

Universal Design for Learning Across Schools in the Global Context: Current Complex State of Play

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter serves as an introduction to the volume. It sets out key information about Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in order to support the reader as they navigate the various narratives of field practitioners and implementers who analyze their journey with UDL in the K-12 sector. The chapter also examines the current landscape in relation to UDL implementation and offers some broad ecological observations as regards the contemporary state of play. It broadens the discussion to the global scale and discusses geo-political divergences that will support the international reader as they connect the material to their own regional context. The chapter highlights certain themes that appear as either facilitators or stressors in teachers' journeys with UDL, themes that will be echoed by the various chapters, and analyzes in more depth within them.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This chapter serves as an introduction to the volume. It sets out key information about Universal Design for Learning (UDL), in order to support the reader as they navigate the various narratives of field practitioners and implementers who analyze

their journey with UDL in the K-12 sector. The literature and scholarship on UDL have grown to such an extent that it can be daunting for the novice reader or practitioner. This can be counter-productive in the sense that UDL is all about offering educators a simple, user-friendly, and clear framework with which to streamline their creation of inclusive provisions in the classroom. The chapter will therefore serve as reminder of the core objectives of UDL, of its key characteristics, and of its most urgent implications.

The chapter also examines the current landscape of UDL implementation and offers some broad ecological observations regarding the contemporary state of play. The literature on UDL has grown considerably over the last decade, but most of its content and focus have been centered on evidencing the pedagogical soundness of UDL or its impact on teaching and learning (Capp, 2017). There has been limited writing exploring the strategic implications of UDL as a process of change in educational institutions, or across the K-12 landscape. There is little evidence of best practices in terms of leadership, management of change, administrative support for educators, or sustainable growth. The reason for this is that much of the literature on UDL has been framed within educational theoretical paradigms (constructivism, social constructivism, social model of disability, experiential learning, and critical pedagogy) (Fovet, 2021), rather than within theoretical frameworks that might account for organizational pressures and institutional realities. Instead, this chapter applies to UDL an ecological paradigm which acknowledges the scope of UDL implementation as a process, the breadth and variety of educational stakeholders that it involves, and its complexity as a process of change. Ecological theory records and evidence phenomena from a systems perspective (Vargas-Hernandez et al., 2023). It explores the interactions between these systems, and their influence on actors in the landscape. An accurate assessment of the weight or impact of the multiple actors that are involved in the UDL implementation process on the specific stakeholder or unit that leads the drive for UDL growth will be of key importance in offering a realistic and complete road map for UDL integration.

The chapter, as a result, highlights certain themes that appear as either facilitators or stressors in teachers' journeys with UDL, themes that will be echoed by the various chapters and analyzed in more depth within each. There has been much literature focusing on instructor perspectives in relation to UDL integration, but the literature reflecting and amplifying the voice of K-12 teachers in this area has been limited. There has been scholarly reflection produced by researchers about the realities faced by K-12 school practitioners in relation to UDL adoption, but far less literature emerging from these teachers themselves.

The reasons for this are immediately apparent: teachers, when they engage with UDL, often have limited time and resources to record this experimentation. They may also lack the confidence, familiarity, or support to tackle the process of aca-

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