

NARRATOR: Welcome to the Universal Design for Learning series, a rich media professional development resource, supporting expert teaching in learning from the National Center on UDL. In this session, we will learn about UDL implementation as a process of change.

DAVID ROSE: Every child is really a complex system, a whole host of strength and weaknesses. And we think of them like systems. Similarly, school districts are complex systems. And the process of UDL implementation is very much like the way we think about teaching students with UDL.

PATRICIA RALABATE: UDL implementation is not a set of discrete steps or protocols that everybody does in exactly the same way. It's a process: an iterative, continuously improving cycle of learning, reflection, and growth. And it's designed in a UDL way, applying the UDL principles and guidelines to a systems change approach. In this way, you can customize the supports that are provided to districts in order to meet their unique needs.

Although we've identified five phases of UDL implementation, we recognize that each school district or higher education institution will approach the UDL implementation process in a unique manner. Therefore, we need to anticipate different paths and plan for scaffolds and supports that will meet each system's needs. This is an important distinction that makes UDL implementation different from other initiatives that attempt to hold participants to a specific lockstep implementation approach.

One of the first things that a school, a district, or a higher education institution should do when they're investigating Universal Design for Learning implementation is to consider what their needs are. Why would they change what they're currently doing? What specific needs do they want to address? Starting with a clearly identified need is critical to successful UDL implementation at a systemic level.

NARRATOR: Dr. Roger Plunkett, assistant superintendent in the Baltimore County Public School District, identifies the needs that UDL implementation will address.

ROGER PLUNKETT: We're considering UDL as a framework because we're in the midst of revising our curriculum. We're rebuilding our curriculum. We're working to align our curriculum with the common core state standards. We want our curriculum to be teacher friendly, as well as student friendly. But more importantly, the curriculum must meet the needs of all learners. The UDL framework has all the components that we need to move toward the 21st century curriculum. It was truly a no-brainer for us.

NARRATOR: This graphic illustrates how the UDL implementation process occurs in an iterative, continuously improving series of phases. In 2005, Fixsen et al identified stages of implementation. CAST has adapted these stages to include five phases of UDL implementation that are recursive in nature. They are: explore, prepare, integrate, scale, and optimize.

Let's take a moment to stop the video and reflect on what we've discussed so far. What would you identify as a critical educational need in your district? What would you like to see done about this need? In what ways will UDL implementation help your district to address this need? Stop the video and discuss these three questions. Restart the video when you are ready to learn more about the five phases of the UDL implementation process.

At first, a school district or higher education institution begins exploring UDL. During the explore phase, the focus is on investigating UDL as a potential system-wide decision-making framework, building awareness about UDL with key players within and outside of the system, and determining the willingness and interest of staff to begin district UDL implementation.

In this following segment, Jeff Diedrich, director of Michigan Integrated Technology Supports, describes a process used by one district to establish interest and ownership in UDL implementation.

JEFF DIEDRICH: Willingness and interest on the part of district staff and community is essential for Universal Design for Learning. We recently worked with a district that wants to implement Universal Design for Learning on a building-wide level. The request from the principal was, can you come in and do a one-day workshop on Universal Design for Learning? And in talking with the principal, there was some concern about buy-in. He wanted to make sure that his teachers were invested in it and they owned it.

And so rather than coming in and providing an overview of the Universal Design for Learning, we stepped back and we used a process called structured dialogic design, structured dialogue. And we presented a focusing, triggering question for the teachers to react to. And that question had to do with, how do we meet the needs of all students, essentially. But it didn't incorporate Universal Design for Learning in any way.

So they generated roughly 68 ideas. And then once they did that, they clarified the ideas. We then took that back and looked at all their ideas, and we did an alignment. Well, how does Universal Design for Learning, or does Universal Design for Learning address this? Does it address for this? And some of them it did, many of them it did, and some it didn't.

So now when we are planning for training with the district, we can go back and we can use their language. You stated one of your requirements is this to make sure that all students are successful. This is how Universal Design for Learning can support that. That way, the teachers, they were -- they're co-owners of it and we can help them move forward.

NARRATOR: After exploring the UDL framework, leaders within the system make the decision that they want to implement UDL as a systemic framework. The next phase involves preparing for UDL

implementation. During the prepare phase, the focus is on creating a climate that is flexible, but maintains high expectations for all; mapping needed resources and processes, which might include specific personnel, structures such as planning time, materials, curriculum, and professional development; and defining a strategic vision, plan of action, and expected outcomes.

Let's listen to leaders in the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation talk about how they prepared their Indiana district for the UDL implementation process.

GEORGE VAN HORN: Looking at everything we were doing and saying everything we're doing is good and has good intentions, but it's random. And we needed to tie things together. Agreeing that UDL was that framework that was going to help us tie things together was a crucial step. And then developing a plan of, okay, how do we go from three of us thinking this a wonderful idea to actually making a difference in our buildings?

BILL JENSEN: We had written a document, a white paper kind of outlining, again, a conceptual framework for the school corporation. It kind of evolved around learning and what that would look like in the 21st century, what that should look like in the 21st century. And then as we got -- George exposed us to Universal Design for Learning, we went back and added onto that white paper about instruction in BCSC, what that would look like, and how it was based on Universal Design for Learning and what that was. That became part of this white paper, this major conceptual framework, very early on.

NARRATOR: As preparations conclude, educators begin applying the UDL framework to teaching and learning, and putting in place a vehicle for reviewing its effectiveness. During the integrate phase, the focus is on creating individual and system-wide structures and processes to support implementation and evaluate its effectiveness; developing educator expertise, and applying UDL to instructional practices and decision-making; and fostering collaboration and support to integrate UDL broadly.

Liz Berquist, a UDL facilitator, highlights a couple of the different ways that districts can develop educator expertise and foster collaboration.

LIZ BERQUIST: There's a number of ways that you can develop educator expertise around Universal Design for Learning. I think the first and most important is to help teachers connect UDL to what they're already doing. For example, in one county where we're working, they have just launched a teaching and learning framework that's new to the district, so helping folks see how UDL fits within that framework is essential, because that framework guides everything that they do.

The other piece is more concrete. And it's giving teachers very specific examples. So after you've learned about the UDL framework, here is a tool that's going to help you design a lesson. For example,

we have the UDL lesson builder. And we ask teachers to design a lesson using that tool. And if they're not 100% comfortable with UDL yet, there are scaffolds that are built into that, reminding them of the UDL principles, taking them out to the guidelines, linking them to digital resources to provide multiple means. That's really important because it's concrete and they're walking away from a session with something that they've already done.

Professional learning communities, or PLCs, are fabulous ways to provide people with a structure for learning more about Universal Design for Learning. Some of the schools that we work with already have PLCs set up around other content areas or subject matter, so the teachers are familiar with the PLC model. There's other schools that have never even heard of a PLC before, so you have that extra step of introducing what is a PLC, how is it different from a teaching team or a study group. And it's really important to emphasize that a PLC has that same shared goal at the end.

It's important to also provide incentives for teachers for participating in the PLC beyond just the, you know, internal motivators for joining a professional learning community. Some of the districts that I've worked with have been very thoughtful about the time that they give to teachers. For example, they do creative scheduling. They think outside the box so that there's common planning time. One of the districts has provided substitutes so that teachers can take some time during the day to learn more about UDL and spend more than just an hour. They can really kind of roll their sleeves up and get into it with a little more time.

For after-school professional developments, all of the districts have made sure that they provide teachers with stipends. Something else that's been very useful for teachers is to earn credit towards continuing education, or even a master's degree. And there's multiple options for that. So just thinking outside the box is really important.

NARRATOR: When ready, a school district or higher education institution expands UDL implementation across the system as a teaching process and decision-making framework. During the scale phase, the focus is on promoting ongoing professional growth by supporting a UDL community of practice responsive to individual and systemic variability; expanding effective practices, processes, and structures through advanced professional development and technical assistance; and enhancing an integrated system-wide approach to UDL implementation through continual evaluation of gaps and needs.

Loui Lord Nelson, a former UDL coordinator at Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation, explains how the district expanded effective practices by developing a teacher evaluation tool.

LOUI LORD NELSON: Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation wanted to design a rubric to support their teachers' implementation of UDL in the classroom. And that rubric was used for several years by both teachers and administrators together as a communication tool.

And a few years after that, the school corporation decided that they wanted to embed UDL within their evaluation system. And so they used that rubric as a basis, alongside other tools that were required by the state, and they have now designed an evaluation system where 50% of it is dependent upon the usage and implementation of UDL in the classroom.

NARRATOR: Because UDL implementation is a process of continuous improvement, we want to do more than sustain the practices that have been adopted. We want to build procedures that allow for consistent, ongoing innovation, refinement, and improvement. Therefore, this last phase is referred to as the optimize phase.

During the optimize phase, the focus is on enhancing a system-wide culture that aims to maximize improvement of teaching and learning practices in a way that reflects and aligns with the UDL principles; predicting, preparing, and responding to potential internal and external changes that could impact UDL implementation in the future; and maximizing improvement by embedding processes to respond to variability that exists within the system. As Jeff Diedrich explains, embedding UDL into the culture is critical to optimizing UDL implementation.

JEFF DIEDRICH: When districts want to move towards full implementation, scale, and sustainability, they want to consider building it into the culture. It can't be dependent on one individual. There's research that says that there has to be 80% buy-in for an initiative to be successful and sustained. And I think that's critical with Universal Design for Learning because if you have a principal that leaves, you want it embedded into that culture so that it can be picked up right by the next principal.

If it's embedded, truly embedded in that culture, it should come up in the interview with subsequent staff so that you're bringing in someone that's fully prepared to embrace that framework and ensure that even if they aren't familiar, you should be able to ask questions that get at whether they're going to align with the framework of universal design, or that philosophy.

The other factor is, again, to get that 80% buy-in, I think it's imperative that you collaboratively build this. And it takes, research indicates, three to five, seven years to fully implement and sustain. So this is not short-term. And we all want that quick fix. We all want it to happen right now. Districts at all levels need to understand that it's going to take time. But through that, you build that shared ownership

and that sustainability. So you have to include the entire community of stakeholders in that, and then you're going to be able to sustain that.

NARRATOR: Let's summarize what's been discussed so far. UDL implementation is a process that begins with an identified need for change. Because systems are variable, UDL implementation varies from place to place, system to system. However, the process of UDL implementation usually occurs in a recursive progression through five phases: explore, prepare, integrate, scale, and optimize.

Now that you've learned about the UDL implementation process, here are some questions you might want to consider to determine how to get started. What identified need in your school or district could be addressed by utilizing the UDL framework? What else does the district need to know about UDL to make an informed decision? What can the district learn from others who are engaged in implementing UDL as a framework for decision-making? What are the benefits and challenges of implementing UDL as a systemic change process?

Thanks for joining us for this session on the process of UDL implementation. You can learn more by downloading materials in the Resource section, and by going to the National Center on UDL. To find out how school, district, and state education leaders view UDL implementation, participate in the discussion forum entitled UDL Implementation: A Process of Change, on the UDL Connect community page. Please join us again as we continue to add new sessions to the UDL series.