

# Planting Seeds and Growing Forests: From Being A Lone Voice To Being A Movement

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## **Abstract**

*The Three-Block Model of UDL (TBM) was developed by Dr. Jennifer Katz and brought to Manitoba in 2009. By 2015, implementation had been scaled up to a provincial/national level. Courses are taught in nine universities, and the work is spreading across the country. This paper will discuss the process followed, and lessons learned along the way.*

## **Keywords**

Three-Block Model of UDL, Implementation, System Change, Teacher Professional Learning.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2005 the Manitoba legislature passed “Bill 13 – The Appropriate Education Act”, which mandated inclusive education in the province, and suggested “*Inclusive schools should be aware of the concept of universal design. When applied to the field of education, the concept of universal design means that school communities, including teachers, develop plans for the full diversity of their student population. In education, universally designed schools, classrooms, curricula and materials provide all students with access to the resources they require, regardless of their diverse learning needs.*” Thus, the “exploration” phase had already been completed, and a decision made that UDL was what was needed. However, despite this law, as late as 2009, no funding or planning had occurred to support teacher training in UDL. There was no one in the province with the expertise to provide professional development, and most teachers were not even aware of the law and policy regarding UDL. What was needed was an implementation plan to help school divisions assess and reform systemic barriers, help teachers connect the possibilities of UDL with their ability to meet the needs of their students, and then provide professional development to build capacity.

## **BACKGROUND**

The learning needs of experienced teachers are best met through educational programs that meet specific criteria. Wilson and Floden (2003) found that in-service teachers benefit from training that is delivered by experienced teachers, provides opportunities to teach and learn from other teachers, pays attention to both theory and practice,

and provides teachers with the opportunity to apply their learning in their current classrooms. Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) found that one or two-day professional development sessions had little effect on student achievement. Longer teacher education sessions of at least 30 contact hours spread out over six to twelve months were more effective in generating increased achievement in student outcomes.

Providing every teacher in the province with such training required a systemic organizational structure that involved government, universities, teachers’ unions, and school divisions in a collaborative effort. Shifting budgets, initiating new visions and goals, reexamining service delivery, developing support teams, and ongoing collaborative assessment and evaluation, was necessary. A framework was developed that utilized CAST’s implementation process as a guide, working within local contexts and issues (e.g. ministry requirements, cultural influences, and health and wellness initiatives).

## **UDL Implementation**

**Prepare.** Top-down, authoritarian decision making rarely results in positive system change that is sustainable (Harris, 2013; Tewel, 1987). For that reason, initial collaboration began with the teachers’ union so that UDL was seen as a practice that supports teachers, rather than as a mandate. The union hosted free workshops conducted by Dr. Katz, to build relationships and co-create a process that worked within the provincial system. Initially, the preparation stage was multifaceted. Workshops in schools, courses at the university (including a beginners and an advanced summer institute), and research was begun to build momentum and create a groundswell of inspiration. Simultaneously, research was conducted into outcomes for both students and teachers, that documented reduced stress, increased teacher efficacy, and improved staff/classroom climate (Katz, 2013, 2014). In so doing, we were able to move forward in the province and communicate to teachers that universally designed learning environments support both teachers and students, resulting in significant “buy in” from teachers around the province.

**Integrate.** A meeting was called of all the stakeholders, the union, the three universities, the government ministry, community groups, and the school divisions, to

delineate responsibilities. The Manitoba Alliance for Universal Design for Learning (MAUDeL) was formed in an effort to create a coherent systems-change protocol. Subgroups divided into Education and Training, Communication & Advocacy, and Research and Development committees to further the work.

Research then expanded to explore social and emotional outcomes for students in marginalized populations, and with teachers, to determine effective ways of providing professional development, teacher education (at the pre-service level), and service delivery for students in need of additional supports. This allowed the team to provide professional development in the schools, collect data about outcomes, and then work with the schools to determine next steps. Courses at the university were developed to create teacher leaders, and researchers, who could further the work.

The teachers' union continued to support the implementation of UDL and teacher training, sponsoring conferences, supporting government initiatives, and providing professional development for leaders. A PLC of advanced practitioners began training with Dr. Katz to take leadership across regions of the province, and to develop specific areas of expertise (e.g. high school implementation, the role of the principal, etc.). Books and resources such as model units were created to support implementation, and a website, instructional video series, and newsletter were begun.

Our research indicated differences in effective teacher education for pre-service and in-service teachers, and thus separate training processes were implemented.

**Scale.** Implementation in Manitoba is now done systematically. The culture of the ministry has shifted from a special education to an inclusive education model. The government recently changed the funding formula for supporting students with disabilities to facilitate implementation of UDL, eliminating student-specific funding. Dr. Katz was presented with the Council for Exceptional Children's "Outstanding Achievement in Leadership" award by the Minister of Education, indicative of a collaborative relationship that views this work as in the best interests of all.

Dr. Katz was the keynote speaker at the conference of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, and at the Council of School Leaders (principals association). School divisions now ask questions about UDL in hiring interviews. Budgets have shifted away from busing students to special sites, to bringing support services in. Significant monetary investment has been made by all involved to provide release time for teacher professional development. All three universities offer courses in UDL, and an annual conference draws close to 200 people for a week in the summer, in addition to the summer institute at the university that draws 100 teachers for two weeks. A new course is being developed as part of the Masters degree in Educational Administration as well.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE THREE-BLOCK MODEL OF UDL

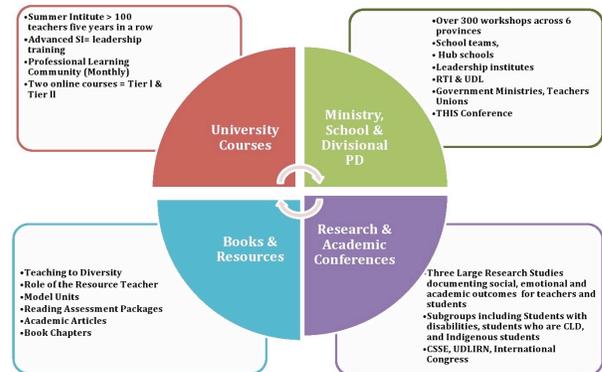


Figure 1. Concept map of implementation plan.

There is still room for improvement. Approximately 40% of teachers in the province have received some training in UDL. Several school divisions have created positions for UDL coaches/consultants. Many, if not most, have funded teacher professional development, increased funding for technology, materials, and classroom furniture such as standing desks and rockers. This year, PLC's have focused on high school implementation, with the goal of creating "expert teachers" with classrooms that others can visit to see UDL in action. More than 100 high school teachers are participating.

**Expand.** The work is now beginning to expand. Scholarly articles, books, conferences, and research collaborations have resulted in expansion of the work to other provinces and countries. The Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education conducts research related to the Three-Block Model of UDL, and several provinces, including New Brunswick, Alberta, and BC are developing leadership teams. Professors at nine universities are teaching courses with UDL content in them. School divisions in Wisconsin and Ohio are exploring the work, and researchers and teacher educators in Australia, Belgium, and Spain are integrating UDL into their courses.

#### SUMMARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF SEQUENCING, SOURCE, MULTIPLE MEANS, EVIDENCE, AND COLLABORATION

It takes a village: Lessons we have learned.

1. **Sequence:** It's important to start with teachers! In places where divisions started by training principals and then asking them to move their schools forward, UDL was seen as a top-down mandate and teachers were less open to the professional development.
2. **Source:** Dr. Katz, and other UDL practitioners, conducted training. This gave credibility to the work; there was belief that it was possible! Teacher leadership is key.

3. **Multiple Means:** As with youth, teachers vary in what supports their learning. Having the choice of learning at the university, through divisional PD, from books and book clubs, at conferences, and through online sources supported the diversity of needs.
4. **Evidence:** Research evidence was valued by teachers when it was presented in practical terms. Teachers appreciated hearing what they could expect for both themselves and their students, before being asked to change their practice for the next educational fad.
5. **Collaboration:** While this work began with a single practitioner, its success came from collaboration between government, professional associations, universities, community organizations, and school divisions. Nurturing a culture of inclusivity amongst the adults, led to the progress in creating a culture of inclusivity for students.

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