

# UDL-IRN SIG: Implementers; An Implementation Tool That Works To Define A Gold Standard

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### ABSTRACT

*It's been dubbed "the million dollar" question: what does a UDL classroom really look like? Truly, there isn't one correct answer to that question. However, all successful UDL classrooms make use of common elements. A Practice Profile includes those common elements and helps teachers implement and refine UDL practices. At the organizational level, a Practice Profile helps districts define what makes up UDL classrooms and what UDL classrooms look like across their different educational settings. The Profile's success stems from its ability to create empowering dialogue between educators as they share and build upon one another's teaching experiences and UDL principles. This session explores what a Practice Profile is, ways they are used, and how to go about personalizing a Practice Profile template to improve instructional UDL practice.*

### KEYWORDS

Implementation, Implementation Science, Practice Profile, Gold Standard, Organizational Tool, Planning, UDL Instruction, Personalization, Expert Learner

### INTRODUCTION

Over the course of last year, the Universal Design for Learning-Implementation Research Network Special Interest Group (UDL-IRN SIG) has worked to create an organizational Universal Design for Learning (UDL) implementation tool that can assist local educational agencies (LEAs) in system-wide UDL operations aimed at developing expert learners. Out of its work, it developed a Practice Profile, which educators and LEA's can use to address educational barriers related to learning environments, culture, language and other factors. Use of the Practice Profile ensures instruction is based on educational research, best practices and competency alignment. The Practice Profile is employed by practitioners and key stakeholders in three stages: developmental, implementation, and evaluation.

Another way to look at a Practice Profile is to consider it a performance-based method of operationalizing and assessing the fidelity of UDL implementation. In the medical industry, a typical **profile** includes data about patients' illnesses, drug therapies, immunization histories, use of medical services, as well as cost of care and hospitalization rates. In education, a Practice Profile helps teachers plan and execute UDL

instruction and barrier free learning environments. It includes identification and synopsis of Critical Components of UDL instruction, UDL Instruction Implementation Assessment, and Defined Measurable Data Paths (Metz, 2016).

### BACKGROUND

The Practice Profile tool emerged out of UDL-IRN SIG efforts to design applicable and functionally feasible UDL implementation supports that incorporate aspects of Implementation Science Tools developed by National Implementation Research Network (NIRN). However, the Practice Profile is only a tool. It is important to note that if used in isolation, full implementation cannot be achieved. Other components of Implementation Science must also systematically correspond with the Practice Profile, including Organizational, Competency, and Leadership Drivers (Fixsen et. al., 2015).

Similar to UDL in the classroom, district wide implementation of UDL should work to reduce and remove barriers to help ensure the implementation is successful. It is imperative for districts to make sure they employ all necessary Organizational Drivers to support implementation, including knowledge, time, policy, and funding. It is also important to solicit the expertise of professionals in technology, special education, mental health, social emotional learning, and behavioral supports. Therefore, it is imperative that districts implementing UDL proactively plan and facilitate vital collaboration time among professionals. Funding limitations, of course, can stifle professional development opportunities and needed professional and classroom resources and materials. Finally, the system/district must consider student outcomes and performance assessment (fidelity) checks to ensure effective implementation. Employing cycles of improvement and inquiry are necessary to maintain confidence in the progress of the district's implementation goal (Fixsen et. al., 2015).

The Practice Profile includes consideration and understanding of a set of Implementation Drivers (see Figure 1). The Competency Drivers consist of Coaching, Training, and Selection. Systems planning on implementing UDL will need to thoroughly consider these areas when hiring new staff for example. Districts will want to make sure new applicants are receptive to using the UDL framework, be willing to play an integral part in the implementation of the guidelines in their

role, and possess the appropriate attitude toward learning that is essential for true UDL implementation. Of utmost importance would be acceptance of the idea that all students can become expert learners. Systems or districts will also want to support the development of the essential knowledge and skills needed to implement the behaviors and actions included in the practice profile, Training and Coaching (Blase, Fixsen, Naoom, & Wallace, 2005).

The Leadership Drivers consist of factors related to the technical and adaptive characteristics associated with leadership. For example, how leaders respond to both adult and student data is a vital part of successful UDL implementation. If data is showing that teachers are not exhibiting the ideal implementation behaviors, it is imperative that both technical and adaptive approaches be utilized. Consider this. If teachers have little time to meet with UDL coaches and receive feedback on their teaching practices, then swift actions by leaders to adjust teachers' schedules to include additional time, is effective Technical Leadership. However, if there is a trend in staff attitudes against the idea of expert learning for all, the uncertainty of positive outcomes becomes much higher. Therefore, different approaches and considerations for addressing staff attitudes, such as additional training on learning progressions, professional development on mindset, or additional coaching on including high expectations for all students into lesson design, represents Adaptive Leadership. These considerations and critical components should be captured in the practices profile to some extent, again making it a useful tool for supporting each type of Driver (Fixsen et. al., 2015).

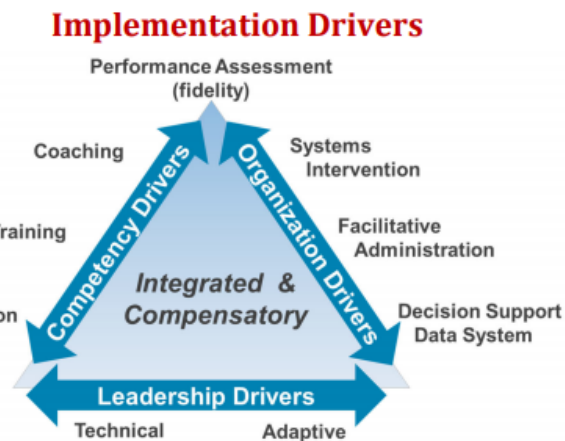


Figure 1 Implementation Drivers (see Fixsen et. al., 2015)

## PRACTICE PROFILE

### What and Why

While implementing and continuously replicating educational frameworks like UDL, LEA's who clearly define and strategically operationalize their behaviors in reference to ideal or gold standards are apt to be more successful. Practice Profiles help LEAs understand what quintessential UDL application looks like. In addition, since the UDLIRN SIG Practice Profile acts as a coaching and training reference, it also helps refine current practice and LEA's develop deeper understandings of UDL theory.

Many members of the district or organization work together to co-create what is needed to make the innovation, in this case UDL, a success. Because experts and novice members develop

personalized Practice Profiles, LEA's can adjust them to meet the needs of local demographics. Locally created Practice Profiles allow Local Education Agencies to participate in extensive conversations about how their district can fully implement and integrate a UDL framework. These conversations can take place across stakeholder boundaries, and locally defined UDL practices can be refined during internal meetings. For example, specific subject and grade level conversations will shape any UDL and Practice Profile implementation. Recently the UDL Collaborative, a state level group of UDL Consultants from Ohio, used a very similar process to complete their own practice profile for UDL.

### Creating a Practice Profile: How

Because our UDL-IRN SIG is almost exclusively a virtual group, we tailored some of our collaborative procedures early on around recommendations found through NIRN. It was obvious that there was no single way to go about creating or using a Practice Profile. It felt like continuous work was necessary to complete a working UDL Practice Profile, which suggested Practice Profile creation and use could easily transition into future professional development opportunities for LEAs that used them.

The format of the UDL Practice Profile (See Table 1) begins with a column that states why each component is important or the component's contribution to the outcome. Subsequent columns contain specific descriptions of behaviors that could be replicated to achieve various levels of implementation beginning with first column, ideal implementation, then moving through the acceptable variations column (that acknowledge progress or steps being made toward the ideal level of implementation), and the unacceptable variations or harmful variations column. There may be additional columns added for acceptable variations. Our SIG found this unnecessary.

Our creation process first began with impactful conversations centered around core UDL classroom components with educators, CAST members, and training experts. In addition, we consulted with teachers attempting to implement UDL strategies for the first time. Each component of the Practice Profile was created by subcommittees. The content was then reviewed each time the SIG met and then revised based upon group feedback. As a result of these conversations, we categorized a series of desired core components for UDL classrooms. These components, which can be further broken down into subcomponents, worked their way into our Practice Profile.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF THE PRACTICE PROFILE

Our UDL Practice Profile contains three critical components: Clear Goals; Recognizing and Designing for Variability; and Expert Learning for All. However, it is important to note that ideal implementation can only be achieved when all components are in place.

*Additionally, it is also important to note that each district, organization, and agency that completes a Practice Profile will identify their critical components based on their location, experts, and community. The three components identified in the Practice Profile created for this session were identified and completed by members of the group, serves as an example of*

what a Practice Profile for UDL might encompass (See Figure 2).

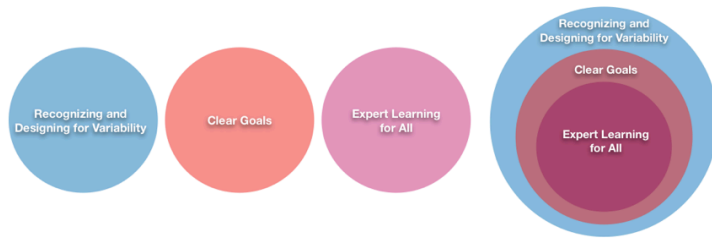


Figure 2. Using all three critical components as lenses to view ideal UDL implementation.

Finally, understanding the critical components of the Practice Profile call for UDL implementors to consider how each critical component: Contributes to outcomes; ideal implementation behaviors; variations of implementation (acceptable and unacceptable); and the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the implementors.

### Critical Component 1: Clear Goals

#### *Contribution to the Outcome*

The Clear Goals component is important to implementation of system wide UDL because clear, communicated standard-based learning goals help develop expert learners by providing teachers and students with pathways that connect to past, current, and future learning in ways that support efficacy and engagement.

#### *Ideal Implementation Behaviors (The Gold Standard)*

The behaviors needed for Ideal Implementation of Clear Goals include: communicating learning goals in multiple ways that are clearly aligned with standards; defining goals as separate from the means, with multiple paths or options for achievement; expressing outcomes to students in a matter that alleviates confusion or anxiety; and considering learner variability.

#### *Acceptable and Unacceptable Variations of Implementation*

These ideas are carried through to the Acceptable and Unacceptable Implementation descriptions that detail how these actions are progressing towards ideal implementation. For example, those who are beginning UDL implementation may not be communicating goals, or the goals may be unaligned to the content standards.

#### *Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities*

The knowledge, skills and abilities needed for this component include: a knowledge of the content standards, deconstruction of the standard, depth of knowledge related to the standard, ability to recognize learner variability, and the ability to assist students in understanding where they are in their learning.

#### *Areas of Impact (Outcome)*

Finally, practitioners know or can prove that the component is in place through observation, work samples, and unit plans, teachers and learners acknowledge and express their understanding in multiple ways throughout the lesson, think about personal learning goals and express where they are in relation to the goal, and can express understanding in multiple ways.

### Critical Component 2: Recognizing and Designing for Variability

#### *Contribution to the Outcome*

The Recognizing and Designing for Variability is important because professionals need to be able determine what students actually know in order to remove barriers, be clear about the purpose of the learning, and what learners need to do to achieve success.

#### *Ideal Implementation Behavior (The Gold Standard)*

Ideal Implementation behaviors that recognize and design for variability include:

- Determining learning targets and the progression or steps for all learners
- Identifying all possible learning barriers
- Using student feedback and formative data to create flexible groups and options for instruction
- Responding to learner variability and barriers by collaborating with district experts (student, school professionals, parents, speech language pathologists, mental health professionals, counselors, teachers working with gifted and talented students, intervention specialists, etc.)
- Including scaffolds that may have not been fully included in previous versions of the lesson (but should be included to address barriers and learner variability)
- Securing resources to remove or limit barriers,
- Intentional use of flexible materials and methods including environmental supports.

Unfortunately, these behaviors are sometimes only partially done, with pieces missing

#### *Acceptable and Unacceptable Variations of Implementation*

Identifying the Acceptable and Unacceptable Variations of the Implementation allow professionals to recognize that they are moving along the right track towards ideal implementation. For example, it is good to recognize when teachers are beginning to identify barriers within their own classroom, but perhaps have not yet considered the full spectrum of potential barriers that exist for ALL students within their classroom. If a student with a more severe disability, or a student with much higher or lower needs were placed in their classroom, would teachers have a strong enough framework, based on UDL and the critical component of recognizing and designing for variability, to be able to appropriately support this student's learning?

#### *Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities*

Professionals will need the knowledge of learning progressions and content standards, cognitive neuroscience (the use of the guidelines and how they activate the three networks of the brain for learning), how to plan with the end in mind using backwards design, and how to identify and address barriers with a variety of instructional methods and materials. They will need to be able to plan with internal and external experts and be able to access potential resources. They will also need to be skilled in instruction and assessment design that includes high expectations for all students.

#### *Areas of Impact (Outcome)*

Professionals will know when they have achieved ideal implementation because there will be evidence. For example,

lesson plans that demonstrate an understanding of standards, learning progressions, learning variability, and specific use of strategies to address learning barriers. Other information may include evidence that professionals are seeking and receiving professional learning, and that they are meeting to discuss student needs with other experts/professionals. Student related evidence of impact may include proof that their input is included in the planning, they are able to express where they are in their learning, that funds are being allocated to support learner variability and reducing barriers, and data that over time, student learning is increasing.

### **Critical Component 3: Expert Learning for All**

#### *Contribution to the Outcome*

The Expert Learning for All component is crucial because students need to learn how to be expert learners so that they can learn in any environment and throughout their life. Teachers need to teach and model how to be an expert learner to ensure students are activating the networks of the brain, truly becoming expert learners in all areas.

#### *Ideal Implementation or Gold Standard*

Actions that show ideal implementation of Expert Learning for All include: teaching strategies and making specific connections to the use of prior knowledge and ways to access it; exposing learners to a variety of tools and resources to help them find structure and remembering new information; modeling how to break down new information into meaningful and relevant ideas that show connections to the current goal; and seeking to understand cross content connections and how topics and skills are used in other classrooms or settings. Ideal Implementation of Expert Learning for All also includes: teaching and modeling the use of learning plans; goal setting; providing feedback to learners on their learning plans; teaching and modeling how to identify strengths and weaknesses, providing scaffolds, and teaching and modeling how to monitor progress. Finally, teaching learners what mastery means, teaching strategies for coping with goal attainment and resiliency, teaching self-monitoring and self-regulatory strategies – including those that support emotional intelligence – are also relevant areas associated with ideal implementation (see UDL and Expert Learners, 2012).

#### *Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities*

To do this, professionals would need to have a variety of knowledge, skills, and abilities that would align, including creating plans for learning, goal-setting, executive functioning, social emotional learning techniques, emotional intelligence, knowledge of how trauma impacts learning, and self-regulatory practices and techniques.

#### *Areas of Impact (Outcome)*

Ideally, professionals would have skills in these areas as well so they could model how to be an expert learner while they themselves are working towards becoming expert practitioners.

### **THE UDL PRACTICE PROFILE: AN IMPLEMENTATION TOOL FOR THE ENTIRE SYSTEM**

The UDL Practice Profile is a vital tool that can be a support to the entire system. The following are some examples of how a district or any educational system can use the practice profile to inform the work that occurs within each driver. This will be captured in the Driver Analysis column (See Table 1) of the Practice Profile.

### **Selection**

What criteria are districts using to select new employees? A Practice Profile could focus the interview process for both employee and employer to make sure both parties were aware of the necessary skills and mindset needed for the position. Would districts want to make knowledge of the UDL Guidelines and Checkpoints a mandatory part of the selection process, or want applicants to simply be open to the idea of expert learning for all students (and try to discern whether or not applicants would be open to training and coaching in the area of UDL)? Perhaps the Practice Profile behaviors and actions are so integral to the selection process, that applicants should be asked to demonstrate UDL-related skills, such as their ability to perform a lesson planning process that includes examples of UDL planning.

### **Training**

One applicant is chosen, the practice profile acts as a reference for professional development. How are districts choosing which training is relevant? It should be aligned to the behaviors that the system has identified and detailed in the Practice Profile. Using the example provided by the SIG, if the training does not support Clear Goals, Recognizing and Designing for Variability, or Expert Learning for All, should the training occur? A district may need to identify what other forms of training are needed to support these three components.

### **Coaching**

Once selection and training have been completed, what ongoing supports should be put in place? If a district is using a UDL coaching model, how is the district providing ongoing feedback and support to their coaches and trainees? What is the focus of the coaching model? How does it relate to the district's ideal level of UDL implementation? The Practice Profile can provide a clear direction for the coach as well as the trainee.

### **Performance (Fidelity) Assessments**

In what manner and form do districts collect information regarding adult data that reflects the fidelity of UDL implementation? Here, the Practice Profile details what the ideal actions should be. Does a district have evidence that fidelity is occurring in its classrooms? How could this be captured and used to strengthen or refine the district's expectations? How will this be communicated to all professionals within the district? Ideally, actions will gain more clarity and become more defined over time. Fundamentally, staff should be engaging in what is meant to be ideal implementation and working towards goals that can be verified via performance assessment.

### **Systems Interventions**

How is the district allocating funds to support the implementation for UDL? The aforementioned practices profile calls for professionals to identify and utilize resources needed to support learner variability. Classrooms teachers alone are not always the only staff needed to secure such resources. How is the district aligning the use of funds with the needs in the classroom? Again, the Practice Profile provides a focus for that conversation which will help the system move forward towards ideal implementation.

### **Facilitative Administration**

How is the district providing time for staff to collaborate and learn from each other? The Practice Profile calls for professionals to recognize that they need access to other professionals (internal or external experts) when they are

planning for learning variability. No one professional will be an expert in every facet of student learning. For truly intentional and proactive lesson planning and design that removes barriers, those professionals need to be accessible to staff during their workweek and planning time. How does a district determine when teachers should plan, and who should be available? Again, the Practice Profile helps to guide that conversation and decision-making.

### **Decision Support Data Systems**

What data regarding adult practices and implementation are you considering as a district? Is the district examining how recent training and coaching is affecting the classrooms? For example, is there evidence that teachers are intentionally planning and using clear goals in the classroom? What is the impact on student learning? Using the Practice Profile as a reference allows the district to determine where they fall within the progression towards ideal implementation and make necessary adjustments along with way. This data should be considered by the district when determining whether the intended outcomes have been achieved.

### **Technical Leadership and Adaptive Leadership**

When leadership is able to look at adult data and make necessary adjustments, this is Technical and Adaptive Leadership. The practice profile can be of use in the decision-making and leadership choices needed by the district. How are districts supporting learning or performance gaps in their staff? Would you want to fill a gap related to clear goals by a curriculum based coach? Perhaps allowing for planning time with someone who has knowledge of assistive technology is necessary for teachers who are struggling in planning for variability. Districts can use the Practice Profile to guide their thinking and ask; do our teachers have the necessary

knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to be able to implement UDL well? If not, what actions are required?

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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**Table 1** Column Headings for the UDLIRN SIG Universal Design for Learning Practice Profile

<b>Critical Component (Non Negotiable)</b>	<b>Contribution to the Outcome</b>	<b>Ideal Implementation (Gold Standard: What it IS)</b>	<b>Acceptable Implementation</b>	<b>Unacceptable Implementation (What it is NOT)</b>	<b>Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities</b>	<b>Driver Analysis</b>	<b>Areas of Impact (Outcomes)</b>
<i>Critical Component Description:</i>	<i>Why the critical component is important:</i>	<i>Implementer &amp; Learner Behaviors:</i>	<i>Implementer &amp; Learner Behaviors:</i>	<i>Implementer &amp; Learner Behaviors:</i>	<i>What's crucial to put "it" in place:</i>	<i>How to ensure "it" is in place:</i>	<i>How to prove "it" is in place:</i>

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