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Universal Design for Learning: An Examination of Leadership Promoting Student Learning for All

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING: AN EXAMINATION OF LEADERSHIP

PROMOTING STUDENT LEARNING FOR ALL

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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BY

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This dissertation is dedicated to my family. My family is made up of those that I love dearly and who allow me to learn and to teach about care, learning and life. I dedicate this to my parents, for being my first teachers and for teaching me to love learning. Although both my parents taught me with love and intellect, my father was the great intellectual advisor of our home. He taught me to love learning, to pursue my passion and to do good for others. It is with great sadness that my father passed away just months before I completed this dissertation. To my dad, this is dedicated to you first and foremost. To my mom, who has always been at my side, a great supporter and guide, I thank you and I love you.

To my family of my three sons and a wonderful husband, thank you for being full of fresh ideas and critical questions. You have brought the energy of abounding love and happiness to our home and to my work. To my three boys, Connor, Brendan and Eamon, I value education because of the opportunities it has provided you. Your passion, intelligence and humor inspire me. You challenge me to new ideas to improve our educational system as a way for all children to find their passion and their voice. To my husband, you are forever my partner. Thank you for propping me up along the way to the completion of this dissertation. Thank you for being by my side in this great adventure of a wonderful life.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the intersection of leadership, Universal Design for Learning and a framework for continuous improvement. Universal Design for Learning is a tool that unites beliefs and actions to address the needs of all children in our educational systems. We fall short in our efforts to close the learning gaps for children with disabilities, children of lower income and children of differing racial and ethnic backgrounds. Universal Design for Learning demonstrates a commitment to proactively addressing the variability of learners so that all children are meaningfully engaged in the learning process. The research provides insight to the issues of equity and inclusivity through an examination of leadership and the shared beliefs, actions and continuous improvement that school districts seek to be successful in meeting the needs of all children.

How does a superintendent or district leader promote and utilize Universal Design for Learning to effectively meet the needs of all learners? What are the specific roles, attributes and functions of a District office leader that enable a clarity of focus on positive outcomes for all learners? What have been the leadership skills and goals that have been applied to school reform efforts? Universal Design for Learning provides an approach that holds promise as a system organizer that assures equitable access and successful learning outcomes for all students. Are there identifiable beliefs, actions, leadership styles and leadership strategies that promote a student centered, curriculum

that supports learner variability? These research questions identify a need to address the

intersection of leadership and Universal Design for Learning into actionable and usable

knowledge linked to authentic contexts. Understanding the dynamic interplay of

leadership and Universal Design for Learning in authentic contexts provides insight and

recommendations that relate to leadership skill development, organizational leadership

and policy recommendations.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The cornerstone of public education is built on the ideal that all children can learn; all children will be active participants in our democratic society as well informed and purposeful citizens. John Dewey in 1902 identified the complex interaction of child and context as the dynamic interactional need of a successful education system. The ideal of meeting the needs of all learners is not a simple task. The complex and variable learning traits of all learners requires that teachers, teacher leaders and administrators have an understanding of how learner variability, context and curriculum inter-relate in a way that leads to successful learner outcomes.

Current mandates and educational policies based on student achievement outcomes require educators to ensure success for all students. Students present with a wide range of variability in their learning. Educators understand that learning is complex taking into account the skills, the context as well as the social and motivational aspects of the learner. This variability in learners requires flexible and adaptive means to address student success. Educators benefit from approaches that are both focused and flexible. Collaboration, problem solving and flexibility among teachers have been identified as components and skills needed for a successful learning system. The effectiveness of

teachers to meet these variable student needs requires that leaders believe and model these same effective strategies in their beliefs and actions at the system level as well.

Significant school reform efforts have focused on closing the achievement gap. The study of leadership success and school reform has yielded an array of recommendations for bringing success to every child in every district. Researchers such as Datnow and Castellano (2001) and Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) identify the importance of leadership as well as the confidence and self-efficacy of the leader. Brezicha, Bergmark and Mitra (2015) identify that leaders must also be flexible in order to differentiate support for the unique context of each school and district environment. Leaders must be able to understand context, have the skill and confidence to lead and be able to support broad based initiatives in a way that supports multiple perspectives and varied actions. Despite the significant efforts of leaders and teachers in the public school system, we continue to see limitations and gaps in the positive learning outcomes for all children.

As educators seek practices that support the needs of all learners, the ideal of truly meeting the needs of all learners remains elusive. Literature and research related to the educational success of children points to achievement gaps in subgroups identified in the areas of low income, as well as culturally and racially diverse student populations. Universal Design for Learning has been identified as the flexible set of philosophy, beliefs and practices that promote the principle of examining the learning environment and not simply the learner. The success of an educational system organized around creating a flexible learning environment that supports all learners is a challenge for

district leaders. Universal Design for Learning provides an opportunity to support flexibility and autonomy of learners and the adults that guide them. The identification of the skills and strategies on how to lead a flexible system that supports variability as the norm and not the exception has the potential to clarify and inform leadership strategies and skills.

How does a district office leader support and challenge a system to provide a flexible learning environment needed for all. Understanding the answer to this question has the potential to inform leadership beliefs and practices in a way that improves successful learner outcomes.

Universal Design for Learning emerged initially as an instructional methodology designed to improve the inclusion of children with special needs into the mainstream of education. UDL has also emerged as a framework for leadership and systems organization. Universal Design for Learning focuses on the removal of barriers in the environment to address the needs of all learners. At a systems level, the removal of barriers to student success is key. Universal Design for Learning experts and proponents have identified Universal Design for Learning as the paradigm shift needed to move educational systems from a "one size fits all" approach to a flexible and responsive system that promotes student learning throughout the system.

Problem Statement

Numerous leaders have worked diligently to address necessary reform efforts in education. We have not yet achieved the full and desirable equity in our public education system. The problems of achieving equity in education along with better understanding

UDL as a systems level organizer present problems that propelled this research. Universal Design for Learning has demonstrated a promise of improved access and outcomes for all students at the classroom instructional level. UDL provides a framework that promotes multiple means of engagement, action and expression. More research is needed to better understand implementation at the systems level and how leaders drive and support these efforts. Universal Design for Learning has been identified as a strategy to align a system for learning; and yet traction and sustainability of the concept has been elusive. More research is needed to bring clarity to what aspects of Universal Design for Learning are critical to the success of all students. What are the necessary conditions, beliefs and actions of a leader to implement UDL in the interest of equitable outcomes for all? A review of available literature supports understanding UDL from many different components of educational design. Few studies have examined the role of leaders in implementation of UDL. Universal Design initially emerged as an instructional strategy for the individual child and then evolved to address the classroom level of student interaction and instruction. More information is needed to better understand how UDL can provide a framework for meeting the needs of all children that surpasses the individual student, the classroom and addresses the school district as a whole. The coordination and commitment needed to create a system wide approach to UDL requires leadership in UDL. How leaders implement UDL as a systems level framework requires more consideration, research and attention. Like many other reforms and associated initiatives designed to promote student success, leadership is a key component of

successful implementation. UDL is a critical reform idea that requires leadership. This study will provide information as to how leaders implement UDL for student success.

Research Questions

The limitations in current research coupled with the need to examine how leaders implement UDL provides an impetus for this study. How do district leaders promote and use Universal Design for Learning as a way to organize and reform a system to assure equitable access and learning? This overarching research question identifies a need to address the intersection of leadership with Universal Design for Learning into actionable and usable knowledge. What are the specific leader characteristics, beliefs, actions, and leadership strategies that promote the flexible and accessible learning environment designed to meet the needs of all learners? Are there unique and specific learning conditions that warrant the practices of UDL? Through a study of actual implementation efforts by leaders this research study will identify core ideas, necessary learning conditions and specific actions of leaders to implement UDL as an organizer for an equitable system of education.

Significance and Purpose of the Study

This study has significance in understanding and promoting leadership skills and strategies that support the variability of culture, skill, and experience among leaders, teachers and ultimately students. Similar to the early concerns of John Dewey understanding the interaction of child and curriculum in an authentic context is at the heart of a school system's success. Researchers have identified that UDL is a promising instructional approach. Recent considerations have identified that UDL holds promise as

a systems level organizer for reform. The need to understand both why and how leaders address UDL across a school district is needed to better understand UDL as a successful framework for student success. How do leaders lead a flexible, accessible, barrier-free system so that all students are successful? Educational systems continue to be challenged by fragmented initiatives and student outcomes that represent gaps in achievement. The study of why and how leaders address UDL and leadership has the potential to inform school reform and improve ways of designing successful learning outcomes for all. This study has the potential to inform leaders in their efforts to remove barriers, overcome obstacles and provide more clarity in the direction of equitable school success for all. More information is needed to inform and guide leaders committed to achieving equitable outcomes for all learners.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to leadership and Universal Design for Learning along with the research questions and purpose of this study. Chapter II contains the literature review that provides more information about UDL. Chapter II includes an examination of other research and how current policy ideas have identified UDL as a practice that holds promise. Leadership initiatives that have been designed to address reform efforts was examined in the literature. Reviewing the available literature that promotes an understanding of the intersection of UDL and leadership provided background that supported this research. The literature review on the intersection of UDL and leadership indicated that more examination of leadership and UDL is needed. Leadership is one of the variables that

when studied and analyzed, can support the evidence needed in identifying UDL as a valuable tool for systems level organization. The connection of the information available from policy, leadership reform efforts and specific UDL and leadership provided a roadmap that directed this needed research.

       Chapter III identifies the methodology for the study including the research design, methods for data collection and data analysis. The research design focused on the responses from 12 qualitative interviews with district level leaders who implement UDL. The initial participants were identified based on the recommendations from CAST. This allowed for an endorsement and acknowledgement that these leaders were recognized nationally for their work with UDL. In addition a purposive sampling led to seven additional district level leaders. The qualitative interviews provided descriptions specific to the unique contexts of these district level leaders and their current work in implementing UDL as the systems level. The specific interview questions sought to gather information from these leaders about identified components of leadership, including their motivation and skills. The interview questions were developed based on the conceptual framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2013). Bolman and Deal identify four frames or components of leadership considerations. The interview protocol was developed with Bolman and Deal as the conceptual framework. The use of these four frames in developing the interview protocol address leadership insight, choices and actions related to structures, human resources, symbolic and political efforts. The findings yielded details that expanded these four frames with specific commentary and insight from these leaders linked to ethics, beliefs and strategies. The methodology also

addressed the added conceptual framework provided by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) as a way to analyze the ethical commitment of these participants. The ethical commitments of these leaders emerged explicitly in all 12 of the interviews.

In addition, the initial intention of this study was to gather policy related documents that may have guided these participants. During the interviews, all 12 of the participants indicated that they were not driven by policy nor mandate. Therefore state level policies were not analyzed as a way of addressing the findings of this research. Documents did not promote increased understanding of the leaders' strategies. Some documents were offered by leaders through the interview process as indicators of their professional development or of their overarching goals for change, innovation and improved instruction for students. Although these may be interesting documents from which to learn more about UDL implementation they did not further the research in this study and have not been added to the analysis nor summary of the findings.

Chapter IV describes the results of the research. This sample from 12 district level leaders provided valuable information about the leaders who have implemented UDL. The findings indicated that the beliefs and practices of these leaders were linked to the successful implementation of UDL. This research study indicated that leaders who implement UDL are driven by a broad definition of UDL that is more focused on beliefs, mission and vision than a technical focus on the UDL guidelines. Each leader defined UDL in a broad sense that addressed a need to meet the needs of all learners, to attend the children who had not historically been successful in schools and to do so in a way that promoted accessibility, care, engagement and positive student outcomes. These UDL

leaders were driven by an ethical commitment to the success of all children, fueled by the needs of students historically under-served in schools.

The leaders provided insight as to how they used a UDL framework as a continuous improvement reform process. These leaders identified ways in which they led change based on clearly understood stages of change promoted by Kotter (2012). The stages of change that these leaders addressed were establishing urgency to make the change, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering others for broad based action, generating short term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change and ultimately anchoring the approach in the culture. The framework for continuous improvement was consistent with the work of these leaders who implemented UDL as a framework to address both adult and student learning from a system-wide perspective.

The actions of these leaders were focused on a collaborative and problem solving approach to working with not only the students, but more specifically the principals and teachers. Similar to the UDL approach with students, these leaders paralleled the UDL approach by addressing multiple ways to engage, represent and assess the success of professional learning and effective teaching for building level leaders and teachers. Most notably, these leaders applied these core areas of UDL to the needed adult learning and interaction that supported UDL implementation at the systems level. These leaders provided insight as to the multiple means of engagement, representation, and actions of learning based on how they communicated and developed the professional learning for teachers and other leaders. There was a clear emphasis on professional development as a

key component in the change process. The professional development provided was focused on both shared beliefs and flexible steps and actions. The professional development was customized and personalized as a way to address the varying needs of teachers and ultimately of students. In addition, most leaders addressed a link to MTSS as a structural tool for meeting the needs of all learners.

Chapter V discusses the overall emphasis of the study and implications for field of educational leadership and future research considerations. The discussion reveals that UDL is a valuable reform process that has the potential to frame district-wide work in continuous improvement. In addition the ethical voices and choices of these leaders provides the need to reflect on how we develop ethical leaders and how we support leaders to maintain an ethical focus on the needed work of meeting the needs of all learners. The discussion also indicates a confirmation of some of the already studied areas of education, indicating that professional development for teachers and leaders is needed to address the successful work of teachers and leaders. MTSS also emerged as a key component of how school districts examine student learning needs and plan to address the variability of needs that predictably emerge.

The implications of this research are also provided in Chapter V. This research provides direction for future research on UDL and leadership. It also provides suggestions and indications that UDL as a reform effort is worthy of the spotlight with other reform efforts and other reform leaders. There is still more we need to understand about the specific outcomes of success that may provide UDL with increased credibility in the field of education. Considerations as to how to cement UDL into the fabric of

educational improvements was addressed. Attention to how UDL might be better addressed in teacher preparation, teacher evaluation programs and leadership training is needed. UDL has been compared to other large scale reform efforts that promote student voice, choice and flexibility to meet the needs of all learners. Future research to examine how initiatives such as personalized learning, culturally responsive teaching, project based and problem based learning also promote an acknowledgement of variability as a norm in public education while supporting strategies that might promote success for all students merit further study by comparing and contrasting these different; yet similar approaches to better meeting the needs of all children.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of the Literature

A comprehensive review of the literature consists of an analysis of sources related

to Universal Design for Learning as a unique and promising concept for education. This

concept holds promise not just at the individual student level but as a leadership practice

that promotes equity. The literature provides an examination of why Universal Design for

Learning as a plan for meeting the needs of all learners is critical to the success of our

nation's educational system. In some states and federal policy, UDL is identified as a

flexible approach for meeting the needs of widely variable learners in educational

systems. The literature review addresses how other reform efforts gained success or

failure based on the work of leaders. Finally an examination of leadership and UDL

provides insight as to why further examination of UDL and leadership is needed. This

examination provides greater insight about equitable student success needed in our school

systems. This information has the potential to bridge research and practice for

educational leadership that promotes the needed equity and inclusivity to assure all

students succeed in our educational institutions.

Chapter II includes an overview of Universal Design for Learning as an

instructional practice and its evolution to a practice for whole system focus and reform.

Although UDL is not a new practice, the focus on UDL and whole system

implementation is not fully understood as a concept for leaders. The implementation as a student-centered, equity based systems level approach is a worthy examination. The concepts and the research on UDL bridges current research to promising and needed educational practices that support improved student success for all children.

An overview of current policy related to Every Students Succeeds Act is examined. The current state models for accountability provided in ESSA addresses a growing focus on flexibility as a means to address the needs of all learners. If we are to address unique and variable learners, then both accountability and flexibility are necessary concepts in federal, state and local policies. The analysis of policy sources provides a sense of current policy goals linked to Universal Design for Learning.

This review examines how reform efforts and the leaders at the helm either have or have not allowed for the needed reforms in education. Research studies that identify the leadership skills and strategies that support education reform efforts are examined. This review of the literature provides for a comprehensive understanding about the beliefs, motivations, skills and strategies of leaders who have implemented educational reform efforts.

UDL and leadership efforts are already utilized in some districts. Looking at these districts both within a single system and in aggregate provides usable knowledge that contributes to the practice and the research about leadership that promotes success. This study will provide examination of what is known and what is unknown through the examination of leadership and UDL. Bolman and Deal (2013) provides a lens for understanding the efforts of these leaders based on how and why they created and

developed specific structures and addressed human resources in their systems. In addition

how these leaders addressed both political and symbolic efforts related to UDL

implementation were revealed through the semi-structured interviews with these leaders.

More detailed information about these conceptual frameworks are integrated in the

findings described more thoroughly in Chapter IV.

Universal Design for Learning Overview

Universal Design for Learning was originally identified as a concept in the field

of architecture that addressed how design concepts could meet the needs of all users.

Perhaps the most well-known design for Universal Design for Learning are the curb cuts

that were originally designed for individuals in wheelchairs to more easily use sidewalks

and crosswalks by eliminating the curb and creating an incline for wheelchair access. The

universally designed curb cuts provided improved mobility for not only individuals in

wheelchairs, but bicyclists, walkers with strollers, scooters as well. An idea designed to

support the needs of some individuals became a valued concept worthy of addressing the

needs of many. According to the Center for Applied Assistive Technology, known as

CAST, UDL gained favor in education early in the 1980s as a method of accessibility for

unique learners who were having difficulty accessing the general curriculum Early efforts

in educational Universal Design for Learning were enhanced and improved, particularly

with the evolution of technological advances.

Rose and Meyer (2002) provided early research in the area of UDL and education.

They conceptualized three core areas of learning in UDL. They identified that multiple

means are necessary in the areas of representation (the what of learning), action (the how

of learning) and the engagement (the why of learning). These multiple representations address instructional skills and methods utilizing instructional strategies, materials and the environment of teaching. UDL as a concept requires clear knowledge of the learner, the environment and the identified goals needed to address accessibility and success. The ideas of UDL promote a framework for addressing clear outcomes by providing flexible approaches with attention to the removal of barriers to learning. UDL has emerged in the field of education. Canter, King, Williams, Metcalf, and Potts (2017) identify the promise of UDL as "a learning approach that designs curricular materials, activities and instruction with flexibility to meet the individual's learners strengths and needs so all students can have access to what is being learned in class" (p. 3). They also indicated that "UDL is characterized as proactive educational pedagogy encouraging inclusion and access for all learners." The challenge of UDL is noted by Hatley (2011) that teachers who understand UDL do not necessarily know how to apply it in practice. She indicated that some teachers see UDL as simply good teaching. Understanding UDL as a broad concept in education that promotes accessibility through flexibility is a key component in the literature about what UDL is and what it is not.

The idea of identifying and removing barriers is a key component of UDL. Rose and Meyer (2002) promote the idea that "barriers to learning are not in fact inherent in the capacity of learners, but instead arise in learners' interactions with inflexible materials and methods" (p. vi). This idea embedded in the understanding and practices of Universal Design for Learning places the responsibility for learner variability not on the learner, but on the environment and those that structure the environment. This includes

the physical environment as well as the instructional choices and the climate and culture of a classroom and a system.

Educationally, Universal Design for Learning has its origins in the work related to assistive technology and the work to ensure that children with special needs are effectively included in the mainstream of education. In 1984, CAST first appeared as a team examining how computer technology could enhance learning for children with disabilities. CAST first appeared as small team of educational researchers seeking to better understand how technology could support children with disabilities in education. Since that time, CAST and the principles of Universal Design for Learning have emerged on a broader level with a system wide focus on successful student learner outcomes for all children. The timeline of CAST provides an overview as to the development of Universal Design for Learning in United States educational system. CAST's original focus on research and development for assistive technology, evolved to become a critical consideration in the emphasis on inclusive practices for children with disabilities and beyond.

Examination of Policies and UDL

Policy decisions are indicative of mandates, requirements and likely address a way to extend understanding of a concept or idea by making it a requirement. The appearance of UDL in policy documents indicates acceptance of the concept with an expectation for implementation. John Kotter, in *Leading Change* (2012) suggests that urgency is a necessary component in a successful change process. The state and federal policies that promote both accountability and flexibility add to the sense of urgency for

educational systems to address Universal Design for Learning. As cited by Cook,

Landrum, and Tankersley (2014), the examination of standardization, accountability and

individualization is an issue not only in the field of special education; it provides a

framework for all of public education as well. Current state and federal policies have

identified learner variability and flexibility of implementation as key ideas for the success

of educational systems. An *Education Week* article from February, 2016 identifies

Universal Design for Learning as a promising practice for focusing on learner variability.

An analysis conducted by CAST and available on their website identifies each state

within the United States and links current policy practices to the concepts of Universal

Design for Learning.

In 2010, Dave Edyburn identifies questions and concerns as to why UDL has not

gained more traction as a key component in the successful reform of educational systems.

He describes how UDL captured the imagination of many educators and policy makers.

He identified early momentum with UDL that followed the 1997 reauthorization of the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In 1999 federal grant monies were awarded

to the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum (p. 33) which garnered the

early attention on the value of UDL. Since that time he and others are still seeking to

understand why the ideals have not gained more successful traction in our educational

system. Edyburn indicates that there is a challenge in implementing a construct that is

difficult to define. He suggests there is critical work in carefully defining variables that

make UDL a success.

The principles of Universal Design for Learning are also referenced in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 as well as the National Education Technology Plan of 2010. Several states have adopted UDL as a framework for state level governance of education. The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 calls for making learning more accessible to students in higher education. This includes "the development of innovative, effective and efficient teaching methods consistent with UDL". The Higher Education Opportunity Act indicates that higher education faculty consider solutions utilizing UDL exemplary practices that accommodate and support students with disabilities across a range of academic fields. For example, the use of print to voice technology not only supports students with visual impairments, it supports reading for students with reading disabilities and others who prefer voice to text. This example of UDL at the higher education level is another policy recommendation that supports the importance of understanding and leading with UDL principles at the classroom and systems level.

The National Education Technology Plan of 2016, released December 2015 commits to personalized learning and the effective use of technology. The Plan specifically calls for equity, active use, and collaborative leadership for everywhere, all the time learning enabled by technology. The plan specifically addresses the implementation of UDL for accessibility of all learners. The plan specifically calls for the use of UDL in teacher preparation programs.

ESSA has also identified UDL as a system that promotes flexibility necessary to achieve success. The importance of providing an equitable and inclusive educational

experience for all students is well understood in the field of education. This particular examination of the stories, the conditions, and the actions that support these policy recommendations enhanced by the actual skills and practices that can effectively move an organization forward are critical in moving from policy to action at the local school and school district level.

Policy decisions as recent as 2015, The Every Student Succeeds Act, the seventh reauthorization for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act from 1968, identify the need for flexibility and accountability citing UDL as one such practice. The focus of this policy identifies equity and opportunity as the key to the success of America's public education system. ESSA requires that student assessments and instruction be provided in an accessible manner to address the needs of all students. This policy addresses social justice, equity and a set of beliefs and actions that address the variability of student learning needs as a key principle for success. CAST provides an important overview of how the practices of UDL have moved from individual student and classroom level instructional goals to a policy focus at the District and State level of education (Retrieved from http://ed.gov/essa).

Specific references to UDL in ESSA are as follows (CAST.org, 2016):

SEC. 1005. STATE PLANS

States need to show that they have, in consultation with local education agencies, "implemented a set of high-quality student academic assessments in mathematics, reading or language arts, and science." These assessments shall "be developed, to the extent practicable, using the principles of universal design for learning." In

addition, "for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities," States may provide for alternate assessments aligned to standards. They should describe in their plan "the steps the State has taken to incorporate universal design for learning, to the extent feasible, in alternate assessments…"

SEC. 1204. INNOVATIVE ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

State educational agencies may establish an innovative assessment system. Those that do must demonstrate in their applications that the system will "be accessible to all students, such as by incorporating the principles of universal design for learning …"

SEC. 2221(b)(1). COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY INSTRUCTION

"The term 'comprehensive literacy instruction' means instruction that— ''includes developmentally appropriate, contextually explicit, and systematic instruction, and frequent practice, in reading and writing across content areas; … '… incorporates the principles of universal design for learning; "… depends on teachers' collaboration in planning, instruction, and assessing a child's progress and on continuous professional learning …" etc.

SEC. 4104. STATE USE OF FUNDS

[for Student Support and Academic Enrichments]

Funds shall be used to support "local education agencies in providing programs that increase access to personalized, rigorous learning experiences supported by technology by … providing technical assistance to local educational agencies to improve the ability of local educational agencies to use technology, consistent

with the principles of universal design for learning, to support the learning needs

of all students, including children with disabilities and English learners …"

Current state and federal policies, including the recent reauthorization of ESSA, create

clear language related to Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning. The

principles of UDL have moved beyond the inclusive practices for children with special

needs enhanced by technology. UDL provides a systems level focus incorporating

assessment, instruction and therefore leadership too. Current Universal Design for

Learning principles address a system and a framework around which we can organize an

entire education system designed to meet the needs of all learners.

Tiered Systems of Support by defining MTSS as "an integrated framework of Common

Core Standards, effective instruction, social emotional learning, and the UDL principles

with the systems necessary for improving academic, behavioral, social and emotional

learning outcomes for students" (Utley & Obiakor, 2015). MTSS is identified a concept

that integrates Response to Intervention with Positive Behavior Instruction and Support

as a framework for organizing a continuum of intervention to address effective,

responsive and equitable instruction (ISBE.net). These principles represent an

acknowledgment and acceptance of UDL in the framework of educational strategies that

meet the needs of all learners.

Woulfin, Donaldson and Gonzalez (2016) identify the need to translate state

policy into school level change, particularly with diverse audiences as an area in need of

further study. How one leads from these policies which include recently reauthorized

ESSA in combination with Universal Design for Learning is an area in need of examination. The policies noted above require an understanding of UDL at the classroom and at the leadership level. These policies present an impetus for understanding more about UDL and how leaders effectively implement it.

School Reform and Leadership

A review of leadership in successful and partially successful school reform efforts allows us to look at the leadership skills, strategies and obstacles faced by school and district leaders. Understanding how these initiatives were implemented provides insight as to how systems reform or fail to reform. It provides for an understanding of how context matters in creating and sustaining successful outcomes for students. School reform efforts have continued to fall short in realizing the goal of successful and equitable learner outcomes for all. In examining school reform leaders, one considers how meaningful initiatives were accomplished. Examining a constellation of school and district reform efforts provide insight as to the skills of leaders who were successful and those that were unable to accomplish the desired goals. It appears that it is a combination of leadership skills and beliefs coupled with clarity of focus on strategies that promotes success.

According to Zimmerman (2014), District offices are responsible for setting direction and providing clear goals for improvement. This researcher described that "few studies have examined how leadership teams can promote shared theories of action among district and school administrators." This researcher described the importance of coherence and focus on change that supports district-wide leadership capacity building.

Blending the work of district office leaders with Universal Design for Learning is key to understanding implementation success. The ideals and practices of leadership intertwined in the work of aligning the practices and the beliefs of Universal Design for Learning created a powerful research opportunity. The understanding as to how a superintendent or other district level leader created and sustained a system that supported learner variability with both autonomy and shared goals is valuable in addressing how leaders address reform.

Datnow and Castellano (2001) shared that leadership is a critical element in the reform process. District office leaders need to connect teaching and administration to shared outcomes and agreements among all stakeholders. Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) indicated that the confidence and collective self-efficacy with an emphasis on priorities is needed for school and district leaders to unite around shared beliefs and actions. Moore (2009) indicated that is it the emotional intelligence of leaders that is needed to promote a shared vision and a common focus on high achievement for all learners. These research studies identified multiple aspects of leadership that can support success of implementation in reform efforts and therefore in system level UDL implementation as well.

The role of a superintendent or other district level leader requires both focus and flexibility. Bredeson and Kose (2007) shared how the reform efforts lead by school superintendents are often subverted by the details and distractions of the day to day functions of an educational system. They described how the good intentions of district leaders can be derailed or delayed by competing agendas. Even when a superintendent

enters the position with a clear focus on curriculum and instruction, he or she can become distracted from the primary goal of creating positive outcomes for all learners. Brezicha et al. (2015), in *One size does not fit all: differentiating leadership to support teachers in school reform* indicated the importance of carefully differentiated leadership and teacher supports to successfully realize implementation of key initiatives and reform efforts. They indicate that this is in many ways counter to current reform efforts that push for standardization and shared accountability measures of student success.

Mombourquette and Bedard (2014) examined the leadership practices and structures that support student success. This study promotes a view that moved beyond principal leadership with a focus on district level leadership in collaboration with school leadership. This research study identified the district level leadership practices that impact school level leadership in their evolving roles. The practices identified are described as: collaboration, setting shared direction at the district level, shared expertise in understanding and using shared agreements on evidence for student learning, job embedded professional development for leaders and aligned practices.

Rappolt-Schlictmann, Daley and Rose (2012) acknowledged the empirical gaps in what can be considered usable knowledge (p. 8). Jappinen (2014) identified the complexities of collaborative leadership models by identifying the difficulty in linking human interaction, sense making and complex settings. This study provided an opportunity to link usable knowledge to authentic context. This study acknowledged that both leadership and learning organizations are complex based on the understanding that both learning and leadership are contextual as well. An improved understanding of

successful leaders using UDL provided an opportunity for understanding and promoting these skills and strategies in a way that is generalizable to more contexts and more leaders with the ultimate goal of reducing and eliminating systematic barriers to student learning.

Understanding the conditions and actions leaders addressed to prompt, support and deliver large scale initiatives added to the understanding of how leaders successfully implement Universal Design for Learning. An examination of leadership skills, practices and beliefs in other reform efforts provided insight as to why and how leaders lead. Brezicha et al. (2015) reminded us of the importance of leaders and their followers. Johnson and Chrispeels (2010) acknowledged the importance of ideological agreements with organizational learning and professional accountability. Understanding the components of leadership reform efforts further informed and enhanced the analysis of findings for this study.

Other large scale education reform effort, such as the movement of increasing mainstream opportunities for children with disabilities, most often referred to as inclusion, was both supported and thwarted through leadership efforts. Ultimately the success of inclusion efforts were found as they were formulated into policy decisions at state and federal levels. Other large scale initiatives provided for an examination of how leadership and reform efforts both fail and succeed. Dematthews (2015) examined the work of inclusion as a reform effort, indicating that goals, actions, responsibilities and challenges must be well carefully addressed in any reform effort. The specific actions designed to include children with disabilities into the mainstream of education required

leadership, advocacy, policy requirements and the shared beliefs and actions of teachers, leaders, parents and students.

Hopkins (2013) indicated that the examination of reform efforts and educational success must be driven by evidence and not simply tradition and prejudice. In addition, Moore (2009) described the importance of the emotional intelligence of a leader to be effective in any reform effort. The need to utilize this study to add to the body of evidence of UDL and leadership is important for advancing the field of educational leadership and UDL implementation.

The implementation of social emotional learning curriculum identifies similar components in order to address large scale reform efforts. Large scale reform efforts identify critical variables in the work. Beard (2013) reiterated the call for additional research to determine the impact and the importance of leadership in curriculum, assessment and the ability to adapt to the local context. Through Beard's study which cites the 2005 work of Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson which indicated that an examination of authentic leadership is needed in reform efforts. This study provided authentic voice and context of 12 district level leaders implementing UDL. This study added to the call of Davis et al. as to the importance of understanding authentic work in real contexts to generalize knowledge about what we know about educational leadership, reform and UDL.

School reform efforts are dependent on successful leadership that understands, supports and commits to the principles identified in the reform effort. Leaders have broad and varied responsibilities that can detract from success of specific initiatives. These

studies identify the importance of personal qualities, professional expertise along with a context and a culture that supports shared direction and collaboration. In addition, the ideas of accountability and the use of evidence are critical to success in an educational system. Sahlberg (2010) and Fullan (2006) use the term intelligent accountability to describe the importance of these thoughtful systems level thinking in action. These studies linked to other reform efforts provide us with information that addresses the importance of understanding UDL principle focused leadership actions in authentic contexts.

Leadership and Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning has been demonstrated as a promising and potentially transformative learning strategy for several decades. Literature linked to teacher practices using UDL can be found in the field of education. Teachers report successful UDL implementation with positive outcomes for all children. State and federal policies have described, cited and mandated UDL as a necessary component of a flexible, accountable and successful educational system. Reform leaders have acknowledged the importance of shared beliefs, focused goals with child centered and accountable practices at the leadership level. The identified research question of how UDL and leadership are effectively implemented at the systems level remains somewhat elusive. Rappolt-Schlichtmann et al. (2012) indicated that "we have been unable to make any significant progress in understanding what happens when UDL is successfully implemented and when it is not. Under UDL variability and multiple paths to success are the rule and not the exception" (p. 10). Examples of why and how some systems have done this work lack

adequate and sufficient evidence to understand UDL as a successful leadership practice for equitable system organization.

The successful inclusive practices that meet the Dewey's original intent of education, as an interaction between the learner and the environment can be viewed through the lens of Universal Design for Learning. Despite these well accepted ideas, scientific research and evidence related to how to successfully implement UDL as a leader is limited. Hatley (2011) who focused on teacher implementation of UDL, called on researchers to continue to address UDL to discover the many possibilities that UDL has in improving student learning. Lacey (2016) highlighted the value of an accessible curriculum for all that lifts barriers to student learning. Edyburn (2010) reminded of the need for clear examination of the variables of UDL implementation so that we can understand its success, value and potential for replication in multiple settings.

Periodicals, workshops and books, such as Novak's (2016), "Universally Designed Leadership," promoted the ideas and practices with testimony of successful practices. Specific evidence based research at the Kindergarten through Grade 12 education level are limited. Novak described leadership styles and practices that promote a system wide focus for leaders implementing UDL. This book, which provided information on important concepts such as goal setting, strategic visioning and high quality professional development, did not provide evidence based on research with leaders. Novak identified strategies that may be generalizable from her specific setting to other settings. She identified key components in implementation of UDL. "Rather that UDL is an organizing mechanism that can bring the District's important work together so

it all aligns to a shared vision for system wide improvement-one that will ensure success for all students" (p. 16). This recently published book is another indicator of the importance and the need for research specific to UDL and leadership.

A symposium for UDL educators, known as UDL IRN was held in March, 2017 with a call for more research related to UDL. The UDL IRN research symposium called for more UDL research in the areas of STEM/STEAM education, instructional design, and neuroscience and product development. The ideas of leadership and UDL were not noted. UDL and leadership has been addressed through some component parts such as teacher evaluation, pre-service teacher education and the use of assistive technology. Research related to leadership and implementation of UDL appears to be limited in the field of research.

Michael Fullan, in *All Systems Go* (2010) provides an authoritative voice related to the needs of a cohesive and organized system for student learning. Fullan describes the importance of clear goals, resolute leadership, shared capacity and intelligent accountability. Similar components are evident when one examines how Universal Design for Learning can support an aligned educational system, yet more research is needed.

Edyburn (2010) challenged leaders to consider what the actual implementation of UDL really looks like? He asked, "What are the measureable outcomes that UDL promotes and allows for a system to achieve?" Al-Azawei, Serenelli, and Lundqvist (2016) provided an overview of background and history regarding UDL while pointing out the empirical gaps in understanding and applying Universal Design for Learning as a

method that addresses learner outcomes, flexible implementation. Al-Azawei et al. also called for more empirical research in multiple implementation aspects of UDL. How to implement UDL is a leadership challenge that is not well researched. Novak (2016) in Meyer, Rose, and Gordon (2014) indicated that "UDL is based on decades of peer reviewed research, though still news to many."

Vitelli (2015) indicated through his research that more work needs to be done to support general education teachers in pre-service training to address UDL and understand the complexities of children with disabilities in inclusive settings. Other researchers cited important aspects such as the importance of professional development and the use of assistive technology; yet the research does not describe how leadership addresses these components.

Woods and Roberts (2016) identified the "fluid, supportive leadership that encourages belonging and independent thinking" as a manner in which a system addresses social justice. This philosophy mirrors the concepts promoted in UDL as a way to reach the needs of children. The interaction between Universal Design for Learning and Distributed Leadership holds promise for creating a system that is both focused on goals and flexible in the means.

The principles of clarity and flexibility can be understood as a strategy in examining leadership. Spillane, Harris, Jones and Mertz (2015) introduction of distributed leadership acknowledged that multiple leaders, both formal and informal have roles in the successful outcomes and also the successful interactions of an educational system. The focus of Spillane et al.'s work was on the interaction and not necessarily the

actions of specific leaders. The focus on interaction in complex and dynamic situations provides a lens compatible with Universal Design for Learning. Similar to the principles of distributed leadership, UDL does not examine only the learner, but the complex interaction of learner and environment.

Thought leaders such as Fullan and Kotter promote and support the change process for continuous improvement in authentic environments with compatible environments or cultures. Kotter (2012) first acknowledged that a leader and the organization must find the urgency for change. The current focus on equity and inclusivity suggests that current state and federal data would indicate that gaps in achievement and opportunity exist within our educational system. The principles of Universal Design for Learning and associated leadership in conjunction with current state and federal reform efforts suggested that an examination of successful leadership practices using UDL is needed as we improve on successful educational systems and positive student outcomes for all.

Kotter (2012) describes the importance of continuous improvement as a way to transform a system. In *Leading Change,* Kotter describes how a multi-step process is needed to create motivation powerful enough to overcome inertia. He also describes the importance of high-quality leadership (p. 22). Kotter specifically addresses an eight-stage process for creating major change. The eight-stage process includes: establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and a strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering broad-based action, generating short term wins and consolidating gains and producing more change and ultimately anchoring new

approaches in the culture. Current efforts related to equity and inclusivity coupled with reform efforts such as PERA and the Common Core State Standards created a need for systems to be clear about goals and yet flexible in our means of delivery. The idea of "one size fits all" was never a real model for leadership and systems organization.

The qualitative methodology of conducting in-depth interviews with district level leadership provides information about contexts as well as beliefs, skills and strategies of leaders. The identified purpose of this study addresses the authentic context and the dynamic interaction of beliefs, cultures, practices and collaboration. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) provide an authoritative overview on how qualitative inquiry can support the examination of these complex, meaningful and needed areas of study.

The review of available literature provided a context for what is known about UDL, what is known about policy and UDL and what is known about the successful leadership efforts to reform and change a system of learning. The literature review indicated that there is a gap in usable knowledge about how leaders actually implement UDL as the system organizer for the success of all students. The literature review indicated the need for clarity in understanding UDL, what it is and what it is not. This study provided an examination of specific UDL work related to leadership and implementation. It did not examine the data around the student outcomes from districts. However, it provided valuable insight to the work of leaders, their beliefs and their actions. This study identified how the work of UDL leaders paralleled the work of teachers with their students. This paralleled work required use of the UDL principles of

multiple means of engagement, action and expression for students and for the adult learners that lead students.

The review of literature addressed key research in four areas. These areas included an examination of Universal Design for Learning in education, an examination of UDL in policy along with an examination of leadership in school reform efforts followed by an examination of leadership and UDL. This chart provides an overview of what is understood in each of these key areas and how the combination of ideas present a need to know more about UDL and leadership. This chart provides a brief summary of UDL, UDL in policy, school reform leadership and UDL leadership. UDL has been presented as an instructional methodology that addresses multiple means of engagement, action, expression and representation. The concept of flexibility in instructional methodology has also been represented in policies that include the National Education Technology Plan, the Higher Education Opportunity Act and more recently the Every Student Succeeds Act. These policies represent a history of promoting flexibility through policy as a way to address a policy-focus on the needs of learners and the need for flexibility in achieving desired outcomes. More research is needed in the area that addresses the intersection of UDL and leadership. The review of literature demonstrates a need to understand how the intersection of UDL and leadership reveals more about leadership and the implementation of UDL as a systems level organizer for change and reform. More research is needed in UDL and leadership as a way to address needed reform in education.

Table 1

Brief Summary of UDL, UDL in Policy, School Reform Leadership and UDL Leadership

Literature Review	Summary of Key Concepts
Universal Design for Learning	UDL multiple means of engagement, representation, action and expression UDL as a classroom strategy to support inclusion of children with special needs into the mainstream Initial link to assistive technology UDL identifies need for clear outcomes, flexible approaches, removal of barriers Described as a proactive pedagogy
Universal Design for Learning and Policy	IDEA 1997 provided early momentum for UDL Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008-UDL makes learning more accessible for all. UDL as an exemplary practice National Technology Plan 2010 and 2016-UDL addresses accessibility for all learners. 2016 update calls for personalized learning and effective use of technology ESSA-UDL as a system that promotes flexibility necessary for student success. Student assessments developed using principles of UDL, learner variability is key principle
Leadership and School Reform	Leadership is critical to reform efforts Skills needed include: self-confidence, self-efficacy and emotional intelligence Focused and flexible approaches are needed District office has key role in setting direction and goals Need for differentiated and flexible approaches Need for collaboration, shared direction and aligned practices Accountability and evidence of outcomes are needed
Leadership and UDL	Need for more evidence and measurable outcomes Need to examine specific variables in UDL implementation and replicate effort

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual ideas promoted by social justice as described by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) along with the more structural focus promoted by Bolman and Deal (2013) provide for two concepts that support a research based understanding of UDL and leadership. Bolman and Deal provide a structural focus on how leaders implement their work. The four frames indicate ways that leaders address the symbolic, human resource, structural and political aspects of leadership. The four frames provide insight on how to lead organizations with attention to these four frames. These four frames were instrumental in the development of the interview protocol.

As the findings were analyzed, another framework for systems level improvement emerged. Kotter (2012) provided an eight stage process for leadership and continuous improvement that was then used to analyze the findings of this research.

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) discuss the importance of multiple lenses for addressing the ethical needs of an educational system for effective student learning. The ethics of justice, critique, care and profession are necessary conceptually in understanding how the beliefs and actions of Universal Design for Learning can support leadership designed to effectively meet the needs of all learners, including those most underserved. The improved understanding of leadership and UDL has the potential to contribute to these critical ideals in a manner that is not only ethical, but usable, replicable and generalizable.

Bolman and Deal (2013) provide a process for examining organizations through four frames: Organizational structures, politics, symbolism and human resources. These

frames provide a usable conceptual framework for qualitative examination and inquiry with district leaders and the implementation of UDL. The four frames described by Bolman and Deal provide a structure for the more detailed examination of implementation of Universal Design for Learning. The four frames provided tools for the initial inquiry that supported a comprehensive understanding from leaders in authentic contexts that describe the skills, strategies, outcomes and obstacles that support implementation of UDL at the district level.

Zai (2015) describes an analysis of general education reform efforts that require a multi-faceted lens as described by Bolman and Deal (2013). He acknowledges that the complex needs and issues found in education require analyses beyond single points of examination. The four frames of structure, political, symbolic and human resource provide a comprehensive framework what to ask leaders about how they lead. Specifically the leadership concepts provided by Bolman and Deal four frames provided a manner for gathering evidence from district leaders with a focus on these four frames and UDL implementation. This accepted leadership concept provided a tool for leaders to define and provide evidence on what, why and how they address UDL implementation as a leader.

Kotter (2012) provided a framework for the reflection and analysis of the responses from each of these leaders specific to their work on continuous improvement. Continuous improvement, change and reform are used almost interchangeably for this study. Continuous improvement is viewed as incremental change. Change is the idea of making something different while reform identifies making change in order to improve.

The similarity of these definitions allows for them to be used interchangeably throughout this study.

The conceptual framework provided by Bolman and Deal (2013) created a framework for responses from the participants specific to the structures, the human resources, the political and symbolic efforts of each of the 12 leaders interviewed. The analysis of responses revealed findings about leadership beliefs that are supported and described by the ethical framework from Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011). The analysis of actions by these leaders matched Kotter's (2012) process for understanding and leading change. The combination of these conceptual frameworks allowed for an analysis of the findings linked to the research questions. How do district leaders promote and use Universal Design for Learning as a way to organize and reform a system to assure equitable access and learning? What are the specific leader characteristics, beliefs, actions, and leadership strategies that promote the flexible and accessible learning environment designed to meet the needs of all learners? Are there unique and specific learning conditions that warrant the practices of UDL?

The chart provided below provides a concise visual summary of the three different conceptual frameworks. These different conceptual frameworks address leadership from concrete structural element regarding how leaders lead, while others address why leaders lead. The combined use of these conceptual frameworks that addressed both how and why, provided a structure that guided obtaining valuable information from the participants. The four frames of leadership provided by Bolman and Deal (2013) were used to develop the interview protocols. These four frames provided a

framework for the development and use of the interview protocol that allowed for the gathering of discrete elements of information related the organizations in which the participants worked. The conceptual framework provided by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) provided a way to address the purpose and ethical choices that the 12 participants presented in describing both why and how they chose to lead using UDL as their framework. In addition, the process of continuous improvement was described by each of the participants. Kotter (2012) provided an eight stage process that aligned to the descriptions of a process toward improvement and transformational change shared by these participants.

Table 2

Literature Review: Key Areas of Study

Conceptual Framework	Focus Area
Bolman and Deal-4 Frames of Leadership	• Used to develop interview protocol • Used as specific codes during interview analysis
Shapiro and Stefkovich-Ethical Decision Making	• Used to analyze findings; particularly related to why leaders chose UDL.
Kotter-Continuous Improvement	• Used to analyze findings; particularly in understanding a process for change and systems transformation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

How does a superintendent or other district leader use the lens of Universal

Design for Learning to assure equitable access and successful learning outcomes for all

students? This research question identified a need to address the intersection of leadership

and Universal Design for Learning into actionable and usable knowledge (Rappolt-

Schlictmann et al., 2012). This research study linked leaders and their authentic contexts

to understand how leaders addressed implementation. Valuable research in UDL can be

found at multiple levels of implementation including learner based brain research,

classroom interventions and implementation areas related to assistive technology. An

examination of authentic leadership beliefs, skills, actions and challenges provided

insight as to how to implement UDL at the district level. Limited research on leadership

and the implementation of UDL exists. This study provided insight and clarity regarding

this important variable of UDL and its value as a tool for framing an educational system's

success.

This study was designed to advance the knowledge that supports and challenges

the critical goal of meeting the needs of all learners. Because the focus of this study is on

leadership styles, actions, beliefs and structures, the importance of examining leadership

in authentic contexts was critical. The complex interaction provided by school districts

that are addressing UDL as part of identified goals, efforts and initiatives was studied.

The realistic settings of school districts as described by district level leaders provided a phenomenological opportunity to understand more about the essences and challenges of educational leadership and UDL. Qualitative research provided for the inductive and comparative opportunity to establish both usable and generalizable knowledge.

Methodology

This study utilized a phenomenological approach to understanding leadership and UDL implementation. This approach provided insight related to the beliefs, context and actions of school district leaders who implement UDL as a way of successfully meeting the needs of all learners. The research consisted of semi-structured interviews with leaders who have implemented UDL at the district level of leadership. This research addressed an examination of perspectives from multiple leadership sources from specific districts of education. 12 different leaders from seven different states were interviewed for this study. Five district office leaders were recommended by CAST. The additional seven participants were obtained using a snowball chain sampling method through direct recommendations from the five participants recommended by CAST. Principals and teachers were specifically not interviewed as part of this study. The focus was on district level leadership and the specific beliefs, context and actions of these leaders. The possibility of using negative examples of where and how leaders attempted to implement UDL and failed was also considered. A negative example was not found. This study included an initial consideration to examine documents that supported the UDL implementation in particular districts. All of the leaders interviewed for this study responded that policies and mandates did not drive their implementation of UDL.

Therefore an examination of state policies and mandates that supported UDL

implementation did not appear to be needed given that it was determined that these

policies were not sources that added urgency nor guidance on UDL implementation.

The detailed responses that emerged in the qualitative interviews addressed the

beliefs, skills and actions of district level leaders. The interview protocol was designed to

address comprehensive responses about each participant's leadership background, their

knowledge about UDL and how they implemented components of UDL through their

unique leadership lens. This research addressed how a leader's beliefs and actions

promote the successful implementation of UDL at the district level. The successful

implementation was designed to ultimately create and sustain a more equitable system of

education for all children.

Sampling

Semi-structured interviews with district level leaders were the source of

information for this study. UDL leaders were chosen based on specific communication

with CAST. CAST recommended five district level leaders. Seven additional district

leaders were then recommended from the initial sample of five based on a snowball chain

method of selection. The snowball chain was directly linked to the five CAST

participants. The seven additional participants were chosen based on a recommendation

from the original five participants providing a strong link to recognized leaders in the

field of UDL. One of the districts provided for three participants, which included the

superintendent who was recommended by the initial CAST nominated participant. Each

participant had a direct link or a single snowball chain connection to CAST. This was

based on a direct recommendations from the recommended five participants endorsed by CAST. In this sample, the snowball did not grow and grow, but only grew as the original five participants shared at least one other participant recommendation.

The number of districts who have supported and implemented UDL beyond the classroom level does not appear to be a large number and this sample represents a saturation of district level leaders. These districts were identified based on their work with CAST and several were recognized for their work at UDL conferences and in UDL related publications. It is possible that leaders who are not as visible or as vocal in the promotion of UDL were not contacted for this study and that full saturation of all district level leaders was not met. UDL is an evolving process and it is possible there are other districts and leaders that might have contributed to this study. It does appear that UDL is spread unevenly throughout the United States. Regional concentrations of UDL leaders exist. For example, CAST located in Wakefield, Massachusetts appears to be a hub of UDL activity and research. Harvard University Graduate School of Education is closely linked to the work of CAST. Given the circumstances and the location of Massachusetts, there are several identified leaders on the east coast.

The specific titles of the participants along with the regions of the country in which they work and district size are noted in Appendix B. The constellation of leaders who participated in this research demonstrate school districts on the East coast, West coast and Midwest. The size of the school districts in which these participants work and lead range from smaller districts of about 1,000 students and through larger urban districts with greater than 31,000 students. The specific titles and responsibilities of these

participants indicate a range of job duties at the district level. This included three superintendents, four leaders with specific responsibilities in special education, with the five other leaders with other district responsibilities including professional development, and instructional responsibilities. Each participant shared a verbal resume of his or her work as part of a response to the interview protocol.

This study utilized semi-structured interviews with 12 district level leaders representing nine different school districts from seven different states across the United States. In one case, three different leaders were from the same district and two different leaders were from the same district in another case. A consideration of examining policies and documents was not pursued when all 12 participants indicated that neither policy nor mandate fueled their decision to implement UDL. The examination of the who, why and how of leadership in this complex work provided was a shared insight and commentary that has the potential to advance both leadership and UDL implementation. The engaged, thoughtful reflection on beliefs and practices shared by these leaders provided valuable and generalizable themes about leadership and UDL implementation at the systems level. The examination of reflection, practice and sharing was gathered through qualitative inquiry through in-depth interviews with identified leaders across the United States.

The importance of examining practices and reflections from these leaders was more valuable than an examination of policies and artifacts. Dematthews (2015) reminded researchers of the importance of leadership, advocacy and policy as well as shared beliefs and actions. The findings from this study indicated that the leadership,

shared beliefs and actions were described as critical to success in their systems. These leaders did not feel compelled nor did they promote policy change. the As one examines other educational reform areas, such as changes in student discipline practices and inclusion of children with disabilities, one is reminded that research in these areas of inclusion and student discipline practices were ultimately sealed for success due to the relationship of policy and practice. These practices were memorialized and required by way of policy. Although these leaders were not compelled by current policy, it is possible that these findings and the work of these leaders may do more to impact future policy decisions.

The descriptions provided by district leaders and superintendents provided a valuable examination of the leadership styles, strategies, skills and actions that promoted the success of learning for all children. Universal Design for Learning promotes the principles of clarity of goals with flexibility in the ways to approach student engagement, representation of student learning and student actions. How leaders support this work provided recommendations that can advance this important work for current and future leaders. How does a leader promote variability in student learning as well as the adult learning for leaders? What do these descriptive interviews provide for us in terms of preparation and support of leaders in the field of education? The shared goal of making our public school systems accessible and successful is critical as we advance student learning and promote student engagement so that all students are successful.

Data Collection Methods

Specific interview questions were developed and are listed in Appendix A. The same questions were used in each interview. The interviews were semi-structured to provide for some open ended responses where appropriate. A specific three month timeline was established for completion of all interviews. This limited time period provided for cohesion and consistency based on the cycle of a school year. The interviews were completed from August through October capturing what is regarded as the beginning period of the school year. Oftentimes leaders look to identify or launch new initiatives at the start of the school year. Often critical planning is completed during the summer months prior to the start of the school year. Overall this research provided an opportunity to add to the body of research in educational reform efforts that address the need to create and implement more equitable outcomes for all students.

Data Analysis

The work of leaders and the evidence of their success can be found through the transcribed and coded interviews. The interviews were transcribed and coded for shared themes related to leadership beliefs and actions. The coding of these interviews was initially linked to the four frames provided by Bolman and Deal (2013). As codes were analyzed, specific themes emerged more broadly into themes of ethics, continuous improvement and the technical details of the implementation process. The interviews led to an understanding of how structures, politics, human resources and symbolic work were addressed in the implementation. These findings then coalesced into more general leadership themes related to ethical decision making and continuous improvement.

The ethical lens provided by Shapioro and Stefkovih (2011) supported the ethical beliefs of leaders. The ethical commitments of these leaders was explicitly connected to the conceptual framework provided by Shapiro and Stefkovich. The ethics of care and the ethic of critique were intertwined in the information shared by these leaders. The ethic of care described by Shapiro and Stefkovich, identified the educators' role in placing students at the center of decision making. This included the social and emotional development of children through the development of relationships. The ethic of critique, described by Shapiro and Stefkovich, comes from critical theory as consideration of addressing inequity. Specifically in education, this is described as supporting the development of all children with an emphasis on those that have been historically under-served. An ethical commitment to all students, including those historically under-served is clearly identified in the interview process through both the leaders' definitions of UDL and the actions they took to implement UDL at the systems level. The student-centered focus that highlighted children who have been at the margins of educational systems, such as children with disabilities and other learning challenges, was interconnected in the definitions and strategies shared by these leaders.

Additionally the interviews were coded related to the outcomes of student learning. Other areas considered were community engagement and professional development. Information about community engagement was limited throughout the interviews. Information specific to district level professional development was robust and extensive throughout most of the interviews. This indicated that professional development was key to the implementation of UDL. Areas related to student learning

and positive outcomes were discussed, but actual data was not analyzed. Leaders identified the process for examining student learning through MTSS. The evidence of student success is described by leaders, but specific student outcome data was not analyzed for this study.

Bias and Positionality

This study about the beliefs and actions of district level leaders had the potential to be influenced by bias and my specific positionality as a district level leader. In my work as a district level leader I am eager to hear the positive stories, to learn from those that have experienced success and who can provide expertise in this complex and noble work. I am drawn to solutions that address equitable outcomes for all students. My own bias as a district office leader had the potential to cloud this study. I am reminded of the importance and care that must be taken to not over generalize from preferred sources. The findings of this study were derived from objective tools and methods that were rigorously and ethically applied. As stated in Merriam and Tisdell (2016), bias must be identified and monitored. I was committed to this identification and careful monitoring throughout the process from interviewing district level leaders to analyzing the findings and conclusions. The use of structured theoretical frameworks provided by Bolman and Deal (2013), Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) and Kotter (2012) provided clear frameworks for this approach. The codes were examined, re-examined and reviewed in a rigorous manner.

The process for analyzing data included multiple steps and processes to address bias and positionality. This included the initial use of discrete codes linked to Bolman

and Deal (2013). The codes were then analyzed and addressed as they coalesced into generalizable themes. The themes emerged into clear ethical themes and themes of continuous improvement. The discovery of these key ideas emerged through a genuine examination of the codes while moving between the big picture and the discrete details. Throughout the process, the practice of analytic memo writing was used as a method to address bias and positionality. The movement between the "big picture and the particulars" as way to capture the recurring patterns and themes provided a method for both generalizing data and the themes and also self-checking for bias and positionality described in Merriam and Tisdell (2016).

The questions that were asked of these researchers addressed leadership beliefs, skills and strategies. This was the goal of this research study and also represented a professional goal of practitioners. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) address this as well through their overview on the biases that are potentially inherent in qualitative research. In addition, Schwandt (2007) provides us with a definition of reflexivity that addresses both the need to examine one's own bias in research and the sense of action in "doing something" based on the research. Schwandt claims that reflexivity requires the researcher to carefully self-examine sources of bias, preferences and theoretical predispositions. A clear understanding of the desire to obtain authentic and generalizable leadership information balanced with the need to extract information that is free of bias was the goal of this research. I sought to make these findings not simply of interest to this researcher but to provide information that is generalizable and of value to the field of education and educational leaders.

I believe that Universal Design for Learning has the potential to be a connection point for many of our fragmented leadership initiatives. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) in the *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, shares how leaders must be able to move effectively from the dance floor to the balcony as a metaphor for the many details and demands that we address daily in combination with our need to be reflective. We need to have a broad perspective and understanding of the needs of our many stakeholders in order to be successful as a leader. In understanding reflexivity, I am drawn to understanding my own bias and prejudice as it relates to the idea of a shared perspective. Gadamer (as cited in Schwandt, 2007) describes the idea of a disabling prejudice and of an enabling prejudice (p. 21). Because one has a prejudice or a bias does not mean that we should ignore that bias, but perhaps we need to understand it, mold it and allow it to propel us to an idea worthy of research and discovery. This study has propelled my growth and understanding as an educational leader.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATION OF RESULTS

How do district leaders promote and use Universal Design for Learning as a way to organize and reform a system to assure equitable access and learning? What are the specific leader characteristics, beliefs, actions, and leadership strategies that promote the flexible and accessible learning environment designed to meet the needs of all learners? Are there unique and specific learning conditions that warrant the practices of UDL? The responses to these research questions addressed through semi-structured interviews with 12 district leaders identified details about the ethical commitments of district leaders. In addition the findings reveal a responsiveness and ability to lead change with UDL as their continuous improvement framework. The findings provide critical details as to how these leaders used flexible approaches to professional development to address variable ways to meet the needs of teachers and other leaders. In addition, these findings illustrate how leaders operationalized multi-tiered systems of support to provide effective methods for understanding and responding to student needs.

These findings indicate that UDL is a systems level organizer for addressing the needs of all learners. The over-arching commitment to meeting the needs of all learners is apparent throughout the choices and decisions made by these leaders. This insight and specific findings related to the research questions bridges a gap in research and knowledge as to how district office leaders provide vision, direction and tools to

effectively meet the needs of all learners and assure equitable access to high quality

learning and successful outcomes.

Summary of Findings

The key themes that emerged from this research indicated that leaders who used

UDL as a systems organizer were driven by an ethical commitment to meeting the needs

of all learners. Ethical commitment was noted through the ethics of care, critique and the

profession, the strongest ethical commitment that emerged from all participants was the

commitment to those children historically under-served through the ethic of critique.

Most leaders demonstrated a commitment to children with special needs or other learning

needs that warranted an emphasis on teaching to the full margins of an educational

system. The ethical commitment to care and compassion was also evident in the

interviews with these leaders. They were child centered in their demonstrated

commitment and the processes they shared throughout the interviews.

In addition, these participants had a strong understanding of the process of change

and how to lead it. These leaders identified Universal Design for Learning as their

framework for continuous improvement. Analyzing the findings about how leaders used

UDL, matched to a framework by Kotter (2012) supported the findings as to how UDL is

a valuable continuous improvement framework. Kotter's process of change and

continuous improvement that involves finding urgency, finding a guiding team, uplifting

the mission and vision, consolidating gains for more change and ultimately sustaining the

change in the environment is valuable evidence in understanding UDL as a process for

systems change and continuous improvement. An analysis of Kotter's themes that

address change, matched to the descriptions from these UDL leaders, indicated that these leaders have strong understanding and skills in leading change.

Lastly these leaders demonstrated a strong knowledge base in regard to critical components of educational leadership on how to improve instructional practices designed to meet the needs of all learners. The findings as to how these leaders promoted improvements with flexible approaches to professional development for leaders and for teachers is described in greater detail through an analysis of these findings. Understanding variability of needs and promoting flexibility as a norm not just for students, but also for leaders and for teachers, is key to the findings as to how UDL leaders supported and led flexible approaches to professional learning.

These leaders demonstrated a commitment to the use of multi-tiered systems of support to use data to better understand the variability of all learners. This process provided a structure as to how to use data to meaningfully understand and respond to learner variability. The MTSS framework supported UDL work within districts.

Ethical Commitments to UDL

All 12 of the participants in this research showed a strong ethical commitment to meeting the needs of all children. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) describe ethical lenses for leadership that include the ethic of justice, ethic of care, ethic of critique and the ethic of the profession. All ethical lenses were present in the work of these leaders, the most prominent lens was that of the ethic of critique. Participants' ethical commitments were evident in their definitions of UDL and the specific actions described by these leaders. UDL provided each of these leaders a road map as to both why and how to create a more

equitable system of education designed to successfully meet the needs of all learners. Their ethical commitments provided clarity on why leaders chose UDL.

The ethics of care and the ethic of critique were intertwined in the information shared by these leaders. The ethic of care described by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) identifies the educators' role in placing students at the center of decision making. This includes the social and emotional development of children through the development of relationships. The ethic of critique, described by Shapiro and Stefkovich, comes from critical theory as consideration of addressing inequity. Specifically in education, this is described as supporting the development of all children with an emphasis on those that have been historically under-served. An ethical commitment to all students, including those historically under-served is clearly identified in the interview process through both the leaders' definitions of UDL and the actions they took to implement UDL at the systems level. The student centered focus that highlighted children who have been at the margins of educational systems, such as children with disabilities and other learning challenges, was interconnected in the definitions and strategies shared by these leaders.

Early in the interview, each participant was asked to provide a definition of UDL. These definitions provided an acknowledgement of shared understanding with the researcher while also providing insight to the values, ethical commitments and vision of these leaders. A shared definition is necessary when one possible barrier to UDL implementation is that one must know what one is doing in order to understand if it is effective. Specifically this research provided agreement that UDL was described similarly between participants resulting in a shared understanding of UDL. As David

Edyburn (2010) suggests, it is perhaps the elusive nature of UDL that makes it hard to define and hard to know it when we see it. This research illustrated an agreement among participants on what UDL is and the intentions of UDL implementation.

The ethic of critique and the ethic of care appeared to be intertwined in the commitments shared by these participants. Participants were guided by a student-centered commitment to meeting the needs of all learners. One participant described his ethic of compassion and his commitment to UDL, "Above all, how do we show that we care for all children." He identified an interest in using UDL to operationalize caring as the core value of his work in education. All 12 participants shared a goal of meeting the needs of all learners as their reason for the purpose in their work and for choosing UDL as the organizer of this purpose. When participants were asked how they defined UDL and why they chose to implement UDL, they shared how UDL provided a framework for meeting the needs of all learners. One leader shared that "UDL is a mindset and a philosophy, but teaching to the margins is better for everybody." The definition of UDL shared by these leaders promotes a core idea that variability is expected and that responses and approaches must address variability as the norm. According to guidance and documents provided by the National Center of UDL, UDL promotes the principle that to achieve success for all, flexible approaches are necessary. This understanding of variability at the core of learning appeared to fuel the actions of these leaders. Participants were driven by their core ethical commitment to meeting the needs of all learners.

A strong commitment to all children and a voice to the ethic of critique, was apparent in the definitions and strategies shared by these leaders. The ethic of critique,

linked to critical theory, specifically identifies an ethical commitment to children who have been historically underserved in the educational system. It is then not surprising that most leaders spoke about a specific commitment not only to meet the needs of all learners, but to meet the needs of children with special needs, children who do not identify English as a first language, children of poverty and children at the highest levels of learning as well. These groups of children are consistent with children who have been historically underserved. One leader shared it this way,

> We are focused on the achievement gap, so our second language learners, our struggling readers, our students of poverty. No one was doing that work well, so pulling out and sending specialists in wasn't working. UDL is the answer to give teachers the capacity to address learner variability without expecting someone else to do that for them. Our main goal was to really make sure that we were closing achievement gaps and that our high end learners were growing and our struggling learners were growing.

Participants provided insights that revealed the ethic of critique based on commitment and responsiveness to those students historically underserved and those students lagging in successful outcomes.

The definition of UDL promoted by CAST addresses the importance of both pedagogy and neuroscience. CAST (2018) defines UDL as a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for people based on scientific insight into how humans learn. The definition of UDL acknowledges an understanding that each human brain is unique thus requiring flexibility in how one teaches each unique brain. Pedagogy, the

manner of teaching children, must then by design be variable because human brains are variable. The definitions identified common understandings of proactive approaches to meeting the variable needs of learners, and doing so by understanding both pedagogy and the neuroscience of individual brains and individual learners. One participant promoted UDL this way,

> For me UDL is really a value system, we need to view the world of education in a way that all means all, that goals matter and the ability to get there. You can't go fast and you can't go backwards. It's a way to intentionally design lessons and approach instruction.

Universal Design for Learning Guidelines   VISIT THE UDL GUIDELINES

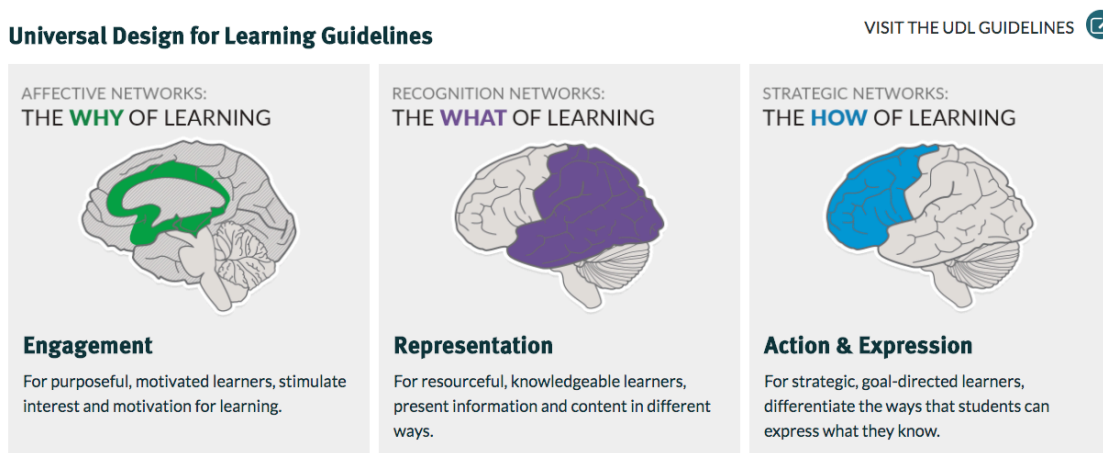| AFFECTIVE NETWORKS: THE **WHY** OF LEARNING	RECOGNITION NETWORKS: THE **WHAT** OF LEARNING	STRATEGIC NETWORKS: THE **HOW** OF LEARNING
Engagement For purposeful, motivated learners, stimulate interest and motivation for learning.	**Representation** For resourceful, knowledgeable learners, present information and content in different ways.	**Action & Expression** For strategic, goal-directed learners, differentiate the ways that students can express what they know.

Figure 1. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines

The descriptions shared by these leaders provided insight to why they chose a UDL framework as the approach to lead a school system. These leaders described thoughtful and proactive approaches to meeting the needs of all learners. These proactive approaches revealed a commitment and an understanding that one needs to begin by

planning for and expecting learner variability. One cannot be surprised by the unique

needs of learners, but to plan for it at the very beginning of the educational process.

> I define UDL as very proactive, developing support for all kids based on what we
>
> know about the brain. Its research based and planning for all kids, we know we
>
> have variability all over, how do we accept that, appreciate that, and plan for all
>
> kids and all staff at the very beginning of our educational journey? So to me, it's
>
> proactive in understanding variability and planning a way to access or to engage
>
> based on the brain.

The definitions revealed ethical commitments and an understanding of the variability of

student needs. One leader shared that, "All kids can learn and all kids have the right to

meet the same standards and it's my job to provide that access."

UDL was identified as a way to meet the needs of all learners. Specific responses

that highlight the ethical commitment of critique and those most underserved were

identified throughout the interviews. In general terms, those that identify with UDL

processes often talk about teaching to the margins, teaching to the full extent of

capabilities to encompass the needs of all learners. These UDL leaders identify this

approach as a challenge but they also identify that this is a better approach for all students

resulting in better outcomes for all. The architectural concept of UDL that provided

sidewalk curb cuts allowing individuals in wheelchairs to access the crosswalk without a

barrier, came the realization that a curb cut was of benefit to many. The realization that

"teaching to the margins" is better for all children is apparent in this research. As one

participant stated, "We quickly came to realize that UDL is an approach that can benefit

all students." In general, the participants discussed the proactive and flexible approach

that are needed to implement UDL. The participants consistently shared insights as to

how UDL provided a way to design and plan flexible approaches to student learning that

promoted access for all. The connection of design and planning with the intent of meeting

the needs of all learners while understanding both pedagogy and neuroscience were at the

core of the definitions shared.

UDL had its early origins in special education and inclusion of children into the

mainstream of education. A definition shared by a participant,

> (UDL) it's grounded in social justice and equity. I believe in dignity and
>
> belonging for all kids. This is how we close achievement gaps. This is how we
>
> look at inclusive practices and meet our district non-negotiables that all teachers
>
> teach all kids.

This ethical commitment to both care and critique was noted throughout the interviews.

Ten of the 12 leaders had professional background in special education or educational

support service positions such as Title I reading or psychologist. Two of the leaders also

indicated that they had a personal history as a person with a disability or family members

with disabilities. Two leaders specifically did not claim any prior position related to

work with children with disabilities. One leader shared his purpose and commitment,

> You have to have strong leaders that believe all kids means all kids. Everyone has
>
> a family member that has been disenfranchised by the educational system. Every
>
> educator has a story-whether it's themselves or a family member. It helps you to
>
> start with why (UDL).

Experiences and commitments to special education and student services were identified by the professional roles of the participants and then evident in their commitment to all children and their purpose in choosing UDL as a system level organizer.

The ethical commitments of these leaders were also identified by a desire to address barriers that are often inherent in school systems. An inclusive approach that breaks down barriers between traditional educational departments and specifically promotes shared beliefs and approaches by general education and special education is described by some of the participants. As stated previously, the majority of these leaders either currently held or previously held positions in special education. The ethical commitments to an inclusive environment for all children were noted throughout multiple interviews. As one leader shared, "It is about creating a general education environment that could be supportive of inclusion and would still have high standards and a lot of great teaching for all." One of the other participants who had been both a Superintendent and a Special Education Director, shared that his work in special education was really a desire to change the general education environment.

> As a special education person, what I've been trying to do my whole career is change the regular education environment. It's always been about pro-inclusion, but not putting kids back in an environment where they have already failed; we need to change the environment.

These ethical commitments identified vision, philosophy and actions of these leaders. "Why did we pull kids out to get what they need? Why do you have to leave to get what you need?" Another leader identified UDL as a movement gaining momentum,

I think this is like a civil rights movement and that is based on the fact that really

all students deserve to be educated together and that all learning and growth is

alterable and that there are things educators can do to make sure all kids literally

have the exact same opportunities and options as their peers. I think so much of

education has historically been directed by people who have implicit bias toward

different groups of students.

As another leader shared, "I went into education to be a change agent but also reinforce

best practice and I still couldn't find a best practice that was able to meet the needs of all

kids, at all times."

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) also identify the ethic of justice. The ethic of

justice identifies the laws, rules and agreements of leaders. Participants were asked

specifically what role that mandates or policy had in their commitment to UDL. Despite

recent changes in ESSA that promotes UDL, all 12 of the leaders indicated that the

commitment to UDL as a systems level organizer was not driven by policy or mandate.

Leaders addressed how local commitments to UDL were written into school

improvement plans and professional goal setting, but not mandates from local, state or

federal government policies or mandates.

The fourth ethical lens described by Shaprio and Stefkovich (2011) is the ethic of

the profession. The ethic of the profession identifies the melding of the ethic of care, the

ethic of critique and the ethic of justice. The ethic of the profession describes student

centered approaches guided by the commitment to all children and supported by policy

and action. The intertwined ethics of care and critique appeared to the primary drivers for

the purpose of the work. An understanding of the ethic of profession was notable through

an interpretation of the work and the commitments these leaders described. These

participants understood the ethic of the profession by expanding beyond simply an ethic

to care and commit to the success of all children. These leaders demonstrated ways in

which their commitments became actions through UDL implementation.

The ethic of the profession was identified through the actions of UDL

implementation shared by these leaders. Interview questions regarding first actions of

implementing UDL and describing processes of implementation revealed the ethic of the

profession. Leaders described how structures, communication and time were needed to

implement UDL. They described personnel and financial considerations needed to

implement UDL. These details provided evidence that these leaders were not only driven

by an ethic of care and critique, but they also had clear understanding of how to move

systems forward. Specific details about process and the necessary component parts of

leadership are addressed in the sections on continuous improvement and an analysis of

component parts of professional development and multi-tiered systems of support. The

analysis of the actions of these leaders provided evidence of their understanding of the

importance of melding the ethics of care, critique and ultimately the ethic of the

profession.

The insight as to the ethical commitment and the ethical choices that these leaders

described indicates that UDL is an ethically oriented reform effort designed to meet the

needs of all learners. These leaders implemented UDL without mandates. Their primary

driver for change and for student success is ethical decision making committed to the

needs of every learner. The complex question as to how we create flexible, responsive systems of education not only designed, but also effective in meeting the needs of all learners can be found in systems level implementation of UDL. The insights, strategies about these leaders in regard to their own beliefs and ethics is a valuable understanding about the importance of leadership, the necessity of having strong and ethically oriented leaders and providing leaders with flexibility needed to lead and to create systems that provide all students with success.

Continuous Improvement: A Process for Leading Change

In addition to the ethical commitments of the participants in this research, it was also clear that the leaders had a process and a framework to guide and lead district level change. Educational leaders need to have a clear understanding of change to support and lead continuous improvement. Current work in education requires leaders to embrace change. Educators seek change to improve outcomes for all students and to determine the strategies necessary to do this effectively. One of the frameworks designed to describe and support a continuous improvement change process is Kotter's eight stage process described in *Leading Change* (2012). This eight stage process matched to the feedback from the participants provides a clear illustration as to how UDL implementation at the district level is a systems approach for addressing change and overall continuous improvement. UDL is an approach to change that promotes successful outcomes for all children. UDL leaders describe the importance of not seeing UDL as one more thing to do, and not another initiative layered on the top of many other initiatives. Instead these leaders indicate that UDL is a values-driven reform process. This process allows

educators to connect the many initiatives around purpose and an aligned vision. The flexible approach inherent in UDL has the potential to not simply support a continuous improvement process but to address a student centered flexible approach that meets the needs of both educators and students.

Kotter (2012) provides an eight stage process for leading change. His eight stage process encompasses, finding urgency, developing a guiding coalition, promoting a vision and strategy, communicating change, empowering others, generating short term wins, consolidating gains for more change and ultimately anchoring change in the new culture. The narratives shared by the participants can be directly linked to Kotter's eight stage process for successful organizational change. Interview questions revealed insight from dedicated leaders as to how they led a change process focused on the elusive goal of meeting the needs of all learners.

Kotter Stage 1: Establishing a Sense of Urgency

Kotter's (2012) initial step in the change process is finding urgency to do the work. Kotter describes that urgency is found when others realize that the status quo is unacceptable. Finding urgency in the unmet need of students is clear in the ethical commitments shared by these participants. The ethical commitments shared by these participants, manifests itself in Kotter's initial process of finding urgency to do the work. These ethical commitments were carefully detailed in the subsection on ethical commitment of leaders. These leaders identified a commitment to meeting the needs of all learners and particularly improving processes so that all children are successful.

Throughout all of the interviews the idea of addressing unmet needs and supporting all children to success was evident. One leader shared,

> Initially we were having a great deal of difficulty around special education achievement and one of the groups that came to speak about solutions to the problem was CAST…As I listened to him, one of the areas we were struggling with was as an organization was our effective instructional model (for all).

Another leaders shared a similar commitment to finding the urgency in meeting the needs of all learners, "How do we really intentionally design learning for kids that really provided all kids with an access point." Their commitment to meeting the needs of all learners identified a need to achieve student success to the full margins of a school system. Perhaps one leader put it most succinctly, "You have to have strong leaders that believe all kids means all kids." The commitment to purpose for doing this work and doing it well was found in the ethical commitments of these leaders. This ethical commitment aligns to the important step in finding urgency to do the work.

Kotter Stage 2: Creating the Guiding Coalition

Kotter's (2012) second stage in leading change and continuous improvement, identifies the need to find a team and a guiding coalition. These leaders identified collaborative, problem solving based approaches to guide teachers and other leaders in embracing needed change. These leaders were not top down in their approaches to leading change and systems improvement. One participant indicated that "The district office is here to support it (UDL) but not push it top down." The leaders used inspiration over compliance to connect with their guiding teams. One leader shared,

I really focus on flexibility and autonomy and the inspirational side of leadership.

Being vulnerable to the fact that I don't have everything down pat, and I have to

surround myself with good people to really optimize and scale other people's

practice so it's more of a giant leadership team instead of being a figurehead of

UDL.

Another participant indicated that

I need to engage people's hearts and minds. It's really engaging people's hearts

and minds to do important, good work. It's really about finding ways of creating

conditions for people to engage in their own ongoing learning and inquiry around

their learning to understand that people have different strengths and different

assets and challenges that they bring to their work.

The participants described different ways that they developed guiding teams that

provided increased understanding and capacity to share UDL implementation. "I need to

give a lot of power and autonomy to the stakeholders and let it catch fire." Several

leaders described how they developed guiding coalitions by forming pilot groups and

professional learning communities. Another leader shared, "You need to have a

committed group of people who want to be first. They are your early adopters. They can

be a professional learning community, but they have to have a facilitator who knows

UDL." Pilot work was described by leaders as one way to develop a guiding team. Pilot

work was identified as specific UDL training and implementation with one small core

group. One leader who started UDL implementation with specific pilot work with an

identified small group shared, "I started with pilot work, the pilot took off and organically

expanded itself. It became promoted from within from the staff the colleagues and not administrators. Colleagues had already experienced the benefits."

The examples of how leaders utilized relationships, collaboration and problem solving approaches to create teams, share a values based vision and build capacity were noted throughout the interview with this leaders. These collaborative problem based teams identified the professional needs of teachers and leaders in UDL implementation. These guiding teams were able to practice implementation strategies and further develop and refine processes for effective implementation at a broader level.

Kotter Stage 3: Developing a Vision and a Strategy

Kotter (2012) describes the need for vision as a need to break from authoritarian decree and micromanagement. Kotter indicates that neither authoritarian decree nor micromanagement have resulted in successful systems transformations (p. 70). According to Kotter, vison clarifies direction, motivates others to action and coordinates the actions of many. Kotter describes the characteristics of an effective vision as imaginable, desirable, feasible, focused, flexible, and communicable. Elements of these characteristics of an effective vision are provided by the participants. They shared both vision and strategy through descriptions of their beliefs and their actions.

Kotter's (2012) idea of vision and strategy is closely linked to the ethical commitments identified previously. The analysis of the vision and strategy demonstrated by these leaders' moves beyond the ethical commitment to have the more well developed and implemented actionable strategies. The vision and strategies promoted by these leaders indicated that learner variability needs to be considered as the norm in education

and having flexible strategies to address learner variability is the key. The vision and strategies shared addressed how to address a shared commitment to all children through an understanding of variability while also understanding this as a way to address adult learning. "I think we really focus hard on knowing your learner, and learner variability and proactively thinking about that."

The idea of defying authoritarian decree and micromanagement were also noted in the comments shared by the participants,

> No one is going to follow you if you don't build a relationship with them first. I think it's (UDL implementation) grounded in engaging people and understanding them, so engaging them by knowing them, by knowing where they've come from, who they are, and then also really looking at what you bring to the work.

The comments from these leaders indicate that relationships and flexible approaches are important for successful UDL implementation.

The flexible approaches also indicate that these leaders did not overly manage every detail and direction to a specific end result. They supported problem solving based approaches giving adults direction and flexibility, similar to that provided to students in UDL model.

> It's (UDL) a lens for design and planning and it's about changing culture. Multiple representation, multiple options for engagement, and multiple options for all is important. UDL is about shifting more control to the students, giving adults the design lens to more efficiently and effectively match options and multiple pathways for learning. It's offering options to students with a precise

matching of data and design. It's capitalizing on strengths and removing barriers.

Put students in the driver's seat of learning.

This same participant went on to say that

It's really about voice and choice. The concept of if we want people to know why

they're doing what they're doing and what they need to do and how they're going

to do it. We need to deliver that in a way that's going to activate all three

networks of their brains so we can get buy in and commitment.

This idea that clear goals can provide flexible approaches to achieve the same outcomes

was reiterated by a number of participants. Another leader shared the importance of

connecting to the vision in ways that are, according to Kotter (2012), feasible, flexible

and communicable.

UDL is about having a singular goal, and the representing that goals, that message

in as many ways as you can that simply don't deviate from that goal, and you're

representing that idea, that message in ways that people can connect to it.

The vision and strategies shared by these leaders promoted beliefs and practices that

indicated the need to connect with teachers and leaders to inspire and to provide them

with a flexible options for implementation.

Kotter Stage 4: Communicating the Change Vision

Communication about UDL was identified to be multi-faceted and multi-layered.

Kotter (2012) describes the importance of having a common understanding of both goals

and direction in order to attain success in the transformation and change of an

organization. Kotter describes how communication can provide the motivation and

coordination of a desirable future. Kotter indicates that leaders need to repeat messages, use different forums and walk the talk in order to communicate effectively. The participants in these interviews addressed purpose of UDL implementation through multiple forums with a variety of stakeholders.

The participants provided the motivation through their ethical commitments to an educational system that promises and supports success for all students. The coordination of communication was described by these leaders in a variety of ways. In identified efforts to repeat messages to a broad base through a variety of forums, leaders described communication strategies directly linked to the day to day communication with teachers. Other leaders shared more explicit strategies including the use of communication to School Boards. In one case, UDL was linked to the district's strategic plan through an explicit communication of identifying UDL as an identified innovative practice to which the district was explicitly committed. Leaders communicated the why about UDL and supported others to lead with them and to share their beliefs. For many leaders the communication strategy was also linked to the work they did with teachers through their relationships. "You need to have a relationship with them, engage them and know them. It's about serving others. It can't be top down, it has to be facilitative, responding to their questions and problem solving."

Participants described professional development through a variety of forums as a way to communicate with teachers and other leaders. As one leader shared, "You have to be thoughtful and you have to be attentive to the internal narrative of teachers. I really tune into the emotional side of professional development and really engage teachers."

Another leader shared a similar idea indicating that, "You need to understand the internal narrative going on in teachers heads-good or bad, you need to know it and respond to it. You need to think about the level of trust with leadership to roll something out." Some leaders shared more explicit communication strategies, "I share a central message about UDL, checkpoints, foundations, UDL is a hard thing to do fast. Time is a barrier. It takes layers of patience and intentionality." Another leader shared, "The first thing we did was design a vision around UDL. As a superintendent, I needed to make sure the Board understood the why and the purpose. Effective instruction and student engagement are the drivers."

Some leaders communicated more by way of beliefs and goals.

As a special education person what I had been trying to do my whole career was change the regular education environment. It's always been pro-inclusion, but not putting kids back in an environment where they have already failed. We need to change that environment.

Another participant shared that, "Being in special education is really a desire to change the general education environment. UDL is our core belief system for that." It is clear that all of these participants had thoughtful ways that they communicated about change to their constituents. One superintendent specifically identified the need to model, "I hope my strengths are high expectations, strong relationships and really leading through role model example and really modeling about what I think is important whether its work ethic or caring about others." The process for communication was both implicit and explicit. Communication about "Why UDL?" was central to the messages shared by these

leaders. They demonstrated their own ethical commitment and values in their communication strategies. They utilized relationships and purpose as primary vehicles for communication. They discovered and utilized a variety of forums for communication. They identified key stakeholders from School Boards to teachers to address the purpose and the process of UDL implementation.

Kotter Stage 5: Empowering Employees for Broad Based Action

Kotter (2012) identifies that internal transformational change occurs when many people assist in the process. Kotter describes a commitment to identifying and lifting structural barriers that may hinder understanding, commitment and participation in the change process. Developing a process for reducing and removing barriers, empowering others and building capacity within an organization is important in moving a change process forward successfully.

The National UDL Center identifies that minimizing barriers, maximizing learning through flexible options is the core of UDL. This principle of minimizing barriers is also identified by Kotter (2012) as a way to address broad based support and action to transformation of an organization. In UDL, minimizing barriers was initially identified to address student learning needs. The findings from this research are consistent with the idea that minimizing barriers is needed both for students and for adults to effectively address UDL as systems level change. The principles of UDL initially supported an understanding of the flexibility and variability needed for student success is also viewed as critical for adult learners. These UDL leaders identified the

importance of providing not just children with multiple pathways for learning and success, but also providing that same concept of choice and flexibility for adult learners.

The participants in these interviews identified time and money as two barriers to full implementation of UDL. In particular, time with other leaders was identified as a barrier in effectively connecting with building level leadership to support and lead the change effort. Identifying barriers is also a concept identified in UDL.

I think our role as administrators is to remove barriers for teachers to be effective in the classroom. Really support them in a collaborative manner so that they are able to design learning environments for all kids. It's about technical and adaptive challenge, our focus needs to be on really thinking about educating every single student.

One participant shared that in his consultation with a CAST consultant, he was asked, "Why don't you just give teachers choice?" Another leader shared, "It's about inspiration, not compliance. Flexibility and autonomy are necessary. Start with a menu/choice of options." This idea of choice and flexibility is represented by the participants throughout the interviews. Choices were provided to teachers and to leaders to address their professional learning needs about UDL. As one participant shared, "UDL is about changing culture." Another participant shared the importance of autonomy for adult learners, "Give power and autonomy to the stakeholders. Connect with people through their core values." The participant then went on to share, "UDL is grounded in engaging people, understanding them, so engaging them by knowing where they are coming from, who they are, and then also really looking at what you bring to the work."

These leaders described the importance of UDL as choice and flexibility and also a way of gaining support through collaboration and problem solving with teachers and other leaders.

These participants shared ways in which they addressed flexibility in approaches that parallel the UDL process of flexibility for student learning. In addition, they shared how they used collaborative structures to support adult learning and the development of broad based support. Another leader shared that, "We started with a small group of teacher volunteers. Those teachers became champions for UDL. The next year we developed another PLC group."

The importance of broad based support was also identified through the need to develop and promote a shared foundation with teachers and other leaders. This was sometimes identified as the need to better align and connect traditional departments of general education and special education. "We really needed this work to come from both sides of the house: Curriculum and Special Education." "It couldn't feel like one more thing. We offered stipends, we set aside specific PD days, we have monthly and quarterly meetings where we go a little deeper each time. They actually presented to each other." Other leaders shared similar responses in the importance of UDL as a shared approach for all students; particularly connecting general education and special education approaches to educating all children.

Kotter Stage 6: Generating Short Term Wins

Major change and transformation takes a long time. Kotter (2012) describes the importance of generating short term wins as the visible and needed evidence to remain

committed to the more ambiguous aspirational change. The educational transformational goal of meeting the needs of all learners with UDL can easily be such an ambiguous and transformational goal requiring some short term wins along the way.

Short term wins were identified both in student outcomes and teacher satisfaction with their professional development and learning. One leader put it best,

> Without hesitation these teachers are coming back and saying we see the fruit. We see the impact. Kids are more interested, more engaged in content, decreased tardies and better attendance, kids that were disenchanted with education are starting to perk up more.

Leaders spoke about improvements in student achievement data and participation in higher level course choices. One leader indicated that the UDL work has resulted in higher SAT and ACT tests and that students with disabilities are scoring higher than average on these same assessments. Another leader shared that teachers are far more satisfied with the professional development offered by the district because of the choice and flexibility provided. One participant shared,

> We developed a research model for collecting data. Our Director of Research and Assessment collects data on all of our UDL classroom to look at how do students grow in that learning? What were their test scores? What did their engagement look like? He measured according to survey data and also behavior data. What is teacher engagement looking like? What's teacher satisfaction looking like, when they are teaching the UDL model? He's got some metrics in which we are seeing positive results.

The concept of carefully analyzing more qualitative and quantitative gains in districts implementing UDL is needed. Although more work is needed in better understanding outcomes of success, the idea that these leaders were able to identify positive short term wins which supported their own motivation and that of others was apparent in these findings.

Kotter Stage 7: Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change

Kotter (2012) indicates that transformation requires an ongoing commitment of time and a continued focus on the inter-dependence within the organization. Kotter warns that resistance can reappear and maintaining the inter-connectedness of the work takes attention and change at all levels of the organization. These findings indicate that UDL is a process, one that takes time and a commitment to the component parts of system level change. This process includes a commitment to teachers' needs through professional development and on-going support along with commitments to policy and personnel that support UDL.

Examples of how specific components of the educational system became linked to UDL provided evidence on consolidating gains to produce more change specific to UDL implementation. One participant shared it this way,

> You have to have a multi-year plan. The worst thing you can do is come in and do a two day workshop and then leave. It has to be sustained in duration. There has to be a coaching aspect. You have to model the framework. You have to build a professional learning community based on knowledge of adult learning theory. It can't be random strategy.

Commitments to changing the component parts of the educational system are needed. Some of the districts and states have committed to professional practices of UDL in the teacher evaluation system. "I think we are on the cutting edge of what ultimately will be a movement, and we're out ahead of it. Especially since it's now embedded in our teacher performance expectations in California." Others shared how UDL is now written into district level strategic plans and school improvement plans. Other examples of consolidating gains for more change, included the ongoing commitment to working directly with teachers through their daily work of implementing UDL. This included commitments made to instructional coaches, in some cases specific to UDL at the building level.

> I wasn't sure about how we were doing until I started spending time in the school buildings with teachers. After giving them training and then watching them apply it and hearing what changes they were making. Just being in classrooms with teachers who were doing their best to implement was quite probably the most significant learning that I received as a leader.

Another leader indicated that, "I don't think our teachers are there yet with expanding this to the margins in the way that it should be. It's a process." Leaders acknowledged that the implementation of UDL is a process that takes time and resources. The leaders who participated in this research would indicate that their process is on-going. Although leaders revealed gains and progress for both students and for adult learners, the participants indicated that this work is still on-going.

Kotter Stage 8: Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture

Kotter (2012) describes that culture changes only after you have successfully altered people's actions. He indicates that both new actions and resulting performance improvements are needed in a new culture. This includes new norms, new values, superior results and ongoing communication. In addition, Kotter warns of a need to address employee turnover that supports the new culture. Some leaders shared that in order for the work to be anchored in a new culture that there is still more work to do in terms of the structure as well as the programs and processes that support teachers and leaders in learning about and implementing UDL. Several participants indicated that UDL needs to be part of teacher preparation programs. UDL represents a need to address traditional breakdowns between general education and special education.

Historically there's been this general education world and this special education world. It's been two separate programs and handled very separately. What we are trying to do is collaboratively work across these departments and support all learners in the classroom.

One participant shared,

I think (UDL) has shown how we work with each other's strengths… to build on each other's effectiveness, and to not be teaching in isolation any more…I think it has freed (teachers) from a little bit of the pressure of trying to teach all things to all students by yourself.

One leader provided this summary in regard to next steps and direction. Another leader shared,

I think we are finally at a point where UDL is not optional. We are saying that her

are options for you, but there's not an option that you don't take a step. It takes 5-

7 years to become really good with UDL.

Another participant shared, "Ultimately there's a self-sustaining quality to it. It's got to

be job-embedded."

Kotter 8 Stages: Summary of Findings

These findings suggest that UDL at the systems level, supported and driven by

leaders committed to UDL, provided a clear framework for continuous improvement.

Continuous improvement provides a framework for incremental change and growth of a

system that eventually leads to transformational change. The process detailed by Kotter

(2012) provided a lens to analyze the information shared by all 12 of the participants in

this study. An analysis of the frequency of comments within each Kotter stage was

analyzed to understand the prevalence of the stages of the change process. The insights

and detailed information shared by the 12 participants indicated that all eight of Kotter's

stages of change were present in the information shared by the majority of these leaders.

In a limited number of cases, these leaders did not provide evidence related to generating

short term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change and anchoring new

approaches in the culture. All 12 of participants addressed: establishing a sense of

urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and a strategy, communicating

the change vision, empowering employees for broad based action. The frequency of

explicit descriptions and implementation of these stages is detailed in the following chart.

Table 3

Frequency of Explicit Descriptions and Implementation of the Eight Stages of Kotter

Establishing a Sense of Urgency	12
Creating the Guiding Coalition	12
Developing a Vision and Strategy	12
Communicating the Change Vision	12
Empower Employees for Broad Based Action	12
Generating Short Term Wins	11
Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change	11
Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture	10

Key quotes were inserted in the sections above as a way to address both consistently shared ideas and notable quotes that illuminated how the work of specific leaders was addressing a need in the process of change and improvement. The findings indicate that the majority of the participants described connections to all eight of Kotter's stages in the process for change. It is possible that the unique roles of the participants or the limitations of the interview protocol or time available limited responses. It is possible to consider that these stages were implemented but not described in the interview.

Findings among at least 10 to 12 of the 12 participants indicated a high level of alignment with Kotter's (2012) stages of continuous improvement. It should be noted that some of the stages presented some overlap and interpretation as to which stage the information addressed. For example, the development of a guiding coalition to lead change was closely related to another Kotter's stages of empowering others for broad based support. The frequency of participant comments linked to Kotter's second stage of creating a guiding coalition were not noted as frequently as Kotter's fifth stage of

empowering others for broad based support. These stages both address a key finding that these leaders did not lead by authoritarian decree, but sought out shared leadership with others.

The change process shared by these 12 participants did not appear to be linked to the size of the district nor did it vary greatly based on the differing job titles of these participants. Each participant shared information as to how they addressed a multi-step, multi-stage process for change. Of the 12 participants interviewed, none of them described an end point or culmination of his or her work with UDL at the systems level. Each of them described the need for ongoing work with UDL as a way to achieve the desired outcomes for all learners. District level UDL implementation is a framework for change, continuous improvement and ultimately systems transformation. This is similar to the processes promoted by leaders such as John Kotter.

Key Components of a UDL System: Professional Development and

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Two systems components emerged as critical parts of the whole in how leaders implemented UDL at the systems level. Both of these components; professional development and multi-tiered systems of support deserve specific attention in the findings as to how leaders implement UDL. Ethical commitments and the commitment to continuous improvement provide an understanding of the framework for UDL development and implementation. Professional development and MTSS provide additional findings in regard to how leaders utilized specific approaches to implement UDL system-wide. More specific concrete steps in how leaders implemented UDL are

found through a closer examination of professional development and multi-tiered systems of support.

Key Components: Professional Development

Leaders provided detailed and comprehensive overview of how professional development was key to the process of UDL implementation at a systems level. The semi-structured interviews asked leaders to describe their first action with UDL as well as to describe other barriers, along with information about personnel and financial decisions with implementing UDL. The participants shared specific responses regarding the professional development needed to implement UDL. Throughout the interviews, the participants shared a commitment to professional development for adult learning. Professional development examples were identified in direct response to a question about professional development. However, these leaders described their commitment and processes for professional development well before they were asked about professional development as a specific interview question. This indicates the comprehensive commitment to professional development as a tool that has a significant contribution to the success of UDL implementation.

Leaders who implemented UDL at a district level, utilized a variety of approaches to professional development and learning for teachers and for leaders. The variability of approaches was thoughtful and well planned as a way to provide for the variability understood in adult learning as well as student learning. The core of UDL is understanding that each learner is unique and that learning needs need to be addressed in multiple ways based on what engages a learner, what a learner needs to learn and how

that learning is demonstrated. This same concept is addressed for adult learners as they support fellow leaders and teachers in the implementation of UDL. One leader shared this succinctly,

> I plan professional development for leaders just like I would plan for the classroom. I have to plan for variability and think about implementation science. People are at different points with any new initiative: exploring, planning, integrating, scaling. When I do professional development, I follow the UDL framework. I know I need to engage adults, recruit their interest.

These insights from district level leaders provide insight to the importance of high quality professional development that is flexible, customized and designed to address the needs of teachers and leaders.

District leaders described the importance of learning and planning based on the unique needs of teachers and leaders while also providing for choice and options in professional development delivery. One leader shared, "There needs to be a menu and a choice of options" for learning about UDL. This same idea was shared by many of the other leaders in regard to promoting and teaching others about UDL. As one leader summed it up, "It really about creating the conditions for people to engage in their own ongoing learning and inquiry around their learning to understand that people have different strengths and different assets and challenges that they bring to their work." Planning for professional development choice to address the variable needs of adults was noted throughout these interviews.

Professional development was responsive to specific teacher needs and inquiry about UDL. The variety of approaches included initial workshop models to learn about UDL, working with consultants from CAST and other UDL experts as well as job-embedded professional learning opportunities often delivered through a coaching model. District leaders described a choice of large scale professional development institutes and workshops, summer academies, review of research articles related to UDL, book studies and the job embedded work of coaches. In addition to choice and flexibility, participants described the importance of responsive and personalized approaches. Personalized and responsive models such as coaching were described as a way to connect directly to both teachers and leaders. A responsive approach allows for direct communication about the problems, the barriers and the successes that teachers and leaders encounter in implementing UDL at both the building level and the classroom level. Many of the participants shared the importance of job-embedded professional learning, "We really try to understand where people are and what they are struggling with and try to match up UDL support to match that. So what exactly does it look like? What exactly are you asking me to do?" These participant went on to describe the importance of having time directly in the schools to respond to these key questions from teachers and from leaders. "I would like to get UDL coaches in every building." Co-teaching was also shared as a model that supported UDL implementation. One leader indicated that for her, co-teaching required a better shared planning model in order to be successful. This insight to the variety of approaches offers not just the idea that choice is important but that multiple

pathways, depending on the needs of the district, can support a pathway to UDL implementation.

Leaders shared concerns and challenges specific to professional development at the district level. Primarily district level leaders focused on the limitations around the time needed for adults to engage in new learning. "I think the weakness in our implementation is our inability to get administrators to carve out enough time to really embrace it." Another leader echoing the same concern, "We work to do PD with principals but they are so busy with their heads on a swivel-it's hard." Another leader who was also concerned about time shared, "We have a hard time getting enough time with teachers to really build capacity." Leaders also identified the reality of staff turnover as a challenge shared by leaders. It is important to have continuous options, "You have to stay on top of it." Another leader shared,

I talk to them, every single month, we do that. So you have to sustain effort. Nobody wants to do PD every single month if it's always the same. We constantly have to check in and give them the opportunity to reflect on their own practice.

Addressing these identified barriers of time, money and staff turnover are important considerations of leaders as they implement UDL at a systems level.

Professional development is a necessary consideration and condition for adult learning about UDL. Adult learning about UDL and UDL implementation is critical for both leaders and teachers. The commitment to a collaborative, engaging and responsive process is needed. The opportunity to provide for a range of options and give teachers choice also emerged as a key finding. An awareness of the concerns and challenges, such

as time and staff turnover, provides for realistic considerations in how to implement needed professional development. The specific structures and options varied by district with the shared theme that choice and flexible options for adult professional learning are needed. Just as the UDL classroom requires an appreciation for variability and flexibility through engagement, action and expression, so do professional development efforts for adult learners.

Key Components: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

There appear to be a variety of definitions and understanding of multi-tiered systems of support. The Illinois State Board of Education identifies MTSS as a framework for organizing a continuum of intervention through the use of effective, responsive and equitable instruction. The State of California Department of Education (2015) defines MTSS as an integrated framework of the Common Core Standards, effective instruction, social emotional learning and UDL principles with the systems necessary for improving academic, behavioral and social emotional learning outcomes for students. The Massachusetts Department of Education requires all districts to offer a single system of support that is responsive to the needs of all students, regardless of variability. The MTSS process provides a structure for careful considerations of student data, student learning and planning for effective instruction.

MTSS was identified by some participants as one of the structures utilized to address the implementation of UDL. Participants described the use of MTSS as a structural component that provided for regularly occurring ways to examine student data to improve practices and successful outcomes for meeting the needs of all learners.

MTSS provides for increasingly intensive tiers of instruction, and also provides for a regularly occurring method of analyzing students' progress with assessments to determine the level of student need. This regular examination of student data with teams of teachers and leaders responsible for the daily instruction of these students provides information about student skill levels and creates a structure to design and plan for more differentiated or intensive instruction. In a study by State of California Department of Education (2015), it was identified that only 24% of educational leaders responding to a national survey indicated that they utilized MTSS.

Seven out of the 12 leaders described a specific link between UDL implementation and MTSS implementation in their districts.

We apply UDL not just to the students that are struggling but to the full range of students. It also means that you have to make sure your initiatives are aligned and that you have a robust cycle of continuous improvement.

The shared planning through examination of student data provides a structure that supports the needed flexibility and responsiveness of a UDL system. One leader noted that "We designed a vision for UDL and the data was coming from MTSS." This participant demonstrated the direct connection between UDL as the belief and vision with MTSS supporting the examination of student needs linked to the necessary planning.

UDL leaders identified differing approaches and commitments as to how they achieve a well differentiated, universally designed classroom, school and district designed to meet the needs of all learners. One participant shared, "We are molding together what was RtI and is now MTSS with UDL. It's about inclusive practices." All

participants supported a highly differentiated, universally designed classroom. Some

described how co-teachers and the integration of specialists and coaches support students

in the general education environment. They described approaches that provided for a

more inclusive UDL classroom. One leader shared how they used both student data

through MTSS and a commitment to UDL so that "We eliminated all small group math

and small group reading. We moved to a completely inclusive model, no resource rooms,

no learning centers. Everything is co-taught and do lots of professional development on

UDL." These findings indicate that the MTSS process is instrumental to examine student

data and to plan effectively in order to design a UDL instruction. The findings vary in

regard to the specific structures that leaders chose to implement a UDL classroom.

Leader described structures from general education to more supportive interventions

either inside the general education classroom or outside the general education classroom.

These findings would indicate that more research is needed to comprehensively

understand the choices and direction that leaders provide in regard to how UDL

classrooms should be established.

Summary of Key Findings

UDL is another reform effort that when analyzed through a leadership lens

provides the necessary insight needed for successful educational reform implementation.

UDL has the potential to be the driver for systems change. UDL promotes an

understanding that variability among learners and the teachers and leaders who support

them is the norm. Successful approaches to meet the needs of all learners requires

flexibility and variability. The appreciation and understanding of flexibility and

variability requires that leaders believe that all means all. Then approaches to successfully address this ethical commitment must be thoughtful, flexible, goal oriented and supportive at the many different levels of a school system. Professional development that provides teachers a voice and a choice so that they may provide that to their students is key. Leaders need a guiding coalition to do the work. This study further illuminates that leaders cannot do this alone and that messages, edicts and even goals from a district office fall short without the support and guidance linked to teacher's daily work. The ideas of promoting coaches, professional learning communities and collaborative structures to link to the internal narrative and needs of teachers, to problem solve with them is needed so that they can address the variable needs of each and every student. Reform leaders have referred to this as support and accountability. Michael Fullan (2006) describes this as the intelligent accountability.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This study was designed to answer three research questions. How do district

leaders promote and use Universal Design for Learning as a way to organize and reform a

system to assure equitable access and learning? What are the specific leader

characteristics, beliefs, actions, and leadership strategies that promote the flexible and

accessible learning environment designed to meet the needs of all learners? Are there

unique and specific learning conditions that warrant the practices of UDL? These

research questions were developed in response to the problems that have been difficult to

address or remediate in public education. Despite the significant costs and tremendous

efforts of educators across the nation, the achievement of desirable outcomes for all

students continues to be a challenge. UDL has been promoted at the classroom level and

more recently at the systems level of reform and change. UDL promotes flexibility of

engagement, expression and action for learners as well as those that teach and lead. Key

reform ideas that promote strong beliefs and the important work of leaders have been

studied and analyzed. This research adds to that body of research and knowledge by

providing real, relevant and passionate descriptions from UDL leaders in authentic

contexts where they are challenging, supporting and sustaining systems designed to

promote successful outcomes for all children, every classroom, everywhere.

The interviews with 12 district level leaders who were identified initially by CAST and then through a snowball chain method of sampling providing key insights from seven different states about the actual work of leaders implementing UDL. This research provided key insights about the ethical commitments, beliefs, characteristics and leadership strategies utilized by these leaders. The findings closely parallel the work of reform leaders working to improve educational outcomes. This includes a specific analysis of how the work of these 12 UDL leaders matched a process for change and improvement described by Kotter (2012). This study provides needed insight as to how successful systems change happens and how leaders lead and facilitate the process.

The qualitative study that analyzed responses from 12 district level leaders provides valuable insight and information that has the ability to inform leadership efforts designed to meet the needs of all learners. It also has the potential to inform evolving educational policies, such as ESSA, that promote a UDL lens promoting both flexibility and accountability at the district level of student success. This study addresses leadership characteristics and beliefs while also providing insight to structures and strategies that address how this work is done at the district level.

The findings from this research indicate a strong ethical commitment to the purpose of UDL implementation to meet the needs of all students. How leaders from this study led and facilitated a reform process indicates that a system-level UDL process closely aligned to the change processes described in other reform efforts. These leaders demonstrated practical and technical skills in education. These skills allowed them to lead processes that connected directly to leaders, to teachers and to the direct and

immediate needs of students in identifiable and flexible ways. The focused yet flexible strategies allowed teachers to improve and expand instructional practices that effectively met the needs of all learners. The findings demonstrate how UDL leaders demonstrated commitment to the positive outcomes for all students. These participants provided leadership through an organized and supportive framework for continuous improvement and change. This included knowledge and implementation of the specific tools and actions needed to do the work. The tools and actions needed to do the work are described as professional development for leaders and for teachers and an effective MTSS process. These findings provide insight as to the purpose and commitment to change, how to lead a process of systems level change and to demonstrate the technical skills needed to do so in a way that change becomes part of a new culture for learning. These findings provide valuable and needed insight as to how leaders lead and how they assure equitable access in education.

Summary of Findings

The findings presented in this chapter address the original research questions related to the conditions that warrant the implementation of UDL at the district level and to the specific leadership characteristics, beliefs and strategies implemented by these leaders. The eight stage process described by Kotter (2012) indicates key findings in each of his eight areas. Leaders found an urgency in the commitment to meeting the needs of all learners in systems where this goal has been elusive. Leaders found guiding coalitions through shared work with fellow administrators and breaking down the barriers between general education and special education. Leaders often started with small pilot groups

and allowed UDL to grow more from collaboration amongst colleagues instead of a top down initiative.

The detailed definitions of UDL provided key details specific to vision and strategies around building a framework that clearly identifies the goal of meeting the needs of all learners through goal oriented yet variable approaches. The communication of the change was coupled with efforts to empower others and generate short term wins. The leaders who identified success with UDL were able to effectively engage others in the work. This included engaging both the hearts and minds of these other leaders and teachers. Understanding the needs and concerns of both other leaders and teachers provided a context for the support needed to implement UDL successfully. Finding purpose, and the "why," in the work allowed for a connection to meaningful processes and strategies that provided both support and accountability.

District leaders identified ways that they addressed the consolidation of gains and anchoring UDL in the system. The reflection of these leaders indicated a need to have a commitment to purpose, the acceptance that time is critical and that a shared team is needed to implement UDL and systems change. These findings are aligned to the principles set forth by John Kotter in his eight stage process for leading change. These findings also resonate with other structures for leadership and change such as those set forth by Michael Fullan (2006). These UDL leaders demonstrated a commitment to the need for change, clarity of goals; yet flexibility in their approaches. They demonstrated that shared capacity through professional learning communities, pilot sites and learning

networks that support an aligned educational system with clear goals, flexible means, focused leadership and thoughtful accountability was critical.

Consistently the findings indicate that an ethic of care and critique centered around reform efforts were at the core of this work by district level leaders. The specific leadership characteristics, beliefs and actions and strategies that emerged through this research indicate that there is a combination of strong ethical beliefs, a compassion and a commitment to all children and a connection to connecting mission, vision and goals to get this work done through flexible and accessible guiding teams supported through professional development and a commitment to continuous improvement.

Discussion

This study provides insight about the beliefs and characteristics of leaders and both why and how they lead an education system in need of change. The findings from this study provide insight for the field of education regarding the role of Universal Design for Learning as a systems level organizer. UDL has evolved from an approach that supported the inclusion of individual children into the mainstream of education at the classroom level to a broad framework that addresses a way to meet the needs of all children through a systems approach. The initial work of UDL which was focused on the inclusion of children with disabilities into the mainstream of education and the use of technology to support such implementation. The original connection to special education students may be part of the strong ethical commitments found in UDL implementation at the leadership level. Specifically these leaders interviewed spoke clearly and passionately on the ethic of care and the ethic of critique.

The UDL leaders provide an understanding of the framework of UDL that is expansive and focused on mission, vision, beliefs. These leaders were not simply focused on mission, vision and beliefs. They addressed their mission, vision and beliefs through specific actions; particularly through professional development and MTSS practices. The literature review completed for this study identified similar themes in leadership and reform efforts. Both the findings from this research and the literature related to educational leadership indicate that the qualities of a leader matter. These qualities have been identified as commitment, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. In addition, the literature regarding leadership, and the findings from this study, identify the importance of the district office connecting directly with building level leadership and to teachers through shared vision and goals. These UDL leaders provided detailed descriptions as to how they connected the vision and practices between the district office and the schools with both focused and flexible approaches. This study strengthens an understanding that the qualities and actions of district office leaders matter in meeting the goals of an educational system that effectively meets the needs of all learners. The summary of leadership and reform efforts found in the literature review match a framework for reform efforts shared by the leaders who participated in these interviews. This study indicates that UDL is a reform effort and not simply an instructional methodology.

The findings from this study are consistent with the approaches and recommendations for reform. These leaders identified specific ways in which they were able to promote clear direction with UDL as the framework while also supporting a variety of ways to achieve goals for both the adult learners and the students. UDL as a

principle identifies that multiple means of engaging, teaching and assessing success matter in order to meet the needs of all learners. These leaders identify that in an educational system, leaders need to identify the teachers and the students as need multiple pathways to success. The core ideas of UDL, understanding variability and promoting flexibility are at the core of the leadership findings as well.

The understanding that none of the leaders interviewed for this study were compelled by policy or mandate is intriguing. The references to ESSA indicate that UDL has a place in successful UDL implementation; however, the leaders interviewed indicated that policies and mandates did not inform their practices at the district level. One interesting question is not whether policy informed the practices but how can current leadership practices inform future policy. The National Education Technology Plan of 2016, released December 2015 commits to personalized learning and the effective use of technology. The Plan specifically calls for equity, active use, and collaborative leadership for everywhere, all the time learning enabled by technology. Although this plan may be interpreted specific to the implementation of technology, the call for equity and collaboration were identified as key themes in this research as well.

The integration of UDL into guiding documents, if not actual policy or mandate, holds importance in how UDL may become anchored in school districts. Some of the participants identified a need to promote UDL through teacher preparation programs. At least two of the participants identified the importance of integrating UDL into their district teacher evaluation process. Others identified UDL as a concept embedded in their school improvement plans or district level strategic plans. UDL at the policy level

appears to be emerging. The new ESSA policy specifically identifies and requires that districts address the principles of UDL; particularly in assessment. Research has demonstrated that leadership, advocacy and policy are ways that other educational initiatives, such as the inclusion of children with special needs into more mainstream environments and the importance of teaching social and emotional learning were ultimately sewn into the fabric of education. It is possible that this study points to the first step in identifying how leaders successfully lead using UDL as the systems level organizer. Perhaps it is the leaders that then promote and develop the advocacy and the policy that cements UDL as a critical practice for leaders. It is possible that this research and the work of these leaders can do more to impact the future direction of policy and not the other way around.

The findings from this study provide insight and direction that has the potential to further inform how we develop and guide leaders in the field of education. The need to develop and support the ethical decision making of leaders is critical in our field. Continuing to develop and utilize frameworks that support continuous improvement models is also needed. This study demonstrates that UDL is a framework for continuous improvement. A UDL framework appears to be well matched for leaders that are guided by student-centered ethical decision making. In addition, leaders need to have the methods for implementing UDL. The tools of professional development and MTSS can provide leaders with clear and usable components in organizing and implementing change. This study demonstrates ways to implement professional development practices with specific examples that are flexible and designed to engage and support teachers and

building level leaders. The use of MTSS as a consistent shared process for examining

student data to understand and respond to student need is consistent, and needed, within

the UDL framework. These findings that address beliefs, characteristics and practices of

leaders who implement UDL at the systems level provide the field with more knowledge

as to how we develop leaders and improve our practices in order to meet the goal of

providing a high quality educational system that meets the needs of all children.

Implications for Further Research-Ethical Decision Making

The most consistent findings from this study address the ethical commitment of

these UDL leaders. All 12 of the participants shared a similar message in their

commitment to meeting the needs of all learners. Each leader identified the commitment

to an "all means all" approach as the primary driver for their work with UDL. Whether

looking at the conceptual framework of Shapiro and Stefkovich (2011) or understanding

the ethical commitment from Kotter's (2012) stage of

> finding the urgency to do the work," these leaders articulated commitment and
>
> urgency by using UDL as their framework for leading an educational system as a
>
> way to meet the needs of all. These leaders identified UDL as the way to address
>
> achievement gaps, to address under-served students and to ensure learning for all.
>
> The UDL framework was described as a proactive process that committed to all
>
> children at the beginning of their educational journey regardless of their level of
>
> need or skill. Some described UDL as a value system that was summarized by one
>
> leader as saying that "teaching to the margins is better for everyone.

These leaders found positive learning outcomes for both the adults and the students using UDL as the framework. The problem statement identified in this research study addressed a need to achieve desirable outcomes for all children. These desirable outcomes address the importance of education in advancing our educated citizenry and supporting all students to future success, whether that be in college or career. This research demonstrates that UDL holds the promise of meeting the needs of all learners when driven by the ethical commitment of the adults that lead. This poses the critical question of how does one ensure that leaders are ethical and student centered in their decision making? Examining more about how leaders develop as ethical leaders and how they maintain that ethical focus are areas that merit more study based on these findings. What does this mean for the institutions that develop leaders through certification and licensure for district office positions? What does this mean for the districts that select student centered ethical leaders? How does a district interview, probe and determine that a leader is student centered and ethical. Then, once in a position of leadership and authority, how does a system ensure that this ethical focus is maintained? These questions relate to area of future research and practice in the field of educational leadership.

Implications for Further Research-Replication and Continuous Improvement Models

How does one use these findings to replicate the process of UDL implementation in more districts? Understanding UDL in the context of a continuous improvement model is important. Given that there are many ways in which district office leaders promote continuous improvement, how does one better understand if UDL is a preferred or more

effective framework for continuous improvement? This study addressed a framework for

continuous improvement identified by Kotter (2012). Kotter's eight stages of change did

not originate in the field of education. Other leaders, such as Fullan (2006) have

identified models for continuous improvement in education. The current ESSA policy

establishes a framework for continuous improvement as well. There are a variety of

continuous improvement models that could be considered for additional research

Examining UDL implementation in comparison to other continuous improvement models

has the potential to be a valuable next step that further informs practices of reform and

improvement of schools.

Implications for Further Research-Professional Development and MTSS

The components parts of leadership practice, professional development and

MTSS are two critical components in the implementation of a UDL framework. How

these component parts are developed and utilized provides a launch point for future

research. Leaders provided a great amount of detail in how they utilized professional

development to achieve the desired focused yet flexible approach that engaged both

building leaders and teachers. It is worthy of future study to better understand how these

component parts led to successful implementation. Is it the many options in professional

learning that promoted a connection, understanding and implementation of UDL or is

there one approach that provides better outcomes? The analysis of workshop models for

adult learning in comparison to job embedded models of professional development, such

as coaching and technical support at the classroom level are worthy of more study.

MTSS is one way that districts operationalized UDL. The MTSS process provides an on-going process for teams to examine current and specific student data and to design needed instruction. Specific study of the linkage of MTSS and UDL implementation also appears to be an area worthy of more study. Are the two required in order to successfully implement UDL? This study identifies a need to better understand the value of MTSS as one of the necessary structures to support student learning and UDL implementation. MTSS as a process that connects directly to UDL implementation is worthy of more study. MTSS has numerous component parts. MTSS incorporates the use of student data, careful timing of data review and specific design for instruction. Understanding the need for each of the component parts of MTSS and how it relates to UDL is valuable for future study. It is valuable to consider the study of other ways leaders examine student outcomes within a framework that connects the beliefs and practices designed to ensure positive student outcomes.

Implications for Further Research-Methodology for Study of UDL

Future research may also consider similar research questions using different methodologies. These semi-structured interviews analyzed through a qualitative approach provide a context for valuable in-depth case studies in any of these districts. Matching the work of the leaders to the understanding of the building level leaders and the teachers has the potential to reveal more about the shared beliefs and the understanding of effective implementation strategies. The examination of the student outcome data in districts that implement UDL also has the potential to further inform the field and determine more

about the efficacy of UDL as a systems level organizer designed to improve learning for all.

Implications for Further Research-Flexible and Accessible Approaches to Learning

Comparing UDL to other reform and initiatives that promote variability as the norm is also worthy of additional research. Avoiding ambiguity in understanding UDL implementation is important so that researchers can determine with greater specificity the process and the tools that are most powerful in addressing student learning needs. Principles in areas such as personalized learning, problem based learning, project based learning, culturally responsive teaching all place a high value on variability and access as well. These ideas are exciting but challenging because of the variability and potential ambiguity. Capturing and identifying the effective components of these variable but ambiguous approaches is needed. New and more refined research questions that probe more deeply and ultimately provide even greater specificity about UDL leadership as well as UDL student outcomes are needed.

Implications for Practice-Ethical Decision Making

The practice of leadership, although far from formulaic, does promote key ideas similar to those described by Kotter (2012) and replicated in this study. The study of leadership matters as one looks to find ways to successfully lead educational systems so that all children can be successful. The key ideas of finding purpose and urgency in why leaders lead is critical. This study underscores that leaders need to demonstrate a passion and commitment revealed in the ethics of care, critique and the profession. Leaders need

to have clear mission and vision around insuring that all children can be successful. The focus of the work needs a clear plan that is goal oriented but flexible in its implementation and approach. It is likely that leaders need support to develop as ethical leaders and to maintain an ethical focus. Determining how as a leaders one develops and maintains this focus is important. Not only do teachers need support to focus on mission, vision and practices, but so do principals and other administrators. Principals may be among the busiest and most distracted professionals in education. Carving out time for administrators to be one step ahead of teachers is necessary. This study demonstrates the need of leaders to demonstrate an actionable ethical focus on successfully meeting the needs of all learners. The implications of this research indicate that the student-centered ethical focus needs to be part of how we develop and train leaders. In addition how leaders are supported to maintain that focus and commitment despite the many demands on the time, energy are important considerations in the successful practice of educational leadership.

Implications for Practice-General Education and Special Education

The historic separation of general education and special education needs to be challenged in order to utilize all available resources and professional expertise to meet the needs of all learners. This study points out that both the ethical commitment to all children is best achieved through an integration of both beliefs and strategies that support all children across the full continuum of learning. Leaders cannot do the work alone nor in silos. The need to coordinate and integrate goals and implementation efforts to meet

the needs of all learners requires the coordination of a comprehensive approach that includes general education, special education and other areas of student support services.

This research points out that having guiding teams through professional networks is valuable. A guiding team that involves teachers and administrators is critical in order to connect the work from the district office to the classroom. Champions, pilot groups, that test the process before others, and professional learning communities connect the district office to the classroom. The connection to the classroom in real time, specific to the needs of children, provides for needed dialogue on what is needed, what requires modification and how to do the work. The internal narrative and needs of teachers varies based on the students in front of them on a daily basis. Establishing professional development support and training that connects in real time to real teachers with real students appears to work best. This varies based on teachers own knowledge and readiness, but also because of the variable needs of the students. Connecting to real needs in real time, likely requires coaches and facilitators. These professionals who have the time to discuss and problem solve with teachers support the flexible instructional approaches needed in the classroom while supporting the varying needs of teachers as well.

Implications for Practice-MTSS

MTSS is a practice that supports the implementation of UDL by examining student data and making needed adjustments based on student need. MTSS as a framework for organizing a continuum of intervention through effective, responsive and equitable instruction (ISBE, retrieved 2018) provides a structure for matching student

data and planning for instructional design and student support. MTSS provides a structure

for the careful consideration of data, discussion about students and problem solving

around interventions, instructional strategies. This approach is at the core of the UDL

implementation in providing a way to determine that flexible approaches are needed to

address unique student needs. For MTSS to be successful, collaboration and problem

solving need to be the core focus. A realization that MTSS is about using data to design

and implement successful instruction for all children requires more attention. The

acknowledgement that MTSS may be a critical core component of successful UDL

implementation is important in better understanding and furthering the implementation of

UDL.

The acknowledgement that this work takes time and commitment is critical. Both

patience and deliberate intention is needed to implement UDL as a system level organizer

designed to meet the needs of all children. Understanding the value and importance of

shared goals, clearing the path, adjusting along the way, but continuing forward is critical

to success. Too often initiatives get changed, shifted or leaders leave and the path

disappears. Many of the leaders interviewed indicated that this work takes at least five to

seven years. In the words of Heifetz et al. (2009), staying the course; yet being willing to

make course corrections is necessary. Educational leadership is complex. Leading

systems that meet the needs of all learners, requires an ethical commitment to doing the

work. Leading a system requires attention to the many layers of detail that address the

student centered determinations of personnel, financial and instructional decision making.

Staying the course, reducing distraction and avoiding the pitfalls of authoritarian decree

and micromanagement are important considerations in leadership. This study identifies

the critical components of ethical decision making, a process for leading change and

attention to the important details to accomplish the work all as critical.

Limitations

The limitations of this study relate to the sample size and the time spent with each

educational leader. The sample size of 12 district level leaders appeared to represent a

saturation in the field. The intention of this study was to interview participants who were

recognized for their implementation of UDL. This recognition came from CAST and then

through a snowball chain of finding other participants. It appeared that saturation was

achieved. It is likely that there are relatively few of leaders implementing UDL at the

district level. A larger sample size of leaders had the potential to enhance the findings of

this study. The connection of district level leaders with building level leaders and

classroom teachers might have also added to the depth of findings.

Each interview participant provided 40 to 60 minutes of their time. This is a

reality of the interview process when interviewing professionals who have many

professional responsibilities. The willingness of these leaders to participate was exciting

and refreshing. Their passion and willingness to participate likely relates to their passion

for UDL and a desire to see UDL expand. It would have been interesting to shadow these

participants or spend a greater length of time with each of them, to visit their sites and to

learn more about UDL implementation. The limitation of an unfunded dissertation study

accessing practicing administrators is another limitation to this study.

Summary and Conclusions

Leadership skills and strategies matter for the success of the district. The confidence, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and ethical commitments of leaders have an impact on their success and the success of the children for whom they lead. The ethical commitments demonstrated by the leaders in this study forged a path to inclusive practices designed to meet the needs of all learners in their school systems. Understanding how leaders lead in unique contexts provides insight as to how leaders lead, how their beliefs spur their actions and how promoting UDL can provide for the flexibility and variability that both adult learners and students need to access learning and demonstrate success.

This study indicates that UDL provides a framework for continuous improvement that matches other well established processes for change such as Kotter's (2012). This well-matched process starts with the acknowledgment of the needs of students. It provides an urgency and an understanding that change is needed based on the needs of all students. UDL merits more recognition in the field of change and reform efforts designed to address the stubborn and inherent weaknesses in our school systems. A systems level approach to UDL implementation addresses the needs of all learners, including the needs of students, teachers and leaders. The UDL framework provides a thoughtful and strategic process that systems require vision and strategies to address variability, flexibility and accessibility for all. UDL leaders have a role in informing emerging policy and direction through leadership and advocacy in order to see UDL cemented into future considerations for educational success. The knowledge, commitment and practices from

UDL leaders have the potential to reshape and respond to the needs of our educational

system addressing the goal of meeting the needs of each and every learner.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please share with me the number of years and months that you have been in this current position.

2. Please share with me a verbal resume of your work in this field that includes this position and other leadership positions you have held.

3. What led you to this specific position at this time?

4. Please share with me a typical day with the range of responsibilities you usually have.

5. How would you describe your personal philosophy of leadership and how you came to hold that philosophy?

6. As you know, I am doing research on Universal Design for Learning and district leadership. How do you define Universal Design for Learning?

7. How did you first come to know about UDL?

8. How important is UDL to you in your current work? How important is UDL to other stakeholders in your district (probe if necessary for other district leaders, board members, building principals, educators, parents)?

9. Do you recall a time or an action where you first considered UDL in your leadership actions?

10. How would you describe the role of UDL in your current leadership

11. Why do you use UDL as a leader? (follow up regarding, Was there a specific student need that led you to UDL implementation?)

12. What role did mandates or policy play in your decision to implement UDL? Please identify specific policies or mandates that were part of your decision.

13. Can you describe any barriers that you have run into in regard to UDL implementation? As you describe barriers could you also comment on what you have done in response to these barriers?

14. If you had to describe the hardest thing about UDL implementation what would it be? What about the easiest part? Can you elaborate on why these areas were hard or were easy?

15. What, if any, personnel decisions have you made in regard to UDL? Did you find that you needed to modify any staffing patterns because of UDL?

16. Do you have a specific professional development plan linked to your UDL work?

17. What kind of financial commitment is needed to address UDL in your district?

18. What kind of time commitment is needed to implement UDL in your district?

19. Can you describe other actions you took as a leader to address UDL implementation?

20. Did you work directly with families in understanding the concept of UDL and how the District was addressing UDL at the school and district level?

21. Did you work directly with principals in understanding the concept of UDL and how the District was addressing UDl at the school and district level? What about your work with teachers?

22. As you reflect on your leadership role are there specific skills or strategies that you found to be most important in implementing UDL in your district?

23. Did you have specific needs that you wanted to address when you started implementing UDL? Do you feel like they are being addressed now?

24.   What are the outcomes that you can identify now related to UDL implementation in this school district?

25.   Did these outcomes change over time since you first implemented UDL? Are you able to describe how they changed over time?

26.   How would you describe the teachers who have been most successful with UDL?

27.   Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about UDL implementation in your district?

28.   Are there other district level leaders that you would suggest that I meet with to learn more about UDL implementation? Your suggestions could be specific to this district or other districts.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANTS BY JOB TITLE, REGION AND DISTRICT SIZE

Participant	District Office Position/ Job Title	Region of United States	District Size by student number	Other notes
1	Coordinator of Professional Learning	East Coast	113,282 students K-12	
2	Superintendent	East Coast	1000 students, K-12	
3	Director of Student Services	Midwest	5300 students, K-12	
4	Instructional Specialist	East Coast	159,000 students, K-12	
5	Superintendent	West Coast	31,000 students, K-12	
6	Assistant Superintendent of Schools	East Coast	2500 students, K-12	
7	Superintendent	Midwest	11,600 students, K-12	
8	District Instructional Specialist	West Coast	31,000 students, K-12	
9	Coordinator of Inclusive Practices	West Coast	31,000 students, K-12	
10	Deputy Superintendent for Instructional Services	West Coast	Oversight for 40 school districts, K-12	County office role
11	Supervisor of Special Services	East Coast	1764 students, K-12	Rural area
12	Director of Special Education	Midwest	11,600 students, K-12	

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Martha started her career as a speech/language pathologist then worked as an Assistant Principal at a school for children with emotional needs and then became the Principal/Director at a school for children with autism. Martha has worked in public education as a district level leader since 1993. She was the Special Education Coordinator, then Special Education Director and Director of Student Services for River Forest Public Schools where she spent 22 years of her career. She is currently the Superintendent of Schools for Riverside School District 96 in Riverside, Illinois.

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