

# UDL-IRN SIG Implementers: An Investigation Into the Alignment of Effective Innovations and Universal Design for Learning

**Cherie Smith**

State Support Team 6  
Wapakoneta, Ohio, United States  
csmith@sst6.org

**Lindsay Slater**

State Support Team 3  
Independence, Ohio, United States  
lindsay.slater@escneo.org

**Craig Blum**

Illinois State University  
Normal, Illinois, United States  
cblum@ilstu.edu

## ABSTRACT

*The members of the UDL-IRN SIG are currently implementing, or supporting districts in the implementation of UDL. The SIG created a process that helps educators align UDL with other effective innovations. The Effective Innovations (EI) Alignment Process is based on the idea that critical components of effective innovations intersect. The recognition of this intersection deepens the understanding and improves the effectiveness of all EIs.*

## KEYWORDS

Effective Innovations, Alignment, Implementation, Implementation Science, Universal Design for Learning, Personalized Learning

## INTRODUCTION

Since the previous UDL-IRN Summit, the Universal Design for Learning-Implementation Research Network Special Interest Group (UDL-IRN SIG) has continued to use and apply the UDL Practice Profile, created by the SIG in 2018. A practice profile identifies and summarizes critical components of an innovation (Metz, 2016). The UDL Practice Profile, as well as expert opinion and research from other EIs, were used in an alignment process. The UDL Practice Profile was utilized in the EI Alignment Process as a way to identify core components to be analyzed in the alignment process. The SIG decided not to create a practice profile for each EI considered (i.e., Personalized Learning).

## BACKGROUND

The SIG chose an alignment tool shared by Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MIBLSI) to compare Universal Design for Learning with an Effective Innovation. An EI is usable, doable, learnable and readily assessed in practice. It is a set of defined practices, systems, and data systems used in schools to achieve outcomes proven to produce desired results. EIs can include broad-based initiatives, such as an integrated behavior and reading multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). This is a program or set of practices that utilizes an assessment and/or data system (MIBLSI, 2018). In order to support objective, district-wide discussion regarding the ways EIs compliment or conflict with each other, the UDL-IRN SIG chose to compare the Universal

Design for Learning Framework with other frameworks and initiatives (EIs) that have similar components.

The core critical components of each EI were identified and defined to maximize the application of the alignment process.

The main reasons for completing an alignment process are 1) to advise the district in the selection or de-selection of an EI, 2) assist the district in leveraging EI components to determine whether they conflict or enhance each other, 3) increase consensus or buy-in for an EI by visually displaying how the effectiveness of its core components will be enhanced if used in conjunction with another EI (MIBLSI, 2018).

## THE ADJUSTED PROCESS

The UDL-IRN SIG completed the steps in the EI Alignment Process shared by MIBLSI (2018), using the documented steps as a guide, and adjusting the sequence as needed. First, the SIG consulted with qualified professionals to support the alignment process, individuals who could speak to the core components of each innovation. Next, the SIG discussed the core components of each EI. The group then determined a starting point for alignment. The SIG began by comparing UDL and Personalized Learning (PL), because districts and professionals robustly debate these two EIs and their intersections.

To begin comparing UDL and PL, the SIG defined the core components of each EI. The UDL Practice Profile served as the foundation for the selection of the core components of UDL. The personalized learning components were derived from *Empowering Learners with the Learner Profile* (McClaskey, 2017). After recording the core components of UDL and PL, the SIG identified areas of alignment. The SIG started with the first component of UDL, as defined by the UDL Practice Profile, and determined whether that component was evident in PL. The team analyzed each component to determine alignment.

This step in the process led to the most debate. Various groups using this process sometimes arrived at different conclusions based on their values and understanding. It allowed the members of the SIG to gain a greater understanding of how

each EI aligned and could potentially support and enhance the effectiveness of the components under review.

The final three steps allowed the members of the SIG to discuss and note which components a) did not align, b) were direct contradictions, or c) increased the effectiveness or strengthened the component by reinforcing it through a different lens.

### **BENEFIT AND USE OF THE ALIGNMENT PROCESS**

The SIG determined that there were benefits to using a formal alignment process to examine multiple EIs. This process could prove valuable for districts and schools who want to implement multiple EIs, including UDL, and are looking for ways to ensure alignment across the data, systems and practices of each EI. This process would assist the teams in determining overlapping, competing and complementary components of each EI.

This alignment process could also prove beneficial to districts and other educators as they seek to understand how the UDL Framework complements many other EIs already in use or under consideration. As with any new EI, educators are often apprehensive about having to implement “one more thing”. While the UDL Framework is not “one more thing,” some may regard it as such. If a district chooses to embrace the UDL Framework as their EI, using a formal alignment process can help teachers and district staff understand the components of other EIs and how UDL can be used to support their continuous improvement efforts.

### **UDL-IRN SIG SUMMARY**

The SIG discussed the application of the alignment process and identified some key conclusions: 1) This process can and should be used by school districts who have potentially competing initiatives or EIs. 2) This process can help educators determine which EIs enhance the UDL Framework, and improve outcomes for all students, and which initiatives compete with the UDL and potentially limit outcomes for all students. 3) When leadership teams are not in agreement on implementing an innovation, this process can be used to determine which EIs support and enhance each other.

### **CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK**

While the UDL-IRN SIG implementers used the EI alignment process to examine the critical components of the UDL Framework and Personalized Learning, the SIG was only able to complete one alignment cycle. The SIG uncovered critical components common to two EIs, where they differ in critical components, and how they intersect and/or enhance one another. The SIG found this alignment process valuable and determined that comparing the UDL Framework with other EIs is an important consideration. Specifically, the SIG wants to compare the UDL Framework to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and to PBIS. Looking for alignment between the UDL Framework and these other EIs (culturally relevant pedagogy and PBIS) would assist the SIG in gaining a deeper understanding of these established EIs and how the UDL Framework enhances, supports and intersects with them.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The UDL-IRN, for creating the Special Interest Groups and specifically the Implementers Group; McKenzie Browning for supporting the organization and publication of the group; the UDL Collaborative members from Ohio who took part in the SIG; the members of the SIG; Kimberly St. Martin from MIBLSI for sharing the District Effective Innovation (EI) Alignment Process with the SIG chair; Becky Rees, the Director of SST6, for supporting the work of the SIG; and Dr. Michele Duda, Implementation Scientist, for sharing expertise that led to the development of the SIG’s Practice Profile.

### **REFERENCES**

- McClaskey, K. (2017). Empowering learners with the learner profile. Retrieved from <https://kathleenmcclaskey.com/2017/08/29/learner-profile/>
- Metz, A. (2016). *Practice Profiles: A Process for Capturing Evidence and Operationalizing Innovations*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Implementation Research Network, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- MIBLSI (2018). District effective innovation (EI) alignment process. Retrieved from [https://miblsi.org/sites/default/files/Documents/PPSC\\_Sequence/LIT/Module7/03\\_District\\_Effective\\_Innovation\\_Alignment\\_Document\\_handout%20only.pdf](https://miblsi.org/sites/default/files/Documents/PPSC_Sequence/LIT/Module7/03_District_Effective_Innovation_Alignment_Document_handout%20only.pdf)