

A Blueprint for UDL: Considering the Design of Implementation

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Abstract

Based on our experiences, we layout some specific considerations for the implementation of Universal Design of Learning (UDL) at the school, district, and state level. Similar to the framework itself, we approach systematic implementation from a position of thoughtful design and rapid iteration. The overall purpose of the paper is to provide foundational understanding and further transparency around the implementation of UDL.

Keywords

Universal Design for Learning, reform, implementation

INTRODUCTION

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework is made up of a collection of research findings from the learning sciences (e.g., education, educational psychology) and the brain sciences (e.g., cognitive science and neuroscience) and is organized into three main networks: affective, recognition, and strategic (Rose & Meyer, 2002). For example, learning that is related to emotion is linked to the affective networks. The researched practices related to those networks comprise the UDL principle of engagement. Learning that is related to how information is delivered to the student/learner is linked to the recognition networks. The researched practices related to those networks comprise the UDL principle of representation. And when students/learners are given the opportunity to manipulate information to demonstrate their comprehension, that action takes place within the strategic networks. The researched practices related to those networks comprise the UDL principle of action and expression (Click here for the [UDL graphic organizer](#)).

As a framework, UDL is generally focused on supporting the variability of every learner. While brains have some similarities, the actual networks that invoke understanding and learning are highly variable (Sporns, 2011). For instance, research based on simple tasks such as tapping a single finger has shown the significant difference in how different brains process that exact motion (Meyer & Rose, 2002). Additional research continues to clarify how differently each person's brain processes information. Defined as *variability*, these recognized differences point us toward designing more diversified opportunities for learn-

ing (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). This variability comes to light when a teacher considers how to effectively engage and support learning for every learner. UDL is a framework that supports the design of a learning environment or classroom that both expects and accepts the variability of every learner. In addition, the framework emphasizes *context*. This includes how the student emotionally connects to the topic, the setting, the mode of delivery, the person delivering the information, and how other learners can alter that student's acquisition of the information (Daley, Willett, & Fischer, 2014). Creating an environment where learners know they will be able to access and deliver information in a way that fits their momentary or constant needs allows them to approach learning in a more receptive state (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

With access to the necessary resources and supports, the person putting this framework and these research findings into action is the teacher. When teachers effectively implement UDL, their lesson and learning environment design choices awaken the affective, recognition, and strategic networks of students. This practice is carried out through a purposeful iterative process very similar to the work of designers and engineers. In fact, after teachers have been implementing UDL for a while, they often talk about themselves as "learning engineers." They see themselves as a designer of solutions focused on overcoming barriers through a process of problem-solving and iterative design. As highlighted in Basham and Marino (2013), engineering design is an important concept to the implementation of UDL. Teachers who adopt UDL generally take on the engineering habits of mind that include systems thinking, creativity, optimism, and attention to ethical considerations (Basham & Marino, 2013). When applied together, these habits and UDL drive the design and implementation of curriculum/instructional goals, instructional planning, the use of instructional methods, strategies, and materials, and progress monitoring that support all students. To achieve this level of support, though, often requires both systems level and teacher level change to be effectively and sustainably implemented. Some of these changes have been noted and are the basis of this document, or blueprint, for implementing UDL.

The first section of this blueprint offers a brief overview of the common misconceptions and realities of UDL. Next, the implementation stages model created by the National Implementation Research Network is introduced. Additionally, the characteristics associated with the roles of teacher, school and district, and state are examined relative to implementation. The paper concludes with ideas around families as a part of implementation and a brief discussion of a project recently led by [CAST](#) that supported the implementation of UDL across four districts.

IMPLEMENTING UDL

From a perspective of implementing instructional practices, one way UDL can be broken down is into four critical elements. These include (a) the establishment of clear goals, (b) intentional planning for learner variability, (c) the use of flexible methods and materials, and (d) maintaining timely progress monitoring (IRN-UDL, 2011) ([Click here for the Critical Elements](#)).

As stated above, the UDL framework brings together and organizes researched practices and strategies. The framework is designed to emphasize the importance of planned options and purposeful access to learning opportunities. By using UDL, both options and access can be confidently built into the learning environment and into each day's lesson plan. Thus, the application of UDL into practice begins with lesson planning.

Clear Goals

The genesis of any lesson plan is its goal. Constructed based on standards, which in most cases are the Common Core State Standards, the lesson goal is what guides the development of the lesson, the ensuing activities, and the related assessment(s). To allow for the options and access emphasized within the UDL framework to be activated, the lesson goal must leave open the methods and materials used by the teacher and learners (Coyne, Pisha, Dalton, Zeph, & Smith, 2012). The lesson goal must also guide the lesson and student outcomes. Finally, the lesson goal must be understood by the students so they can articulate the outcomes they should reach at the end of that lesson.

Intentional Planning for Learner Variability

The heavy emphasis on options and access within the UDL framework are there to support learner variability. As cognitive neuroscience continues to discover, the way individuals process information is more variable than we previously realized (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). To limit the use of additional supports to students with IEPs, students who are English Language Learners, or those who are recognized as gifted and talented has become an outdated model. The UDL framework contains options teachers can build into their lessons and environments to attend to areas of variability. Those options include perceptual ability, language ability, background knowledge, cognitive strategies, and motivation (UDL-IRN, 2011).

Each of these options are met through the planned use and spontaneous use of methods and materials that maintain the rigor of the lesson.

Flexible Methods and Materials

The flexible use of methods and materials can happen naturally when teachers use the UDL framework to plan their lessons and environment (Nelson, 2014). The framework consistently nudges them to consider options related to identified areas (e.g., recruiting interest, physical action, and comprehension), leading to the creation of opportunities that guide students to become resourceful, strategic, and purposeful learners. Students are also given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways.

Timely Progress Monitoring

UDL guides us to respond to the variable nature of our students by providing multiple options and opportunities for them to demonstrate their knowledge. We want to assess the students' skills and knowledge frequently and pointedly through formative assessments so instruction can remain fluid and address mis-steps or inaccuracies. Summative assessments should also be varied in their design for variable learners. With the information that comes from these frequent assessments, teachers can reflect on how they are offering information, whether their students are grasping the information or skills, and what supports might be added for future growth.

Common Misconceptions and Realities of UDL

Throughout education are many misconceptions about UDL that lead it to be mischaracterized and sometimes criticized. This section provides a basic summary of some these misconceptions.

It's About Technology.

Because UDL emphasizes flexible methods and materials, and technology seemingly provides that additional level of flexibility, some individuals jump to the assumption that by using technology, teachers are automatically utilizing UDL. There are two falsehoods that underlie this assumption. First, technology is only as good as its defined use. Allowing a student to use a smartphone or tablet during class brings no value if its use is not directly linked to the goal of the lesson. The use of the technology must be purposeful; otherwise, the technology can become another barrier. Second, some technologies (primarily programs and applications) are marketed as having been designed either utilizing UDL or that they help a teacher implement UDL. While a technology that has been designed utilizing the UDL framework will likely provide more flexibility in comparison to similar products, it is how the technology is used that decides whether or not it supports the implementation of UDL. For example, the company Knovation develops its products utilizing UDL. They fully understand, though, that it is through the product's use that UDL truly comes to life. For example, one school system in Indiana implementing UDL has

used a product created by Knovation and has seen positive outcomes at the high school level. It isn't the product alone that led to the outcomes; instead, they believe it is the combination of UDL and the product that led to the positive outcomes (Nelson, Arthur, Jensen, Van Horn & Garrity, 2011).

It's Only for Kids with Disabilities.

Though the foundational ideas behind UDL came from CAST's work with students who had disabilities, CAST soon recognized that the supports they offered to students with disabilities would provide better access to learning for all students (CAST, 2014). From there, the idea continued to grow as CAST identified supporting research from the fields of education and brain science. Research continues to support the concept that we are highly variable in how we learn; the way we learn is as unique as a fingerprint (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014). To meet that variability, it is essential that instructional leaders and learning engineers utilize the guidelines and checkpoints within the UDL framework to ensure all students have access to the information and are provided the opportunity to demonstrate their acquisition of that knowledge or skill.

It is an Instructional Strategy.

An instructional strategy is a planned set of activities focused on producing a specific outcome. Teachers have strategies for supporting things such as comprehension, understanding concepts, and learning vocabulary. In academic circles, we often hear "UDL is not an evidence-based strategy." This is correct: UDL is not a strategy. UDL is a scientifically based framework, supported by both foundational and field-based evidence. Different from a strategy, UDL is a framework that guides the design of all aspects of the learning environment including curriculum, materials, instructional design, instruction, and assessment. So, while UDL is not a strategy, various strategies can be integrated into the design and implementation of a UDL-based learning environment.

It's What Good Teachers Already Do.

Fellow educators, students, and parents celebrate good teachers, but there is no specific measurement that clearly identifies a good teacher. While academic achievement is a measure preferred by many people today, such a yardstick ignores teachers who provide an environment that supports positive social and emotional outcomes.. Would the teachers whose students were not academically successful but were socially or emotionally successful be considered good teachers? Questions like these continue to be debated because there is no clear definition for a "good teacher."

Instead of hinging success on the question of "good teaching," educators can utilize the UDL framework. It guides the use of instructional strategies, resources, and tools, all of which can lead to strong student outcomes. The framework, though, must be used in its entirety to ensure

the variable needs of all learners are being met. While every option mentioned within the framework will not be used in every lesson, these options can be quickly reviewed against the lesson goal, helping the teacher make quality instructional decisions.

It's the Same as Differentiation.

Differentiation is an important component within any classroom. It individualizes the teaching methods used based on learner profiles that investigate learner readiness and interest. The methods are framed by specific student success criteria and how students express their knowledge or skills is also defined (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009). Acknowledging student needs and creating this kind of scaffolding around those needs is an unquestionable support. Differentiation effectively responds to the needs of students who have demonstrated an academic or emotional disconnect to the topic or skill being taught.

UDL is a framework that is used to design a lesson and learning environment. Using the options suggested within the framework, teachers can establish structures and supports to meet the variable learning needs of their students. The intent of UDL is to design, from the beginning, a lesson or learning environment that can be accessed by all students. There will be times, though, when the needs of all students are not met through the design of the lesson or learning environment. At these times, differentiation should be applied.

It Can only be Done for Small Groups of Kids.

The UDL framework was organized to support teachers in their design of lessons and learning environments. Its intent is to help teachers meet the variable needs of the learners within a designed environment. The number of learners within the environment is not emphasized nor is the type of classroom set up (whole class versus small groups); rather, the way activities are designed (e.g., the size of groups) should always reflect the lesson's goal.

It's only for Certain Types of Teachers.

While UDL does not lend itself to a certain type of teacher, there are certain mindsets that enhance the implementation of UDL. First, teachers must intentionally design lessons and environments that support all students. This includes learners who are typically viewed as "in the margins" (Rose & Meyer, 2002). In most cases, these are students who have a diagnosed disability or are considered gifted and talented. Interestingly, research shows us that there is no average learner; there are no margins (Rose & Meyer, 1999). All learners are variable and learn best in an environment designed with that variability in mind. Thus, teachers truly become designers and engineers when implementing UDL. Second, teachers must reflect on why they are choosing particular strategies, resources, or tools as they relate to the UDL framework and the outcomes experienced by the students (Nelson, 2013). Third, the UDL framework encourages teachers to move beyond the style with which they are most comfort-

able (e.g., lecture) and incorporate additional learning designs (e.g., collaborative grouping) (Nelson, 2013).

It's for Specific Subject Areas.

UDL is inherently designed for all subjects. It is a compilation of options to establish variable learning experiences for all students regardless of the topic. Some subjects may have been taught in certain ways by certain teachers, but the UDL framework (and the research behind it) provides the platform necessary to shatter the myths that hold those teachers to those teaching practices (Nelson et al., 2010).

If I'm Using a "UDL product" I'm doing UDL.

There are a variety of digital products on the market that either state UDL was used in the product's design or the product helps teachers implement UDL. In fact, the National Center on UDL links each checkpoint to information about digital products that can help a teacher implement UDL (<http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation/examples>). There is a disclaimer for this section, though, that also addresses this myth: "even though a product is recognized as a tool that might support a particular checkpoint or guideline within the UDL framework, how that tool is used and whether it's used in conjunction with the lesson's goal determine whether it supports the implementation of UDL." Thus, a tool is just a tool. How that tool is utilized to engage learners, offer a different representation of information, or allow learners to express their knowledge is the path to UDL implementation.

There is No Research Behind It.

UDL is based on over 1,000 studies from the learning and brain sciences. This research ranges from direct classroom implementation studies to studies investigating the impact certain stimuli have on learning. While UDL has been examined as a structure to improve lesson design in relation to incorporated options and information access (Ayala, Brace, & Stahl, 2012; Dalton & Smith, 2012; McGhie-Richmond & Sung, 2013; Spooner, Baker, Harris, Ahlgrim-Delzel, & Browder, 2007), a recent study demonstrated positive student outcomes linked to lessons and environments designed with UDL (Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al., 2013). More studies like the latter are in process, which will provide the field with additional guidance and information.

ROLES WITHIN UDL IMPLEMENTATION.

In moving toward implementation, UDL necessitates investment at different levels of the education system. The intent of this section is to provide a basic understanding of the characteristics associated with UDL within and across these different levels. Finally, the authors make initial recommendations for moving toward implementation within each of the levels.

UDL and Stages of Implementation

UDL is a framework with significant depth. While the UDL-Implementation and Research Network has developed helpful structures like the Instructional Planning

Process and the Critical Elements framework, schools, districts, and states can still find themselves in need of additional support during widespread implementation (Click here for the [Instructional Planning Process](#)). The implementation stages model created by the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) offers a structure that is beneficial when investigating the widespread implementation of any system like UDL. The analysis of each stage can help schools, districts, and states investigate how they are utilizing particular structures and what functions are in place. In relation to UDL:

- The Explore stage investigates current attitudes, system capacity, and needs related to those identified with the UDL framework and the Critical Elements that support or create barriers to the implementation of UDL.
- The Prepare stage investigates the programs, initiatives, resources, and processes in place that relate to the UDL framework and the Critical Elements.
- The Launch stage investigates the movement schools, districts, or states have taken in their adoption of the UDL framework and the Critical Elements as related to curriculum selection, development, assessment, and resource selection.
- The Expand/Sustain stage investigates the monitoring and feedback systems related to instructional design, instructional delivery, and student outcomes.

What Does UDL Mean for a Teacher?

As within any educational practice, teachers are the lifeblood of implementation. Different from other top-down or prescriptive models within education, UDL cannot be sustained by teachers without some organizational support. While individual teachers can implement UDL without support, our work has demonstrated that this practice is not sustainable, effectively scaled, or consistently implemented. It is highly suggested that teachers interested in implementing UDL receive the support of building (and ideally district) leadership prior to and during implementation. Upon effective implementation of UDL, the authors have recognized that teachers generally have the following characteristics:

- **Have a shared understanding of praxis.**
 - Have a foundational understanding of UDL, instructional strategy and design, instructional technology, cognition and learning, proactive behavior management and student engagement, and self-determination.
 - Have a recognized understanding of both their individual and distributed expertise (pedagogical, content, etc.) that is utilized when designing and implementing a UDL-based learning environment.

- Have a shared vision for what education and learning look like and mean within their school.
- Are learner centered and realize the design of learning directly impacts learner outcomes.
- **Are data-driven problem solvers, critical thinkers, and active designers.**
 - View instructional design and teaching as an iterative process influenced by learner variability and performance.
 - Are encouraged and given the authority as well as mental and physical tools to iteratively design for all learners.
 - Are able to actively move through the design process.
 - Recognize that they think differently about lesson design and may even talk about becoming engineers or designers of learning.
- **Are collaborators who actively communicate.**
 - Actively seek collaboration and actively communicate about what works as well as the challenges they are facing within their learning environments.
 - Work together sharing unit/lesson ideas or developing solutions to problems within a learning design.
 - Often design models of instruction that make use of both their expertise and their colleagues' expertise. Examples of these models include co-teaching, focusing on individual subject preferences in all grades, and classroom management design.
- **Are trustful and take responsibility for ALL learners.**
 - View all learners as their learners, regardless of their assigned classroom, performance levels, and label.
 - Are able to identify when something is not working and needs to be redesigned.
 - View themselves as having the knowledge and skills to be an active team member within greater context of the learning environment.
 - Rely on their own work as well as the work of others to facilitate success for all learners within the environment.

Suggestions for Teachers to Move Toward Implementation.

- Become familiar with the three principles of UDL and how they are defined.
- Become familiar with the four Critical Elements of UDL and how they are manifested during a lesson.
- Become familiar with the guidelines, choosing one guideline at a time, and begin implementing them within your lessons.
- Become familiar with the 5-step Instructional Planning Process that makes use of backwards design.
- Connect with other teachers who are using UDL to plan lessons and structure the classroom.
- Perform resource mapping to identify personally owned and school owned resources.
- Take other action steps that move you toward the aforementioned characteristics.

What Does UDL Mean for a School and a District?

The implementation and sustainability of UDL at the classroom level is influenced by both school and district level support. The structures and supports put in place can aid teachers as they gain confidence in their implementation of UDL. Importantly, UDL should not be viewed as another or separate layer within the complex puzzle of pre-existing and ever-changing school and district wide initiatives. The authors' have witnessed that when UDL is viewed as another layer or simply something done during instruction, its implementation achieves minimal success and sustainability. As a framework, UDL implementation should interweave with curriculum design, assessment, instructional technology, professional development, infrastructure development, and instructional resource procurement. Being a design framework, UDL easily integrates into initiatives such as Common Core, STEM education, differentiation, blended learning, and various other initiatives. The authors' work has shown that the following characteristics are associated with districts that have implemented UDL:

- **Shared understanding and support of praxis.**
 - Establish a common language around the implementation of UDL so new knowledge, the application of that new knowledge, and the thinking behind new ideas can be effectively shared across the school and/or district.
 - All personnel have a shared vision for what education is and most importantly what learning looks like and means across the school and district.

- **Centralized focus across the system.**
 - Establish a clear focus for instruction as it relates to UDL.
 - Share this vision with all district personnel as well as the community at large.
 - Establish 3-5 key outcomes that will clearly identify the implementation of UDL throughout the district.
 - Recognize the importance of UDL as a common design framework across other instructional and learning environment initiatives.
 - **Connect instructional resources and technology infrastructure.**
 - View technology simply as another tool or resource for supporting teaching and learning.
 - Measure usefulness of resources or technology around the impact or potential impact on teaching and learning.
 - Continually investigate how resource/technology policy and infrastructure support learner use and outcomes.
 - Continually investigate whether policy and infrastructure inadvertently create barriers to use and outcomes.
 - Continually investigate and clarify how the current technology infrastructure is relative to the needs of users and the learning environments.
 - Identify whether infrastructure provides opportunities for exploration around individualized technology, enhanced learning, or assistive technology options.
 - **Establish instructional exchange.**
 - Establish a supported culture of idea and resource exchange among schools and teachers.
 - Provide mechanisms (such as digital portals), times for collaborative planning, or working professional development days to design UDL aligned instruction.
 - **Empower teachers.**
 - By recognizing the role they play in information exchange and idea creation.
 - By demonstrating that their voices are heard and responded to when implementing new programs, curricula, and ideas.
 - By providing the flexibility necessary for their personal growth timetables.
 - By encouraging teachers to innovate and iteratively design around barriers to learning.
 - By providing training and support that model UDL.
 - By providing timely feedback to support their growth in UDL implementation.
 - By providing clear measurable evaluations that align with UDL.
- Suggestions for Moving Toward School and District Implementation**
- **Contact known entities or individuals skilled in UDL implementation who are able to consult or support implementation initiatives.**
 - **Designate individuals to lead implementation efforts.**
 - Measure potential willingness for UDL implementation within schools.
 - Establish a UDL point person or small team of early adopters at the building level.
 - Establish a UDL point person or small team at the district level.
 - **Provide training and support for those individuals.**
 - Provide the UDL point person/small team with access to training and support specific to UDL implementation.
 - Provide instructional coaches for teachers moving through the process of implementation.
 - **Connect those individuals with others in the field focused on UDL implementation.**
 - Establish time for school wide and district wide personnel to plan and share successes and challenges to UDL implementation.
 - Utilize existing digital platforms or establish a digital platform structured for resource development, resource sharing, and idea sharing.
 - **Establish regular check-ins with designated individuals.**
 - Celebrate successes at school and district level.
 - Create a schedule for check-in's.
 - Define the purpose and steps involved in a check-in.

- **Identify instructional resources and technology.**
 - Conduct UDL building level surveys of instructional resources and technology infrastructure.
 - Identify potential design limitations and barriers to UDL implementation.
 - Catalogue district supported and currently utilized instructional resources.
 - Identify whether instructional resources are being used and how.
 - Investigate how the use of instructional resources relates to the UDL framework and whether some resources could be used differently to enhance learning.
 - Identify solutions to infrastructure limitations for supporting UDL implementation.
- **Defined strategies that fit the culture of individual schools.**
 - Clearly identify then define the culture of each school within the district.
 - Use that definition to design supports and a UDL implementation plan within each school. Plans should integrate measurable goals and behaviors for reaching these goals.
- **Define data collection and desired outcomes.**
 - Identify the purpose behind the data use.
 - Investigate data based on the identified purpose.
 - Establish plan of action based on those data reports.
 - Identify actual behaviors and support actions that move toward achieving desired outcomes.
- **Shared understanding and support of praxis across districts.**
 - Establish a common language around the implementation of UDL so new knowledge, the application of that new knowledge, and the thinking behind new ideas can be effectively shared.
- **Support statewide collaborations/networks for UDL implementation and personnel preparation.**
 - Establish state level UDL implementation network or team comprised of district and building level personnel going through the implementation process.
 - Provide opportunities at state led conferences and meetings for districts involved in UDL implementation to network, share successes, and brainstorm solutions around challenges.
 - Provide a platform/utilize an existing platform specifically designed for networking to discuss UDL.
- **Movement toward using multiple means for expression to demonstrate success in meeting state learning standards.**
 - Explore opportunities to gather data on student success using a variety of measures including non-standardized examples.
- **Development of LEA-focused support materials for implementing UDL.**
 - Provide examples and guidance documents to districts outlining suggested structures that should be in place for UDL implementation at the district level.
- **Alignment of infrastructure that provides leadership and oversight for technology, curriculum, and special education.**
 - Provide examples and guiding documents to districts on how to align technology and curriculum.
 - Provide examples and guiding documents to districts on how to align technology infrastructure and use with special education supports and services.
- **Empower district leadership to create innovative solutions and environments for meeting the needs of all students.**
 - Establish district leadership professional development as well as district level resources for implementation.

What Does UDL Mean for a State?

States that choose to support the implementation of UDL across their districts play a critical and influential role. By establishing a vision that asserts the value of UDL, states demonstrate an understanding that learner variability exists across all learners. While very few state education agencies have publically adopted UDL across all education practices, various state level agencies have implemented UDL in a number of state initiatives. In fact, a recent policy study by the National Center on UDL (2012) demonstrated that all 50 states had some level of UDL implementation. Some states have implemented UDL with other initiatives such as the Common Core, STEM education, and online education. Below are characteristics associated with state level implementation of UDL.

- Create RFPs utilizing UDL as a framework for curriculum selection and/or instructional model implementation.

Suggestions for Moving Toward State Level Implementation.

- **Contact known entities or individuals skilled in UDL implementation who are able to consult or support implementation initiatives.**
- **Identify district-level leaders with a desire to implement UDL.**
 - Share introductory information about the state's approval of UDL as an instructional design.
 - Invite interested district leaders to contact a designated state employee.
- **Establish resources for supporting the statewide implementation of UDL.**
 - Adopt/develop tools such as UDL building infrastructure surveys to help schools and buildings in implementation.
 - Adopt/develop planning templates for schools/districts to develop UDL implementation plans.
 - Adopt/develop instructional walkthrough tools that support greater reflective practice and alignment to UDL.
 - Adopt/develop tools such as digital portals and resource exchanges for encouraging statewide implementation initiatives.
- **Provide networking opportunities for those individuals or individuals they choose.**
 - Establish regional hubs and consortiums for facilitating implementation.
 - Establish regional demonstration schools to encourage implementation.
 - Establish meetings and/or conferences that provide district leaders involved in the implementation of UDL a time to share success and challenges.
 - Support the establishment of instructional support models such as instructional coaching and professional learning communities.
 - Encourage teams or schools of early adopters by providing establishing competitive grants that provide of time, resources, and supports.

How Families are Part of UDL Implementation

In the authors' experience, schools and districts that adopt the UDL framework also set the tone for increased positive interaction with families. By developing a learning culture that accepts and purposefully designs for variability, teachers and administrators can experience more positive interactions with parents and other community members. Overall, schools become a core structure within the community. For example, schools have increased positive interactions with families by hosting a UDL-based school night. Here, families explored and understood how curriculum, strategies, and tools came together to support a truly engaging environment, preparing their learners for the future. Schools have also carried the notion of variability into thinking about families. They have developed family communications that consider things such as alternative languages and adult illiteracy and encourage teachers to use engaging activities such as video to communicate student achievement.

CONCLUSION

As UDL becomes more familiar across the world, educators are beginning to recognize the impact it can have on systems at the local and state levels. For example, a recent project at CAST funded by the Gates Family Foundation looked closely at the process of UDL implementation across four districts (Ganley & Ralabate, 2013). This work exemplified not only the complexity of educational systems but also the positives that can occur on behalf of students when professionals begin working with one another within a framework. UDL continues to provide the guidance these districts seek to ensure each student is provided with the educational opportunities necessary for success (see <http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation>).

This paper seeks to further the conversations around roles within UDL implementation. Just as UDL is built on the concept of variability, the authors recognize that each individual, setting, and structure involved with UDL implementation will vary; however, if global characteristics can be identified and researched, this could help more educational systems adopt UDL. Ultimately, the authors hope to support the momentum that continues to build around UDL implementation.

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