

Introduction to PLC: UDL-PLC Series

The HIAT Team of MCPS in Maryland, began systematically supporting the implementation of UDL to individual schools in 2006. Prior to this, professional learning on UDL had been incorporated into workshops and mandatory training. However, once the team was providing direct implementation support to multiple schools per year, they needed a more efficient way to bring UDL to scale. To achieve this, they developed online UDL professional learning communities (PLCs) using a learning management system to delve deeper into topics related to UDL implementation. Using a cloud-based file system combined with a PLC blogsite would serve as an alternative to an LMS.

During the 2010-2011 school year the HIAT Team developed a sequence of learning and discussion modules to support schools invested in UDL implementation. The series of modules became the basis for a 3-credit, online, asynchronous continuing professional development (CPD) course that commenced during the 2011-12 school year and continues to be used to support the implementation of UDL. The online UDL PLC approach has been used to provide yearlong support to elementary, middle and high schools, as well as with groups of principals, and curriculum developers. These modules are more than just individual study topics, they foster the development of a community of adult learners, encouraging reflection and discourse related to UDL.

What is a UDL Professional Learning Community (PLC)?

A UDL-PLC is a group of educators focused at a deeper level on the teaching practices aligned with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Members actively engaged in the implementation of UDL focus on instructional design that makes learning more accessible to ALL students. The emphasis is on the analysis of teacher practices, ongoing reflection related to UDL, and the sharing of insights and strategies.

Who should participate?

UDL is a practical framework for *all educators* to engage, challenge and support all learners. School-based UDL PLCs are most effective when they include staff from a variety of subjects and specialization areas. In addition to classroom teachers, consider including media specialists, special educators, and paraeducators. Commitment to full participation is much more important than ensuring that every grade or academic team is represented. Participation is best when it is voluntary and is less when staff members are “voluntold”. Ample professional learning on the UDL framework is a prerequisite to the start of a PLC. This can take the form of face-to-face or online professional development, such as a UDL book club or more formal training on the pedagogical foundations of the UDL.

What is the role of administrators?

For any study group to be effective, the members need to know that their work is important and valued within the mission of the school. Consider how UDL framework fits with your school or department's vision and how the PLC members can contribute to this. School-based PLCs will need:

- A representative from the PLC to be a member of the school leadership team
- Time to collaborate together
- A voice in the decision making about how to distribute and share technology resources in the building
- An avenue for sharing their insights for overall school improvement with the school's administration
- Input into the "Look Fors" used to evaluate the performance of teaching staff implementing UDL
- Professional recognition for their work

What do you need to do to get started?

In some situations, a group of individuals are familiar with UDL and have already committed to participating in a UDL-PLC. When individuals are familiar with UDL but have yet to engage in systematic implementation, the best way to form a PLC is to first meet with all possible participants to discuss the purpose of the UDL-PLC. Then use an application process to gauge the interest and commitment of volunteers. Initial training on UDL tenets and instructional design is provided before the UDL-PLC commences. To learn more about moving from planning stages to UDL implementation, click on the link to the UDL-IRN Summit Proceedings: [Making the Transition from Planning to Implementation: Essential Logistics.](#)

To carry out the online UDL-PLC modules, you will need to have access to a Learning Management System (LMS) (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas) where video's and documents can be shared and where group discussions can take place. Without access to an LMS, you will need to develop an online location for sharing documents and videos, (e.g., Dropbox or Google Drive) as well as an online location where discussions can take place (e.g., WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr).

UDL PLC Topics

The UDL PLC study topics are divided into 15 modules. Each module serves as a guide for a single face-to-face or online meeting of a PLC. Many of the topics lend themselves to a flipped classroom approach, or having groups implement a practice in the classroom first and then come together to discuss the practice. Modules can be presented in the order listed below, which is how HIAT has presented them as part of a 3-credit course, but PLCs can create their own learning path by using them in any order you wish.

Each module has a “Learn” segment and a “Discuss” segment. Modules also provide resources, articles and/or websites that support the session topics and launch the discussions. The “Discuss” section contains a reflection and a discussion prompt for each session. For each discussion topic, you will be asked to formulate your own response to the prompt and reply to your colleagues. The UDL- PLC is intended to be a community of learners who collectively interact, through discourse, to enhance and support the professional performance of UDL implementation.

UDL-PLC Modules

1. [Setting the UDL Professional Learning Community](#)
2. [UDL Look-Fors](#)
3. [UDL Story Telling](#)
4. [Classroom Environment and Technology Routines](#)
5. [Instructional Barrier](#)
6. [Technology Tools and Learning Barriers](#)
7. [Outreach Within Your School Community](#)
8. [Time: The Big Barrier](#)
9. [A Deeper Understanding of UDL’s Impact](#)
10. [Exploring Graphic Organizers](#)
11. [Building Student Ownership of Choices](#)
12. [Sharing Teacher-Created Materials](#)
13. [Web Resources and the UDL Framework](#)
14. [Planning Ahead](#)
15. [Summary and Celebration](#)