- to use positive and encouraging language that emphasizes progress made and goals achieved;
- to organize celebration events to showcase student achievements. Periodic events may be held where students present their projects or accomplishments in creative and festive ways;
- to include moments for relaxation and idea exchange through active breaks during class sessions.

*Examples of activities:*

- It may be useful to create a digital repository of exemplary works, that is, a visible recognition system—either in the classroom or online—where the best results are showcased (not as a competitive judgment, but as a testimony of commitment and creativity), thus motivating students to give their best.
- The lecturer could propose weekly challenges or personalized missions: each week, students could receive a “mission” related to the course content, challenging them to explore new concepts or apply knowledge in practical ways, while giving them the freedom to choose how to approach it. Once completed, the mission could be shared with peers or presented in class.
- An engaging learning activity might also take the form of a simulation game, such as an escape room, in which students must solve a complex case within a set timeframe, developing problem-solving skills. Each question or task solved provides clues to progress to the next stage. This approach stimulates positive interdependence, collaboration, creative thinking, and time management.
- Faculties could integrate game-based elements into academic courses—such as points, challenges, and rewards—to encourage student engagement and make learning more dynamic. For instance, a level system could be designed, allowing students to progress by completing activities or answering quizzes creatively.
- In addition, the faculty may use online platforms that foster interaction among students in playful ways—through themed discussions, weekly quizzes with immediate feedback, educational games, or applications that spark interest in the subject matter.
- Students, working in small groups, could produce infographics or academic posters illustrating theoretical concepts covered in class.
- Another meaningful proposal could be the use of allobiography: students collect personal anecdotes (written in the third person on a proposed theme), share and reflect collectively (reading in a circle and discussing), co-construct a collective narrative (integrating the stories in groups), and finally stage the outcome (a theatrical performance of the final dramaturgy).
- Finally, the faculty member could schedule active breaks, short moments during which students move around the classroom to counteract sedentariness, enhance learning efficiency and foster effective peer relationships.

#### 1.4 Address Biases, Threats and Distractions

In university settings, where student populations are increasingly diverse, it is essential for faculties to create welcoming and supportive environments in which students—coming from a wide range of life experiences—feel valued, encouraged to express their views, and empowered to engage in dialogue. To achieve this, it is crucial to address biases, threats, and distractions that may hinder the learning process. This means going beyond ensuring physical safety, by adapting activities to students’ individual needs and backgrounds in order to foster an environment that truly supports learning.

**Recommendations:**

- to structure lessons in a clear and linear way, providing precise instructions and specific examples to support comprehension;
- to share the schedule and timing of activities in advance, allowing students to plan ahead, anticipate tasks, and prepare effectively;
- to agree on the possibility of breaks or time-outs during lessons to support students' concentration and well-being;
- to schedule specific moments (e.g., during breaks) dedicated to listening to and addressing students' concerns about the learning environment, collaboratively defining possible solutions;
- to create safe and anonymous channels through which students can report episodes of discrimination without fear of judgment or repercussions;
- to avoid bias when forming working groups, and actively promote heterogeneous group configurations that include students with diverse experiences, skills, and backgrounds;
- to reflect from an inclusive perspective on the diversification of course content and exam materials, in order to value and engage the plurality of cultural, social, and gender perspectives present in the student community;
- to use neutral, respectful, and culturally sensitive language in all academic communications;
- to provide clear assessment rubrics with transparently defined criteria, in order to clarify expectations and minimize subjective interpretation.

*Examples of activities:*

- The teacher sets up a “reflection box” where students can anonymously submit notes describing negative experiences they have encountered or observed during the course. Each week, faculties select one note at random and invite two students (on a rotating basis) to interpret and reflect on the emotions expressed and propose possible solutions for the future.
- The faculty member proposes bias deconstruction activities using articles, texts, case studies, guided discussions, role-playing, etc., to encourage reflection on implicit prejudices and stereotypes.
- Students engage in a role-playing activity in which each person assumes the identity of someone different from themselves (in terms of gender, culture, disability, or socioeconomic background) and experiences university or workplace scenarios from that perspective.
- After a test or written exam, faculties dedicate time to a collective review of the most common errors, fostering open discussion on how to avoid them, rather than simply returning grades without explanations.
- The faculty members actively involve Erasmus students in collaborative group work by inviting them to introduce themselves and share information about their home university and educational system. Encourage periodic rotation of group members to expand interactions and foster a broader and more inclusive social network.
- The teacher could set up a scenario in which a student with a foreign accent is interrupted or ignored during a group discussion. The scene could then be re-enacted through a role-playing activity, followed by a whole-class reflection on emotions, behavioral alternatives, and respect for differences. This exercise would help uncover the mechanisms of exclusion linked to linguistic diversity.
- The teacher might also propose free-writing exercises, asking students to introduce themselves by writing continuously—without stopping to think, reread, or erase—for a set amount of time (one minute). Once the writing phase is over, students randomly exchange their texts so that each one holds someone else’s work. They are then invited to read what they have received, interpreting their peer’s words, stepping into their shoes, and perhaps recognizing parts of themselves in what they read.
- Each student could prepare a presentation or a “cultural box” that represents their own culture or an important aspect of their identity. Other participants listen and ask open-ended questions to foster mutual understanding and dialogue.
- Finally, each student (or group) could present a traditional dish from their culture of origin. The activity may include a description of the dish and its cultural meaning, an oral presentation supported by visual materials (slides, videos, or photographs), and the sharing of anecdotes, curiosities, proverbs, or customs connected to it—possibly concluding with a collective tasting moment, where feasible.

## 2. Design Options to Sustain Effort & Persistence

In the university context, learning is a complex process that requires not only the transmission of knowledge, but also the creation of conditions that foster student engagement and perseverance. Each student faces challenges differently, influenced by personal, social, and contextual factors. To support engagement and persistence, it is essential to identify meaningful goals, provide support, promote collaboration, and offer continuous feedback throughout learning activities. These elements help students stay focused on their learning and feel motivated to achieve their goals.

## 2.1 Clarify the Meaning and Purpose of Learning Goals

To support students' engagement and perseverance, it is essential that they clearly understand the goal to be achieved and how it can be meaningful for their future profession and, more broadly, for their lives. It is helpful to clearly and explicitly highlight the purpose and significance of the learning objectives, linking them to students' life experiences or anchoring them in case studies, evidence-based research, and similar resources. In this way, the content studied does not remain abstract or reduced to the mere memorization of dates, events, or methodologies, but instead becomes the object of reflection aimed at building usable and transferable knowledge.

### **Recommendations:**

- to present the learning objectives of the course and of individual lessons in a clear and accessible manner, sharing them through the faculty's webpage, interactive presentations, and the teaching materials provided;
- to begin each lesson with a brief overview of the objectives, linking them to real-life scenarios and emphasizing their relevance in professional and career-related contexts;
- to break down long-term objectives into medium-term milestones, accompanied by periodic monitoring of learning progress;
- to provide specific and structured feedback at regular intervals to support students' improvement over time;
- to encourage the use of documentation and monitoring tools—such as learning journals, portfolios, and digital applications (e.g., interactive boards, dashboards)—to help students reflect on both individual and collective progress through scheduled moments of review;
- to promote the use of time organizers to support effective planning and time management for completing study-related tasks;
- to set up regular reminders and timers for different activities, integrating them into the university's e-learning platforms (e.g., Moodle).

*Examples of activities:*

- The university faculty introduces the final project by asking students to design an innovative solution that does not yet exist but could address a common need and have a meaningful impact on everyday life. The project's goal is clearly defined, visualized on a digital board, and broken down into weekly objectives. Each student is encouraged to consider how their idea could fit into real-life habits and usage contexts, taking into account functionality, practicality, and relevance. Throughout the course, the faculty member provides ongoing feedback on student proposals, fostering discussion and analysis of exemplary cases aligned with users' interests and needs.
- The university faculty may create a dedicated section on the university's Moodle platform or another learning platform where course and lesson objectives are published in a structured and easily accessible format.
- The university faculty may include introductory slides in each course session, presenting specific objectives and highlighting their relevance for students' future professional paths.
- Each lesson may begin with a real-world case study connected to the learning objectives. This strategy allows students to approach theoretical content through the discussion of applied, practical scenarios.
- The university faculty may dedicate time during lessons to the participation of external experts, inviting professionals from the field to share how the course topics are applied in their careers.
- Simulations and role-playing activities may be proposed to foster experiential learning and practical engagement.
- The university faculty may implement digital tools that allow students and peers to visualize individual progress toward learning goals (e.g., progress dashboards).
- The university faculty may provide students with time-management tools, such as timelines or study schedules, including clear deadlines for readings, exercises, and revisions. These can be integrated into Moodle using reminder tools with notifications to support time management.
- The university faculty may schedule dedicated student support sessions, offering short meetings (online or in person) to assess progress and address any difficulties encountered.

## 2.2 Optimize Challenge and Support

In the university context, academic challenges can serve as a powerful source of motivation, but their effectiveness depends on the ability to balance task difficulty with appropriate support. The UDL framework emphasizes that students exhibit variability in how they respond to competition and task complexity, making the design of flexible instructional pathways essential.

To sustain successful task engagement, the learning environment must support access, participation, and progress toward increasingly complex goals. It is important to design a variety of tools and resources that stimulate engagement, provide motivating challenges, and, at the same time, guide students in managing cognitive and emotional tension. Effectively balancing available supports with task demands is key to ensuring a learning experience that is both challenging and engaging.

**Recommendations:**

- to provide immediate feedback focused on an external and modifiable locus, emphasizing that success depends on the adoption of effective strategies and sustained effort, rather than on any presumed lack of ability or competence;
- to use positive, encouraging, and motivating language to support students' perceived self-efficacy;
- to design learning activities with progressive levels of difficulty, allowing students to choose challenges that best match their individual learning profiles;
- to integrate engaging and challenging teaching strategies, including the use of technologies (e.g., escape rooms, gamification, interactive storytelling, debates);
- to incorporate activities that stimulate creative and divergent thinking, such as open-ended scenarios, problem-solving exercises, simulations, problem-based learning, project-based learning, or the analysis of ethical and social dilemmas;
- to promote cooperative challenge-based activities, introducing gamification elements (points, badges, leaderboards) to increase motivation;
- to highlight active participation events (e.g., Researchers' Night), where students collaborate to conceive and produce research outputs;
- to manage teaching tasks through digital platforms, ensuring organization and accessibility of learning materials.

*Examples of activities:*

- In alignment with the intended learning outcomes, the university faculty member can structure the e-learning platform page by organizing teaching and learning tasks by cohort, in order to promote clarity, accessibility, and shared planning.
- In courses involving written assignments or projects, the university faculty member can break down the work into phases with intermediate feedback, reducing frustration and fostering gradual improvement.
- During activities, the university faculty member can provide immediate and strategic feedback that highlights the importance of effort and the strategies employed (e.g., “Your analysis is well structured, but consider revisiting this aspect to make it even more effective”).
- The university faculty member can design activities with increasing levels of difficulty, allowing students to choose the level best suited to their skills and to progress step by step.
- The university faculty member may offer optional supplementary materials for students who wish to engage with more challenging tasks.
- The university faculty member can organize academic debates on relevant topics, where students defend opposing positions, enhancing critical thinking and argumentative skills.
- The university faculty member can propose interactive storytelling activities, creating open-ended scenarios in which students must make strategic decisions based on acquired knowledge.
- The university faculty member can implement a reward system for completing learning activities, incentivizing progressive engagement and achievement.
- The university faculty member can organize intensive events (e.g., academic hackathons) in which students work on innovative solutions to research questions.
- During lessons, the university faculty member can present examples of professionals in the field who have overcome obstacles, stimulating constructive discussion on strategies for facing challenges in students’ own learning journeys.
- Promote time management techniques such as timeboxing, a strategy based on setting goals within defined time periods, which helps break down objectives into micro-goals and allocates a reasonable timeframe for their completion.

### 2.3 Promote Collaboration, Interdependence and Collective Learning

In the university context, collaborative learning represents an effective strategy to foster critical thinking, engagement, and the construction of shared knowledge. Through peer interaction and group work, students have the opportunity to examine problems from multiple perspectives, developing key transversal skills essential to their academic and professional paths. The creation of learning communities promotes an inclusive environment in which each student feels part of a collective growth process. When well-structured, peer interdependence not only enhances content understanding but also strengthens the sense of belonging and mutual support.

### **Recommendations:**

- to use cooperative learning strategies (e.g., Jigsaw, Think-Pair-Share, Group Investigation) by designing activities that require the contribution of all group members to be successfully completed (interdependence based on roles, tasks, or resources), and by assigning each member specific cognitive and social roles (e.g., facilitator, organizer, spokesperson, researcher) to ensure active participation and shared responsibility;
- to include peer assessment opportunities to reflect on the effectiveness of collaboration;
- to integrate teaching strategies that promote collaborative learning, such as debate, role-playing, project-based learning;
- to create opportunities for peer tutoring where students can support each other;
- to provide online spaces for exchange and sharing (e.g., a course-specific social group) and digital tools for both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration (e.g., virtual boards, Moodle and shared folders, discussion forums and group chats);
- to dedicate time for shared reflection sessions on the learning process and group dynamics, in order to foster a sense of belonging;
- to structure peer tutoring programs between students of different academic years;
- to support self-managed study groups with guidance from the university faculty member;
- to implement Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approaches to develop both practical and collaborative skills.

#### *Examples of activities:*

- Students are presented with a practical case (e.g., a social problem, an economic situation, or a scientific question) and, working in small groups, must analyze it, propose solutions, and present their findings to the rest of the class in a final discussion.
- The university faculty member can organize a structured debate. The class is divided into two groups taking opposing positions on a neutral topic (e.g., the value of interdisciplinary versus specialized research). With a moderator guiding the discussion, each team prepares arguments and responds to the other team's objections.
- Students collaborate to create a shared output, such as a wiki, glossary, concept map, or collective article on a study topic.
- Students are given an open-ended problem and, with limited resources, must propose innovative solutions through a structured brainstorming and analysis process.
- Students analyze and discuss ethical dilemmas related to their discipline, comparing different perspectives and seeking balanced solutions.

## 2.4 Foster a Sense of Belonging and Learning Community

In the university context, creating environments that foster a genuine sense of belonging and community is crucial to promoting student engagement and perseverance. The university is not only a place for the transmission of knowledge, but also a context in which students develop social skills, build relationships, and refine their identity. To support this process, it is important to design activities and learning environments that allow students to feel valued, supported, and connected with others.

### **Recommendations:**

- to welcome students with opening class rituals (e.g., defining key terms, discussing a news story of the week, short emotional check-ins, or quick polls), thus creating a recognizable and inclusive start to each lesson;
- to establish consistent teaching routines (e.g., scheduled breaks, final moments for group discussion) to foster a sense of continuity and predictability;
- to value mutual understanding through activities of exchange and sharing, integrating materials and topics that reflect the cultural and personal diversity of students;
- to promote a collaborative classroom climate through team-building activities and informal social moments (e.g., exchanging holiday greetings, brief spontaneous conversations);
- to integrate into academic life cultural and recreational events promoted by the department and the university (e.g., university bands, theater courses, reading groups, departmental celebrations), along with social engagement activities (e.g., tree planting, reading sessions in prisons);
- to create spaces for dialogue and social interaction, both physical (study rooms, relaxation areas, shared spaces) and virtual (online forums, social groups, collaborative platforms), to foster cohesion and communication among students, faculty, and academic staff;
- to organize welcoming and orientation practices (welcome days, campus tours) and services addressing specific needs (first-year programs, academic tutoring, inclusion support, thesis guidance);
- to appoint reference faculties for disciplinary areas or specific initiatives (e.g., Erasmus, orientation, inclusion) to ensure personalized and timely support;
- to promote interdepartmental collaborative activities (e.g., hackathons or project-based workshops) that encourage joint work among students from different degree programs;

- to activate support desks and awareness-raising events aimed at promoting respect for cultural, gender, and functional diversity;
- to strengthen student participation and engagement through active student councils involved in decision-making processes and co-design activities related to teaching and academic services;
- to celebrate and recognize students' contributions by establishing university awards and acknowledgments for academic, cultural, and social commitment.

*Examples of activities:*

- The university faculty member can integrate into reading materials or online resources articles, videos, and case studies that reflect diverse cultural and social perspectives. For example, presenting texts by authors from different cultural backgrounds.
- A brief informal meeting could be organized before the holidays, allowing students to exchange greetings and reflections on the semester.
- In addition to individual feedback, the university faculty member can arrange collective feedback sessions, where students discuss group work results, reflect on challenges encountered, and share the solutions they adopted.
- It would be useful to create online working groups through platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet, where students can collaborate in real time on projects, discuss ideas, and exchange useful resources.
- The university can promote exchanges between students from different institutions to foster comparison between academic environments, enrich competencies, and share study materials, methods, and learning experiences.

## 2.5 Provide Action-Oriented Feedback

In the university context, assessment plays a fundamental role in the learning process. High-quality feedback can be essential in supporting students throughout their academic journey, helping them maintain motivation and commitment. Assessment is most effective when feedback is action-oriented, relevant, constructive, accessible, consistent, and timely. Any form of feedback should emphasize effort and practice, fostering long-term successful learning habits and providing clear guidance on how to improve.

### **Recommendations:**

- to provide feedback consistently and frequently throughout the course;
- to schedule intermediate review sessions (e.g., offering feedback during the planning or development of a project);
- to use digital platforms and tools to leave targeted comments on students' assignments and projects;

- to give task-oriented feedback to encourage critical revision, sustained effort, improvement, and achievement of the intended goal;
- to offer multiple formats of feedback: written (e.g., comments on documents, emails), oral (individual or group meetings, class discussions, office hours), and visual (corrective diagrams, color-coded or icon-based annotations, maps, or infographics);
- to provide feedback considering the following levels (based on the “feed up–feed back–feed forward” approach): outcome feedback (e.g., correctness or accuracy of the completed task), process feedback (e.g., suggestions for reviewing how the task was carried out), and self-assessment feedback (e.g., the student reflects on what they have learned);
- to deliver feedback that encourages perseverance, focuses on developing self-efficacy and self-awareness, and motivates students to use specific supports and strategies when facing challenges.

*Examples of activities:*

- During the course, university faculty members can provide weekly or biweekly feedback on ongoing projects or assignments, instead of waiting until the end of the semester or the final evaluation. For example, a faculty member could use an online platform to comment on chapters of a thesis or intermediate assignments, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.
- The faculty member can write comments on a shared document, pointing out strengths and areas for enhancement (e.g., “Excellent work on the introduction, but the methods section needs more clarity”).
- The faculty member can provide assessment rubrics with practical suggestions. For instance, after a written assignment, rather than only indicating errors, it is useful to provide specific guidance, such as: “To clarify your argument, try including a concrete example and a supporting citation.”
- The faculty member can give feedback using guiding questions. For example, after an oral presentation: “You explained the concept well, but how could you engage the audience more? Could you add an image or a question to stimulate reflection?”
- Provide students with models and examples of good practice. If a student struggles with writing a report, a well-structured example can be shown, with step-by-step explanations of what makes the text effective.
- The faculty member can use self-assessment and peer feedback strategies. Students could review their own work using a clear checklist or offer constructive suggestions to peers, e.g., “Your argument is well developed, but you could improve coherence between paragraphs by adding logical connectors.”
- During in-class activities, the faculty member can explain to students why a task could be improved and provide specific, immediate suggestions, e.g., “Try rephrasing this sentence more clearly, perhaps using simpler language.”
- The faculty member can employ technological tools for personalized feedback, such as Google Docs comments or audio recordings, to provide detailed and immediate guidance.
- The faculty member can share success stories and models of perseverance, organizing meetings or roundtables with alumni or professionals who discuss the challenges they faced and overcame during their academic and professional journeys. Their testimonies offer positive role models and encourage students to reflect, ask questions, and discuss strategies for facing similar challenges in their own learning paths.

### 3. Designing Options for Managing Emotions

In the university context, it is essential for teaching to take into account the emotional dimension of students, as emotions profoundly influence the learning process. The ability to recognize, regulate, and understand one's own emotions, as well as to empathize with others, are skills that should be explicitly developed and supported.

#### 3.1. Recognize Expectations, Beliefs and Motivations

In the university context, self-regulation is a crucial factor for student success, as it involves the ability to manage one's own learning independently, set clear goals, and develop the motivation needed to achieve them. Moreover, working on self-regulation fosters a sense of self-efficacy, allowing students to feel like active participants in their own educational journey. It is important for students to understand what motivates them, both intrinsically and extrinsically. To this end, faculties should establish goals that inspire confidence and a sense of belonging in learning—goals that are also realistic and attainable. While it is essential to cultivate high and positive expectations regarding goal achievement, it is equally important to support students during moments of frustration and anxiety and to encourage them to develop self-confidence.

##### **Recommendations:**

- to support students during moments of difficulty by fostering the development of resilience and confidence in their abilities through targeted support strategies;
- to use organizational and motivational tools (prompts, reminders, guides, rubrics, checklists) to help manage anxiety in challenging situations, extend concentration time, stimulate self-reflection, and prevent frustration;
- to provide tutoring or mentoring opportunities to guide students in defining realistic and appropriate personal goals that take into account their individual strengths and areas for improvement;
- to promote structured moments of self-reflection and self-assessment, for example through rubrics and checklists that help monitor progress and evaluate learning processes;

- to engage students in analyzing the explicit and implicit expectations established by the academic environment, reflecting on the role that biases and stereotypes may play in creating barriers;
- to offer positive reinforcement and schedule short breaks to support motivation and maintain well-being during study sessions or assessments;
- to encourage self-reflection and personal awareness through exercises that require students to rephrase their goals in their own words and repeat them periodically to strengthen focus;
- to use surveys or other rapid feedback tools to adapt activities to students' interests, needs, and preferences.

*Examples of activities:*

- Students are required to develop a practical project linked to a real need of the university. At the beginning, they complete a self-assessment questionnaire on their skills, expectations, and potential challenges. The university faculty member provides checklists and rubrics to guide the process, helping students break down the task into concrete and achievable objectives. Each week, students reflect on their progress through a learning journal and receive personalized feedback. Additionally, peer mentoring sessions allow them to discuss common challenges and strategies to overcome them.
- It would be useful to create infographics or summary sheets with strategies to manage academic stress, made available on Moodle or other platforms.
- Teaching strategies such as controlled breathing, time blocking, relaxation techniques, and mindfulness could be effective in optimizing concentration during tasks and/or study sessions.
- Within the same degree program, a system could be established in which more experienced students support freshmen in setting realistic goals and developing effective learning strategies (peer tutoring, mentoring).
- It would be beneficial to schedule regular meetings with the faculty member or academic tutor, dedicated to discussing personal goals and challenges encountered.
- Providing students with practical resources, such as videos, articles, or counseling sessions, can help them manage exam-related anxiety and procrastination. This could include time management techniques, stress-reduction strategies, and methods to promote self-discipline.
- The faculty member could ask students to write a letter to their “future self”, describing the challenges they are facing, the strategies they intend to use, and their personal goals. It would be useful to revisit the letter after some time to reflect on progress made.
- The faculty member can organize a “vision board” session, in which students visually represent their academic and professional goals, followed by group discussions and reflections.

### 3.2 Develop Self- and Other- Awareness

In university teaching, it is necessary to take into account a range of variables—existential, personal, and social—that affect students. It is beneficial to create an environment oriented toward prosociality, supporting the development of social awareness and helping students understand others’ perspectives, respect cultural diversity, and create safe spaces for every identity. It is essential to provide opportunities to process and manage emotions and to reflect on personal strengths and challenges. Tools such as reminders, templates, and checklists can help students choose adaptive strategies for regulating emotions, addressing both external events (e.g., social anxiety) and internal experiences (e.g., anxiety or rumination).

#### **Recommendations:**

- to provide differentiated feedback aimed at managing frustration and supporting both external and internal emotional regulation;
- to propose real-life simulation activities to help students develop adaptability and self-regulation skills;
- to create opportunities for students to reflect on their social interactions;
- to offer activities that encourage appreciation of one’s own and others’ personal, cultural, and linguistic resources (for example, displaying student self-portraits, creating affinity group spaces, or sharing notes of appreciation with peers and colleagues);
- to introduce moments of mindfulness before or after academic activities;
- to provide tools and strategies for emotional self-regulation;
- to encourage students to keep journals to monitor their academic progress;
- to propose reflective learning logs in which students can personally reflect on their challenges, emotions, and what they have learned;
- to organize role-playing activities;
- to introduce the professional figure of a Life Coach to accompany students in their personal growth journey.

*Examples of activities:*

- Students participate in a discussion on a current topic that involves diverse perspectives and sensitivities. Before the meeting, each student completes a checklist to explore their emotions related to the topic, identifying potential biases or insecurities. The discussion is then guided by stimulating questions, during which students analyze the topic from different viewpoints. At the end, they are invited to reflect on the emotional impact of the conversation and how their understanding of the topic has changed, with the aim of developing greater awareness of others' perspectives.
- The university faculty member could create moments dedicated to a "self-portrait and personal stories exhibition", where students share personal or cultural experiences to highlight the diversity present in the classroom.
- The faculty member could dedicate time to creating dialogue spaces to foster a sense of belonging and respect for diverse identities, strengthening affinity groups and spaces for discussion.
- It would be useful to propose intercultural exchange activities, allowing students from different backgrounds to compare experiences, such as sharing traditions or international academic experiences.
- To work on adaptability and emotional management, the faculty member could have students practice simulations of academic or professional scenarios, where they must respond to challenging situations.
- The faculty member could assign group projects with defined roles, so each student assumes a specific role to facilitate understanding of team dynamics and emotional management in collaborative work.
- Many students experience anxiety when presenting work or taking oral exams. To help build self-confidence and improve communication skills, the faculty member can organize public speaking activities in small groups. Each student first prepares a brief presentation on a topic of their choice and presents it to peers, who provide constructive feedback on clarity, body language, and communicative effectiveness.
- After group activities, it is useful for students to engage in personal reflection, analyzing emotions, behaviors, and reactions while considering internal and external factors. Reflecting on others' experiences also fosters empathy and awareness of interpersonal dynamics.
- Students could create a "Me and Others" playlist to get to know each other better. Each student selects two songs: one reflecting their identity and feelings, and another representing a significant relationship with a peer.
- The faculty member can help students develop greater self-awareness through mindfulness, meditation, and relaxation techniques, including sessions with breathing exercises to enhance concentration and reduce stress, and guided meditation to explore emotions and thoughts.

### 3.3 Promote Individual and Collective Reflection

In the university context, it is essential to create opportunities for both individual and collective reflection, as this fosters the development of students' emotional and metacognitive competence. For many students, simply recognizing that they are making progress toward a goal is highly motivating. Conversely, one of the key factors in loss of motivation is the lack of support for those who are unable to recognize their own individual or collective progress. It is therefore important that students have access to multiple models and supports for different self-assessment and group-assessment techniques, enabling them to identify and choose the ones that work best for them.

### **Recommendations:**

- to provide students with feedback during an activity;
- to design checklists to guide students in their learning process or task completion.;
- to develop tools for visualizing feedback and tracking progress;
- to facilitate individual and group office hours to stimulate reflection on challenges, progress, and goals;
- to propose the writing of reflective journals, as well as activities aimed at metacognition and self-assessment;
- to design peer feedback sessions;
- to dedicate time to focus groups;
- to develop activities that encourage metacognitive reflection, including tasks that prompt students to reflect on how they learn, which strategies they use, and how they could improve.

#### *Examples of activities:*

- Students explore a complex concept related to the subject matter. Each student has the opportunity to track their own progress, noting initial difficulties, acquired knowledge, and aspects requiring further study, reflecting on their individual learning journey. In groups, students share their experiences, and the university faculty member provides feedback on key points and arguments, encouraging participants to recognize progress and areas for improvement.
- Before a presentation or written project, students can receive a checklist with specific criteria (e.g., “Check if your work answers the main questions,” “Verify the coherence of your thesis,” “Proofread your work for grammatical errors”). This enables students to self-assess and revise their work prior to final submission.
- The faculty member can propose reflective writing activities on case studies, followed by reflections on how their thinking has evolved over time.
- The faculty member can dedicate time to discussions on learning experiences, where students share strategies that worked and areas for improvement, developing metacognitive awareness.
- After class, the faculty member may organize peer review sessions, in which students provide feedback on each other’s work while reflecting on their own and others’ learning strategies.
- The faculty member can facilitate thematic focus groups, structured discussions that encourage students to analyze their learning experiences and share effective strategies.
- The faculty member can implement structured peer feedback activities, where students exchange comments based on criteria provided by the faculty member to ensure constructive feedback.
- The faculty member can provide specific, individualized feedback during the course, highlighting progress and areas for improvement.
- The faculty member might use progress dashboards (e.g., Moodle, virtual boards) to allow students to visualize their advancement in the course. These tools enhance awareness of the learning journey, help identify areas for improvement, and provide immediate feedback, promoting dynamic and personalized learning.
- The faculty member can schedule reflection sessions after an exam or complex project, discussing mistakes, strategies used, and ways to improve.
- Students could create short podcast episodes in which they recount significant moments of their university journey, discussing challenges, achievements, and personal growth. These episodes can then be shared on online platforms.

### 3.4 Practice Empathy and Conflict Resolution through Error Analysis

Restorative practices represent an educational and organizational philosophy that places relationships at the center of learning, personal growth, and well-being within the university context. They are based on proactive strategies aimed at building a strong sense of community, fostering meaningful relationships, and reducing conflict through dialogue and accountability. The goal is to promote relational and emotional skills, peaceful conflict management, nonviolent communication, a sense of safety and community, respect, and well-being. Promoting the restorative approach—through practices such as peer mediation, circle time, restorative conferences, student group conferences, and community-building circles—can serve not only as a model for repairing harm in cases of conflict or misconduct, but also for building and strengthening relationships and developing personal and interpersonal competencies such as empathy, assertiveness and self-efficacy.

#### **Recommendations:**

- to develop strategies for conflict management within academic work groups, fostering mediation skills, collaborative negotiation, and respect for differences, with a view to supporting both the success of educational activities and future professional experiences;
- to conduct guided reflections on personal emotions within structured settings (seminars, workshops, laboratories) to promote emotional awareness and affective regulation in university learning environments;
- to promote essential socio-emotional competencies for academic and professional life—such as cooperation, resilience, stress management, and teamwork—in alignment with citizenship and employability profiles;
- to propose activities focused on active listening, emphasizing it as a transversal skill essential in academic dynamics (discussions, group work, relationships with faculties) as well as in future professional contexts;
- to organize seminars that raise awareness of cultural, social, and gender diversity, providing spaces for listening and dialogue about students' personal experiences in order to strengthen an inclusive and respectful university environment;
- to introduce reflective and anonymous writing exercises that allow students to express their emotions and, if they wish, share them in collective discussions—thus reinforcing self-awareness and a sense of community;

- to educate for empathy and reflection through experiential methodologies such as case study analysis, film workshops, role-playing or theater activities, circle time, peer mediation, volunteer projects, intergenerational discussion groups, and workshops on relational skills (e.g., conflict management, intercultural communication).

*Examples of activities:*

- Occasionally, students may feel they have been unfairly assessed in an exam and express their dissatisfaction aggressively during class, creating tension. In such cases, the faculty member could offer an exam review opportunity with detailed feedback, while encouraging students to adopt more constructive ways of expressing their opinions in the future.
- A student may be flagged for plagiarism after anti-plagiarism software detects sections copied without proper citation. Instead of immediately imposing disciplinary sanctions, the faculty member could hold a meeting to understand the student's motivations (e.g., academic pressure, time management difficulties, lack of familiarity with citation norms) and help the student recognize the impact of their action on academic integrity. As a restorative solution, the student may rewrite the assignment following proper citation practices and attend a workshop on referencing. This approach promotes awareness of mistakes, repair of harm, and prevention of future violations.
- In a group project, an Erasmus student may feel excluded if other students communicate only in their native language. After reporting the issue to the faculty member, a meeting could be organized to address the situation and identify practical solutions, such as alternating languages, assigning roles that value all contributions, and participating in intercultural workshops.
- Through welcome activities and peer mentoring, restorative practices facilitate the integration of Erasmus students or freshmen, fostering support networks and reducing feelings of isolation.
- Students are divided into groups and work on a case study simulating a conflict in a collaborative context. The activity begins with an "emotion circle", where each member shares their experience regarding the group dynamics, practicing active listening without interruption. The goal is to develop empathy, understand others' emotions, and recognize the importance of effective communication. Groups then analyze the case, identify the causes of the conflict, and develop strategies to restore a trusting and collaborative climate, applying techniques such as conflict resolution, mediation, and active listening. The activity concludes with a collective reflection, where students discuss how the skills learned can be applied in professional and academic contexts, enhancing teamwork and promoting inclusive, collaborative environments.
- The faculty member could propose activities simulating real academic disputes (e.g., division of tasks in a group project). Students, each assigned a specific role, must resolve the conflict considering everyone's needs.
- The faculty member could dedicate moments to view short films or movies addressing diversity, discrimination, or cooperation. Students are encouraged to discuss constructively the emotions elicited by the audiovisual material and reflect on strategies to enhance empathy in academic and professional settings.
- The faculty member proposes scenarios simulating interactions among people with different cultural, social, or gender backgrounds.
- Following the circle time methodology, students share experiences in which they were involved in a conflict in an academic or professional context, practicing active listening without interruptions. Each student reflects on their emotions and potential solutions that could have resolved the conflict, while the faculty member guides the discussion toward collaborative resolution strategies.
- The faculty member invites students to create an "emotional postcard" using a photo they took, a drawing, a collage, or a painting, accompanied by a brief text describing a conflict or mistake they experienced or witnessed. The postcards are submitted anonymously (physically or online) and later shared and discussed in small groups.