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Embedding UDL into Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports

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Recommended Citation

Bohanon, Hank. Embedding UDL into Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports. , , : , 2022. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Education: School of Education Faculty Publications and Other Works,

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their students.

Embedding UDL into Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports

March 24, 2022 by hbohano@gmail.com — [0 Comments](#)

Secondary school staff may be implementing effective universal, tier one strategies in their schools. By universal strategies, we mean academic, behavioral, and social and emotional supports that all teachers can embed into the curriculum. One example of universal support is [Universal design for learning \(UDL\)](#). [This approach includes](#) embedding instructional supports when you teach a skill, asking students to engage with course content, and/or expressing what they have learned, and can help strengthen your schoolwide approach to instruction.

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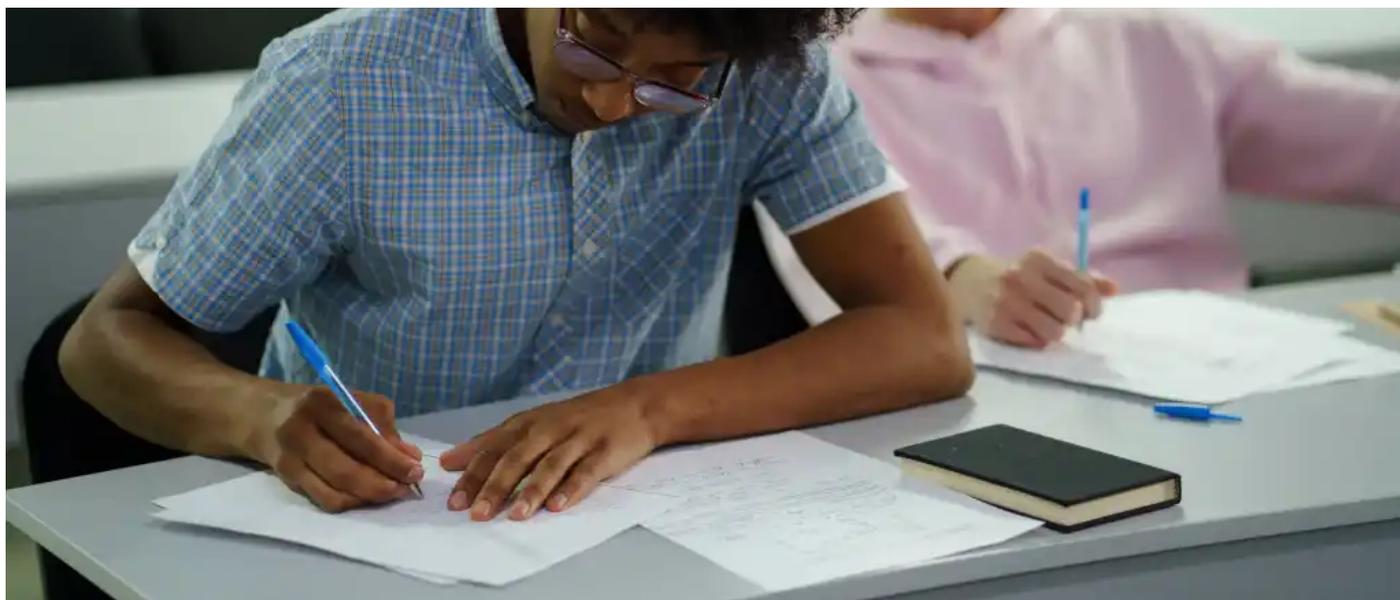


Photo by cottonbro on [Pexels.com](#)

This blog is the second in a series about embedding UDL into schoolwide practices. For more information on developing buy-in for your schoolwide approach, please see [Lisa Caputo Love's](#) blog post *Developing Buy-In for Schoolwide Approaches*.

Recently, my friend and co-author, [Kelly Morrissey](#), shared a presentation for the 7th Annual CAST Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Symposium about embedding UDL into schoolwide interventions. Kelly is the Director of Personal Learning and Student Support at Maine Township High School District 207 in Illinois. The examples she shared provide ways to make your core curriculum more accessible for all learners.

Here is a link to the [presentation](#) recording, it's only about 15 minutes long.

Summary

In this presentation, Kelly described ways to embed UDL strategies into related [multi-tiered systems of support](#) (MTSS) and school improvement in secondary settings. She focused on schoolwide approaches in this presentation referring to UDL. However, schoolwide approaches can include

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Reflecting on Current Practices

Kelly asked participants to think about [tier one, schoolwide strategies](#) they have seen implemented in schools. For example, school staff can [explicitly teach behavioral expectations](#) or [social and emotional learning skills](#). As you think about these examples, here are two questions you can reflect upon:

- What tenants of UDL do you see at play when those strategies are implemented well?
- What examples from the [CAST UDL Guidelines](#) would make good tier one strategies in your school setting?

According to Kelly, UDL and MTSS have these factors in common:

- Both are proactive – we do not wait for students to fail to provide supports
- Both are flexible enough to meet the needs of all students
- Both help all students to meet well-established goals and standards
- Both help educators guide students towards becoming independent learners

Below you will find a graphic organizer Kelly developed to help us see the comparison between the two approaches.

UDL and Tier 1: A Perfect Union!

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Fosters independence in learners	Yes	Yes
Flexible enough to meet wide variety of needs	Yes	Yes



Next, Kelly shared some examples for embedding UDL into tier one MTSS strategies.

Examples of Connections between UDL and Tier One MTSS

In the following examples, Kelly provided specific connections between UDL and MTSS. She highlighted the specific MTSS components using **bold font** and UDL related strategies using *italics*. She pulled these examples directly from the [UDL Guidelines](#).

Flexible Engagement elements with connections to **tier one strategies**

- Creating **clear expectations** for different spaces and activities with **explicit lesson plans** to help students develop the social-emotional learning skills needed to meet the expectations can help *recruit interest by minimizing threats (CAST, 2018)* by making the space more predictable.
- **Collaborating with students to develop the expectations** also *optimizes relevance, value, and authenticity (CAST, 2018)*.

As Kelly stated, “Whenever we make a space more predictable and students feel confident that they know what’s expected of them, it feels less threatening and helps to free up more of their cognitive processing.” It also reduces some emotional barriers that can make learning harder for students.

When we collaborate with students to build these expectations, it adds value and authenticity, which are also part of the UDL framework.

Flexible Representation elements with connections to **tier one strategies**

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students to engage before building an argument, starting a debate, or writing a paper. It can also help students visualize information using a graphic organizer (an example is provided below).

Flexible Expression elements with connections to **tier one strategies**

- Kelly describes using a standard checklist to self-monitor problem-solving steps in mathematics as a tier one strategy. Self-monitoring can help students with planning and support [executive functioning](#). For example, based on an [error analysis](#) of students' work, teachers can identify common problems with computation (this approach could be used for writing or other projects as well). Next, the teacher can develop a brief error checklist that students can use before turning in their work. [Intervention Central](#) provides valuable examples, and blank tools teachers can use to create these checklists for their students. For more research behind this approach, we encourage you to check out the work of [Lee Kern and Glen Dunlap](#), and [Heather Uberti, Margo Mastropieri, and Thomas E. Scruggs](#).

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Systematizing is Key

Selecting tier one strategies that align with UDL principals will add a layer of assurance that the strategy will provide equitable access for all students. However, Kelly shared that for UDL to be successful, you need to connect your design to MTSS related systems.

For example, according to Kelly, you can only say honestly you are implementing a tier one strategy is to check to see if the intervention is being implemented as it was designed (i.e., fidelity). She suggested two helpful reflection questions for implementers of UDL:

- Do we all understand the strategy (critical features) and when and why we use it?
- Do we have data indicating the intervention is happening as frequently as we intend, with its critical features (e.g., walk-throughs, observation data, teacher checklists, student surveys)?

One tool you might consider for helping teachers assess the fidelity of implementation of UDL at the tier one level is the UDL Implementation Rubric that [Lisa Caputo Love](#) mentioned in her [blog](#) from this

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Strategy

Earlier, Kelly mentioned the Reading for Meaning approach to provide *Flexible Means of Representation*. Here is an example of this strategy that Kelly developed based on her work in high schools. Using this approach, you can provide students with an article, website, blog, picture, or video clip covering similar content. In this example, Kelly demonstrated a model where students could review information about career outcomes.

The claim in the first row is that people with more advanced degrees make more money. Students in this example found data supporting people with advanced degrees tend to make more money.

The second claim was that most people work in a field they studied in college. The students were able to refute this idea based on the evidence they found in their resources. (She created this example for discussion purposes only – and it is not based on real data).

Teachers in her school use this strategy to help students develop an argument for a paper, presentation, debate, or even decide how to solve a math problem. The approach provides a structure that reduces the [cognitive load](#) for students.

Reading for Meaning Example (Silver, Dewing, Perini, 2012)

Evidence to prove	Claim	Evidence to refute
Table 1 shows that people with PhDs make an average income of \$80,000 versus those with BAs make an average of \$40,000	People with more advanced degrees make more money	

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Note: Adapted from Silver, H. F., Dewing, R. T., & Perini, M. J. (2012). *The Core Six: Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence with the Common Core*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Additional Ways to Utilize Reading for Meaning

- Allow students to choose from articles at different Lexile levels on the same topic or other claims with various levels of “difficulty” to prove or disprove.
- Use images, songs, websites, directions, etc. as texts to “read”.
- Once comfortable with the routine, students can create their own “Reading for Meaning” activity and challenge each other.

Now it's your turn to practice a schoolwide, UDL related strategy

As we stated, the Reading for Meaning process touches on elements of UDL and can make an excellent tier one literacy strategy within the MTSS framework

Choose one of the following texts:

- [Website overview of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\)](#) (MiMTSS Technical Assistance Center)
- [Infographic overview of MTSS](#) (Lead for Literacy)
- [Short MTSS overview](#) from chapter one of *Implementing Systematic Interventions* (Bohanon, Caputo, and Morrissey, 2021)

Use the text you chose to **complete the Reading for Meaning activity below**: Find evidence you can quote, paraphrase, or describe to support and/or refute each statement in the middle.

- If your evidence supports the claim, enter in the left column.

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Evidence to prove	Claim	Evidence to rerute
	The use of data is key to effective MTSS implementation	
	An effective MTSS team looks at data once per year	
	Students' needs drive decision making when using MTSS processes	

Note: Adapted from Silver, H. F., Dewing, R. T., & Perini, M. J. (2012). *The Core Six: Essential Strategies for Achieving Excellence with the Common Core*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

For more training on UDL and MTSS, check out these online modules from the CEEDAR Center ([link](#)). This is also an excellent article on how implementing UDL as a component of MTSS can be useful to your leadership teams ([link](#)). You can also find additional training on UDL at the CAST website ([link](#)).

I hope these examples of connecting UDL with multi-tiered systems of supports is useful to your work. I would love to hear from you about ways to connect UDL with MTSS in your setting. Please leave a comment below with your ideas.

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