

Exploring the Intersections of UDL & Support for Multilingual Learners

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**An innovative exploration of how
UDL and SEAL can be used in
complementary ways to support
multilingual learners to thrive.**



Introduction

In 2020, CAST launched our most recent effort to update our Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines with a specific focus on addressing critical barriers rooted in biases and systems of oppression. While the UDL Guidelines have become a valuable tool to help practitioners design for learner variability, CAST recognized that gaps and biases exist. Practitioners and researchers alike called for a new version to make stronger connections to identity as part of variability and to address systemic bias. Exploring how UDL might be more fully developed to support multilingual learners was one way to address this call. As such, CAST initiated a partnership with SEAL (Sobrato Early Academic Language) and two SEAL-trained schools to explore how SEAL's research-based and best-practices-driven approach to support multilingual learners might contribute to this next iteration of the UDL guidelines.

This partnership also provided an opportunity to begin to explore how SEAL and UDL might be used in complementary ways to support multilingual learners. UDL and the SEAL approach have potentially promising points of intersection: [SEAL](#) is a research- and evidence-based approach to advancing the educational outcomes of multilingual learners, focused on providing a framework, best practices, and concrete strategies that help reduce barriers and build asset-based, language-rich learning. [UDL](#) is a framework for teaching and learning that guides the design of accessible, inclusive, and equitable learning environments.

Using a job-embedded professional learning approach, the CAST team supported SEAL-trained educators to gain knowledge of UDL and to experiment with applying UDL to practice. Together, the CAST team and SEAL educators examined the connections between [CAST's UDL Guidelines](#) and the [SEAL approach](#) as well as teachers' experiences applying these two frameworks to their practice. Finally, the CAST team conducted focus groups with multilingual learners and parents to learn more about multilingual learners' experiences in school.

Photo courtesy of SEAL





Findings from this study influenced CAST's update of the UDL Guidelines to strengthen the focus on equity and ensure multilingual learners' assets and needs are centered. Findings from this study also suggest that UDL and the SEAL approach, when used in concert, may further deepen teachers' ability to center the diverse needs of multilingual learners. This study was designed as a descriptive, qualitative study that was exploratory in nature; the findings offer rich, fine-grained detail in terms of educators' and students' experiences at the intersection of UDL and SEAL, and offer a generative launching point for future studies. Finally, the study findings generated recommendations for better supporting multilingual learners at the practice, state, and federal levels.

Participants

This study used a purposive sampling strategy to partner with a school district in California that has been partnering with SEAL for over 10 years. As such, English Learner best practices and pedagogy are being implemented and therefore deeply inform design, instructional decisions, and instructional practices across the classrooms. The district serves approximately 8,690 students in grades TK-8. Twenty-nine percent of students are English Learners, and 56 languages are spoken across the district. Participants in this study are from two of the bilingual immersion schools in the district. Participants included 6 educators (3 first-grade teachers and 3 instructional coaches). Participants also included 12 students from the participating teachers' classes who identified as multilingual learners and 3 parents/caregivers of students in the teachers' classes.



Photo courtesy of SEAL

Research Questions

1. What are the ways in which SEAL's approach supports and centralizes multilingual learners?
2. How might the SEAL approach influence the update of CAST's UDL Guidelines to strengthen the focus on equity and ensure multilingual learners' assets and needs are centered?
3. How might applying UDL reduce barriers and increase access to SEAL strategies?
4. How might the SEAL approach and UDL be used in complementary ways to design more equitable and just learning environments for multilingual learners?

Data Collection & Analysis

The project included three phases: 1) Knowledge Sharing, 2) Iterative Design Cycles, and 3) Reflection.

Phase 1: Knowledge Sharing (September 2023–January 2024)

The study prioritized a collaborative partnership in which the CAST team and SEAL educators and staff could learn from one another. Thus, the Knowledge Sharing phase was especially critical to the study. The goal of the **Knowledge Sharing** phase of the project was to 1) kick off the project and welcome participating teachers and 2) create space for the CAST team to learn about the SEAL approach and for SEAL staff/participating teachers to learn about UDL.

Teacher pre-survey

All participating teachers completed a “pre-survey” to share about their experiences in education, their demographic info, their knowledge of the SEAL approach, and their initial knowledge of UDL.

SEAL workshop for CAST team (November 15, 2023)

SEAL staff facilitated an “Introduction to SEAL” workshop for the CAST team. The CAST team learned about the SEAL model and research underpinnings, explored video footage of SEAL classrooms, and discussed implementation and replication. The workshop was documented via fieldnotes, and materials/artifacts (slides, handouts, Google docs, etc.) were collected.

Introduction to UDL (January 9 & 23, 2024)

The CAST team facilitated a two-day “Introduction to UDL” workshop for participating teachers and SEAL staff. This workshop also included a project kick-off with the CAST team, SEAL facilitators, and participating teachers to share more about the project and to explore the intersections of UDL and the SEAL approach. Day 2 also included a SEAL staff member facilitating an exploration of SEAL and UDL using a venn diagram activity to explore areas that are unique to each approach as well as areas of resonance. The Introduction to UDL/Project kick-off was documented via fieldnotes, and materials/artifacts (slides, handouts, Google docs, etc.) were collected.

Photo courtesy of SEAL



Phase 2: Iterative Design Cycles (January–March 2023)

After the **Knowledge Sharing** phase, we moved into **Phase 2: Iterative Design**. We engaged in two iterative design cycles. Each cycle included the following elements:

Co-design session (approximately 1 hour)

The CAST team designed the co-design sessions to be a generative, collaborative, and supportive space to explore the intersections of UDL and the SEAL approach. SEAL educators were encouraged to come to the co-design session with a lesson or learning activity in mind that they might like to design or redesign. During these co-design sessions, SEAL educators and the CAST team collaborated to generate ideas for leveraging UDL and the SEAL approach in complementary ways. Each teacher co-designed an idea to try out in an upcoming lesson with the goal of reducing a particular barrier and increasing access to a specific learning goal.

The CAST team used two different approaches to support SEAL educators with designing ideas: 1) the **UDL Design Process**, a design approach where educators identify a learning goal, anticipate barriers, and leverage specific [UDL Guidelines](#) to reduce those barriers and 2) **Journey Mapping**, a tool for storytelling and visualization to help us better understand educators' and students' experiences during a lesson/unit. These co-design sessions not only were a generative space where SEAL educators could explore applying UDL to their SEAL approach, they also provided a space where the CAST team could learn from the SEAL educators and explore how SEAL themes could more fully develop the UDL Guidelines. Co-design sessions were held in person and some CAST team members joined via Zoom. Sessions were video-recorded and documented via fieldnotes. Any artifacts (teachers' notes, lesson plans, sketches, etc.) were collected and archived.



Implement the lesson (approximately 1 hour)

Teachers implemented the lesson and collected data to share with the group when feasible (classroom video, instructional materials, student work, etc). For one lesson implementation, one CAST team member joined as an observer and assisted with data collection.

Reflect/refine session (approximately 1 hour)

To conclude each cycle, SEAL educators and the CAST team engaged in a “reflect/refine session” to reflect on the implementations and the data collection and make refinements. Reflect/refine sessions were held in person and some CAST team members joined via Zoom. They were video-recorded and documented via fieldnotes. Any artifacts (teachers' notes/sketches, etc.) were collected and archived.

Reflection surveys

At the end of each interactive cycle, SEAL educators completed a brief reflective survey to reflect on their experience and learning in the cycle.

Phase 3: Reflection (April–July 2024)

After the “Iterative Design Cycles,” we moved into **Phase 3: Reflection**. This phase consisted of three different types of focus groups. All focus groups were video-recorded (if conducted on Zoom) and/or audio recorded (if conducted in person), and documented via fieldnotes.

SEAL educator focus group (1 hour)

All 6 SEAL educators joined us for this focus group. The goal of the focus group was to explore educators’ experiences during the design cycles and their ideas for the ways UDL and the SEAL approach may or may not complement one another. Educators reflected on prompts such as:

- “How might UDL and the SEAL approach complement one another to better support multilingual learners to thrive? Can you share a story or an example?”
- “Please share a story of how UDL might have benefited your students.”
- “How might CAST more fully develop the UDL Guidelines to support multilingual learners? What might be missing or needs to be more fully emphasized? Can you share a story or an example?”

Student focus groups (30 minutes):

A total of 12 first-grade students volunteered to participate. Two focus groups were conducted. The goal of each student focus group was to explore students’ experiences in school. Students reflected on prompts such as:

- “What are the things that teachers do to help you learn?”
- “If you were the teacher, what would you make sure to do to help all kids learn?”

Parent/caregiver focus groups (1 hour)

A total of three parents/caregivers volunteered to participate. The goal of the focus group was to explore parents’/caregivers’ perspectives on their children’s experiences in school. Parents/caregivers reflected on prompts such as:

- “What does your child like the most about school? Please share an example/story?”
- “Can you share an example of a time when your child felt supported as a learner?”
- “Can you share an example of when your child didn’t feel supported as a learner?”

Data Analysis

The CAST team used an open coding strategy (Saldaña, 2016) and an etic coding strategy (Maxwell, 2013) based on the previous UDL Guidelines (version 2.2), the UDL Guidelines (version 3.0) draft, and the UDL Guidelines (3.0) final version to analyze the wealth of complementary data collected throughout the study: pre-survey data; video, fieldnotes, and artifacts collected during the intro workshops and Iterative Design

Cycles; reflection survey data; and the focus group data. To establish the trustworthiness of our data, we engaged in “member checking” to test our emerging themes with SEAL participants (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We also shared emerging themes with SEAL staff to learn from their perspectives.

Photo courtesy of SEAL





Findings

Research Questions 1 & 2:

What are the ways in which SEAL's approach supports and centralizes multilingual learners? How might the SEAL approach influence the update of CAST's UDL Guidelines to strengthen the focus on equity and ensure multilingual learners' assets and needs are centered?

Findings from this study provide useful insights into the ways in which SEAL's approach supports and centralizes ELs. Identifying these approaches offered guidance around how to expand the UDL Guidelines as a resource to guide the design of learning environments and experiences that reduce barriers and more fully honor and value every learner. Findings from this study influenced several updates and expansions that are included in the next iteration of the UDL Guidelines.

CAST team's new learning about how SEAL supports and centralizes multilingual learners

The SEAL approach emphasizes creating welcoming learning environments that affirm language, culture, and identities.

Gap uncovered: The previous version (2.2) of the UDL Guidelines could do more to affirm the multiple and intersecting identities that all learners, including multilingual learners, bring to the learning environment. The Introduction to SEAL workshop and the Iterative Design process with educators supported CAST researchers to recognize this key aspect of the SEAL approach. Findings from the student and parent focus groups further emphasized the importance of affirming language, culture, and identities. For example, one parent emphasized how the affirming approach helped her son to feel "included" and how "it's opening the door for kids to be more...open."

Updated version: The findings from this study contributed to the update of one UDL guideline: **"Design Options for Welcoming Interests and Identities" (Guideline 7)**. This is an expanded guideline under the UDL Principle "Design Multiple Means of Engagement," and was updated to more fully honor and sustain learners' varied and intersecting identities, including multilingualism as a dimension of identity. Further, the emphasis on multilingualism as an asset—and the many assets learners bring to the learning environment more broadly—was used to inform full descriptions of guidelines and considerations across the UDL Guidelines.

CAST team's new learning about how SEAL supports and centralizes multilingual learners

The SEAL approach emphasizes the importance of joy in the learning process. Drawing on neuroscience and the direct connections that have been made between joyful, relevant, and interest-driven experiences, motivation and learning, SEAL is intentional about fostering immersive, hands-on experiences as well as tapping into student interests and passions. SEAL encourages teachers to engage students in as well as offer them different modalities to express themselves and their learning. Again, the Introduction to SEAL workshop and the Iterative Design process with educators supported CAST researchers to recognize this key aspect of the SEAL approach. This emphasis on joy was further underscored via the student and parent focus groups. For example, students shared how they enjoyed going on field trips and used words like “play time” and “game time” to describe their learning throughout the school day. Parents also commented on the ways that joy was emphasized. One parent shared that their child loves animals and how the teacher worked to incorporate different “critters” that students observed on the playground (caterpillars, butterflies, etc.) into their science learning.

Photo courtesy of SEAL



Gap uncovered: The notion of joy was implied in the previous version of the UDL Guidelines, specifically within the principle of “Multiple Means of Engagement.” However, the importance of nurturing joyful learning was not explicit.

Updated version: The findings from this study contributed to the development of a new UDL consideration in the updated UDL Guidelines: “Nurture joy and play” (Consideration 7.3). This consideration was added to the UDL Guideline “Design Options for Welcoming Interests and Identities” under the UDL Principle “Design Multiple Means of Engagement.”

CAST team's new learning about how SEAL supports and centralizes multilingual learners

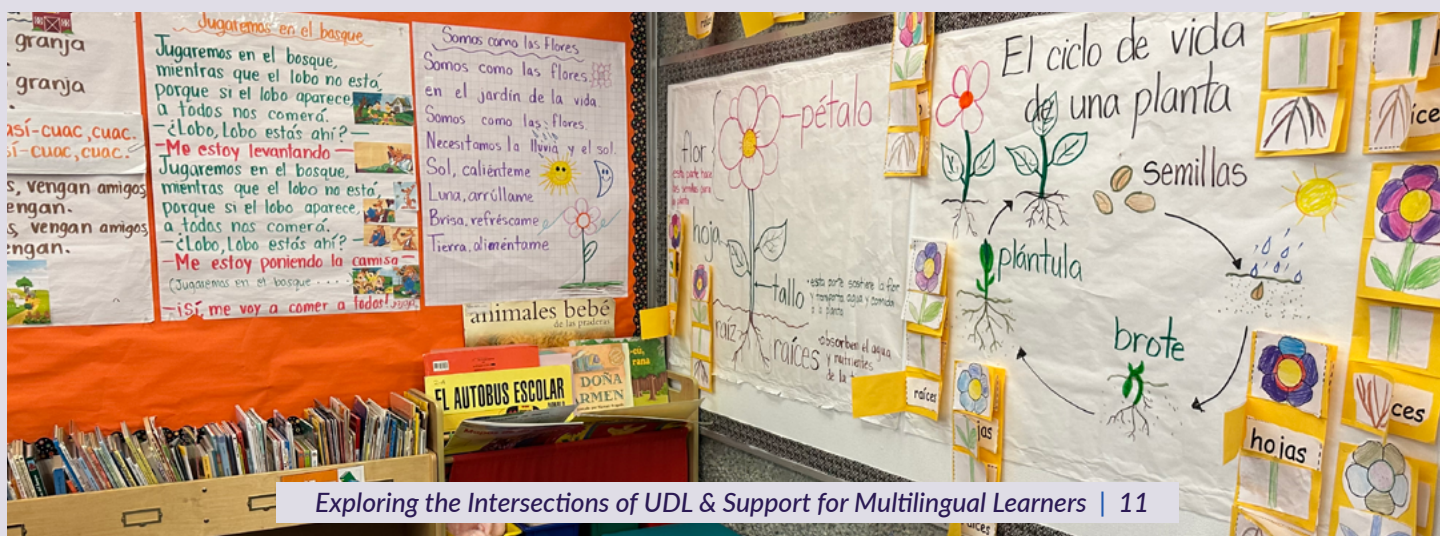
The SEAL approach emphasizes an assets-based approach to supporting students' language development. The approach not only honors children's multiple languages, but frames them as assets in the learning process with a particular emphasis on leveraging children's home languages. Again, the Introduction to SEAL workshop and the Iterative Design process with educators supported CAST researchers to develop this new learning, and it was further developed via the student and parent focus groups. For example, when asked, "If you were the teacher, what would you make sure to do to help all kids learn?" one student emphasized that she would "talk to them [students] in different languages, just like my teacher does."

Gap uncovered: The previous version of the UDL Guidelines could do more to honor the multiple languages and cultures that students bring to the learning environment.

Updated version: The findings from this study were used to expand two UDL considerations: "Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects" (Consideration 2.3) and "Address biases in the use of language and symbols" (Consideration 2.4). These are two considerations for the guideline "Design Options for Language and Symbols" under the UDL Principle "Design Multiple Means of Representation." Consideration 2.3 was updated to expand beyond promoting understanding across languages and also include cultivating respect. Consideration 2.4 was added to emphasize how biases in language and symbols create barriers to fully accessing and operating with agency within learning environments.

Possible directions for future iterations of the UDL Guidelines: UDL Guidelines 3.0 is CAST's first attempt to explicitly call out and support the particular needs of and draw on the unique assets of multilingual learners. We recognize that this study did not allow us to unpack and consider other key EL pedagogy best practices that are critical to student success. Several areas that need to be further explored, understood, and addressed within the UDL Guidelines include:

- The critical role of oral language development
- The integration of language development with content learning
- A focus on comprehensible input to ensure access and participation
- The central role of family partnerships and their connection to language development
- Dual Language pedagogy and best practices



Research Question 3: How might applying UDL reduce barriers and increase access to SEAL strategies?

UDL prompted SEAL educators to look for barriers in the design of the learning environment in order to increase access to learning goals.

“I feel like it’s been life changing to have a different lens when thinking of learning...Just that simple question of, ‘What’s going to be a barrier for some folks?’...I think it just has put a whole other lens that you can’t unsee.” (SEAL educator)

“It has been extremely helpful to think about specific learners and think about possible barriers with engagement, representation, and or action and expression. Thinking about what is the goal for the strategies whether it is language or content. With that in mind, then designing different entry points for students.” (SEAL educator)

SEAL strategies, by design, have multiple goals given that represent integrated language development with content learning. UDL prompted SEAL educators to break apart and examine the goals in order to address potential barriers.

“I think sometimes with our thematic units, because they’re so interwoven, sometimes it is tricky to pinpoint what is the goal of a lesson...So really narrowing [and asking] ‘What is the goal?’ has...clarified so much, like strategies.” (SEAL educator)

UDL offered SEAL educators a framework for reducing barriers and increasing access to learning associated with specific SEAL strategies.

Embedding options for the “Academic Process Journal”

“The Academic Process Journal” provides students an opportunity to make a personal connection with information and content that was presented to the whole class. Students write (or sketch) in their journals throughout the day in response to prompts given by the teachers. Students are encouraged to record observations, ideas, questions, and personal connections, and this journal becomes a resource for students to use in their own writing. (SEAL, 2019)

Adding a UDL lens: Offer ideas and expectations for what reprocessing might look like.

“When I was SEAL trained, the idea of an Academic Process Journal was just blank pages. We tell the kids to reprocess, and that was the option. That’s giving them choice because they can reprocess in any way they want. But, not all students know what that should look like or what that can look like. So I’ve found that I don’t just give them a blank Academic Process Journal anymore. I found that they will be more engaged and they will do more work—and some of them want just the blank paper— if I provide expectations for what reprocessing might look like. So I think giving choice in the way that students reprocess but it being really intentional is not something that I’ve seen. I’ve seen the freedom to reprocess in a way that works for you, but not providing the support to allow students to figure out what works for them.” (SEAL educator)

Embedding exploration time into “Draw and Label”

The “Draw and Label” is designed to teach high-level vocabulary and concepts in a brain-compatible way. While drawing a picture in front of the students, the teacher talks about the concepts and labels the image to create comprehensible input so students have access to the content and language of the lesson. Draw and Labels remain on the walls for the duration of the unit and become a resource in the print-rich environment, allowing students to draw upon them in their daily language production. (SEAL, 2023)

Adding a UDL lens: Before doing the “Draw and Label,” the teacher had the students experience some of the elements independently (videos, play with objects, etc.)

“When I watched [teacher participant] in the first cycle start by having kids explore and then do a “Draw and Label,” that to me was more asset-based. Like watching those students learn on their own and then come to the carpet where she could scaffold that learning really honored what they knew.

And I think when we come to the table traditionally with a “Draw and Label” from SEAL, as a teacher, I’m the one holding all the knowledge. But that—it just really honored what the students were bringing from the experience to the carpet.” (SEAL educator)

Embedding options into the “Categorical Matrix”

The “Categorical Matrix” is a graphic organizer used to help students visually understand the relationship between facts, concepts, and ideas, and a tool to help them practice talking about those relationships.

Adding a UDL lens: Teacher gave student options: choose to listen, choose to listen and take notes (blank matrix), or already populated (basic words already there). The teacher was surprised by student choices (letting go of assumptions and what we think we know is best for students). The teacher noticed the students who were typically less engaged participated more by asking classmates about words, raising their hands, wanting to participate, etc.

Research Question 4: How might the SEAL approach and UDL be used in complementary ways to design more equitable and just learning environments for multilingual learners?

Bringing a UDL lens to the SEAL approach reminded teachers of the importance of releasing learning over to students, thus increasing student engagement and talk time.

“That Friday [after implementing the lesson from the co-design session], I left the school so happy because I realized that I don’t need to carry the cognitive load the whole day... The way I planned this lesson, it was so easy for me... It was amazing to see how much they [the students] could teach themselves and me. And I was not tired. For the first time I didn’t feel tired... Maybe I have to let them [take charge], and myself just put on the side and breathe and say, ‘They can do it,’ because they really can.” (SEAL educator)

“We can trust our students, learn to trust our students, and see them do really amazing things, which, as a teacher, is helpful to not have to carry that load all the time. Very, like, freeing in that way.” (SEAL educator)

“This lesson design helped me to see how structure and freedom can work together to help students own their learning. Too much structure or too much freedom doesn’t allow for kids to thrive, and I feel like when I combine SEAL and UDL it’s the perfect mix of both.” (SEAL educator)

Bringing a UDL lens to the SEAL approach reinforced and strengthened teachers’ understanding of the importance of tapping into students’ background knowledge and providing hands-on, experiential learning opportunities.

As noted above, exploring the “Draw and Label” activity through a UDL lens supported the SEAL educators to examine barriers and increase access. This exploration also strengthened educators’ focus on centering learners’ assets:

“SEAL is very—it’s assets-based, and language is an asset and being bilingual is an asset. And at the same time, it feels like many of the strategies are teacher-directed, like a “Draw and Label” is teacher-directed on day one... When I watched [teacher participant] in the first cycle start by having kids explore and then do a “Draw and Label,” that to me was more asset-based. Like watching those students learn on their own and then come to the carpet where she could scaffold that learning really honored what they knew... it just really honored what the students were bringing from the experience to the carpet.” (SEAL educator)

Bringing a UDL lens to the SEAL approach strengthened teachers' understanding of the need to offer choice and to ensure learners are challenged.

"I feel like I'm always really intentional and good at supporting some of my most striving readers and writers who need a lot of support, but I'm not always reaching or intentionally differentiating up and providing options for some of my students who may not need as much support. So, throughout this cycle and the last one, and then even beyond these two cycles, I've just been providing more choice in how my students show their learning and just being intentional about offering really structured options for my students who need it. But then also offering options that take away that structure and allow for more independent work. And it's just taken away. Like my three or four kids who I always know are going to tell me, 'I'm done. I'm finished. I already read it,' I feel like I'm including them, too." (SEAL educator)

Bringing a UDL lens to the SEAL approach encouraged educators to honor students' knowledge about themselves as learners, expanding teachers thinking about their roles as educators.

"I used to think I knew what my students needed, but now I think they know what they need." (SEAL educator)

"[In terms of adult learners] I used to think it was, how do you say it? It was their issue, like their opposition, defiance, I guess. But now I think it's me that has to provide them all the different ways of looking at it and reaching them. Kind of seeing it through their lens. And how am I going to pull them in that way?" (SEAL educator)

"I used to think I knew what was best for my students. Now I think they're capable of figuring out what is really best for them." (SEAL educator)

Photo courtesy of SEAL



How has the SEAL approach influenced the update of CAST's UDL Guidelines to strengthen the focus on equity and ensure multilingual learners' assets and needs are centered?

SEAL approach	How SEAL uncovered a gap in the Guidelines	Updated guideline/consideration in Guidelines 3.0
Emphasis on creating welcoming learning environments that affirm language, culture, and identities	The previous version of the UDL Guidelines could do more to affirm the multiple and intersecting identities that all learners, including multilingual learners, bring to the learning environment.	"Design Options for Welcoming Interests and Identities" (Guideline 7) This is an expanded guideline under the UDL Principle "Design Multiple Means of Engagement." This guideline was updated to more fully honor and sustain learners' varied and intersecting identities, including multilingualism as a dimension of identity.
Emphasis on joy as part of the learning process	The notion of joy was implied in the previous version of the UDL Guidelines, specifically within the principle of "Multiple Means of Engagement." However, the importance of nurturing joyful learning was not explicit.	"Nurture joy and play" (Consideration 7.3) This is a new consideration that was added to the UDL Guideline "Design Options for Welcoming Interests and Identities" under the UDL Principle "Design Multiple Means of Engagement."
Emphasis on an assets-based approach to supporting learners' language development	The previous version of the UDL Guidelines could do more to honor the multiple languages and cultures that students bring to the learning environment.	"Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects" (Consideration 2.3) "Address biases in the use of language and symbols" (Consideration 2.4) These are two considerations for the guideline "Design Options for Language and Symbols" under the UDL Principle "Design Multiple Means of Representation." Consideration 2.3 was updated to expand beyond promoting understanding across languages and to also include cultivating respect. Consideration 2.4 was added to emphasize how biases in language and symbols create barriers to fully accessing and operating with agency within learning environments.



Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice

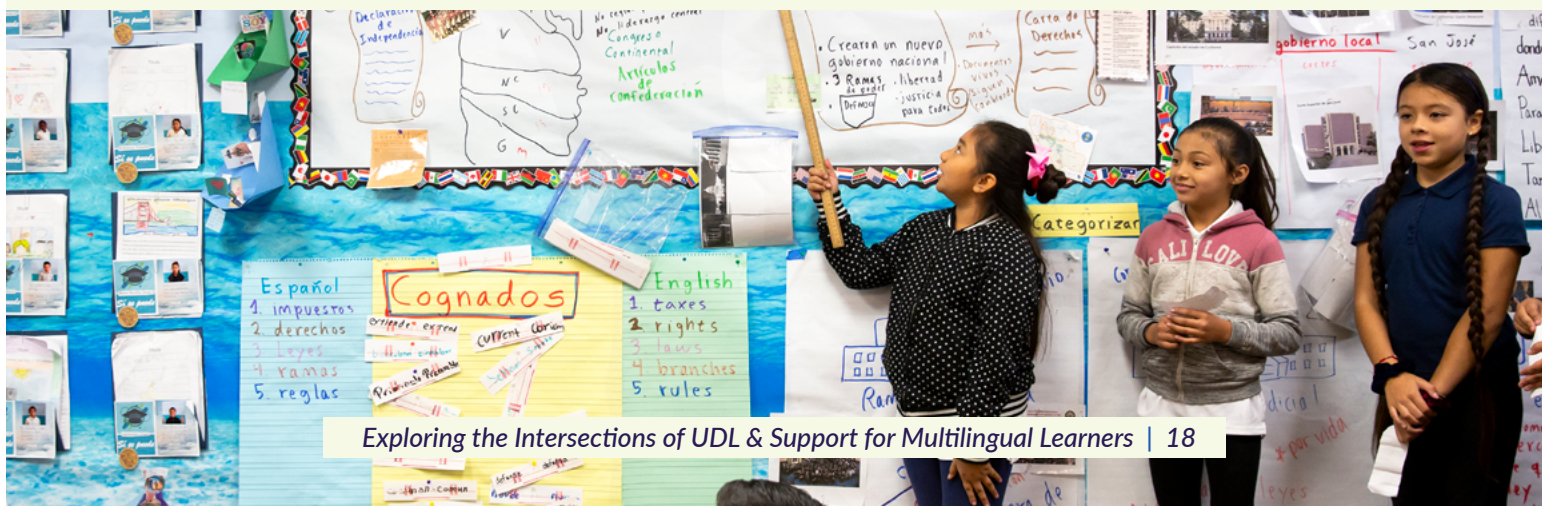
Create a rich array of professional learning opportunities for teachers to continue exploring the intersection of UDL and the SEAL approach. The findings of this study uncover the untapped synergy between UDL and the SEAL approach and the rich learning that can occur when teachers apply UDL and SEAL strategies in complementary ways. Both approaches seek to emphasize and lift up the many assets that students bring to the learning environment, and this natural synergy can lead to unique and innovative approaches to more fully support multilingual learners.

- Professional learning opportunities should include a variety of formats (videos, demonstrations, case studies, classroom observation, professional learning communities, etc.) to support educators to choose the format that best supports their learning.
- Professional learning opportunities should be inclusive of all education staff (content educators, education specialists, specialists, instructional assistants, school site leaders, etc.) to support a collaborative learning model.

Support teacher learning through Iterative Design Cycles. The approach of Iterative Design Cycles (co-design, implement, reflect/refine) proved to be a powerful form of professional learning itself. These cycles generated rich collaboration among and between SEAL educators and the CAST team; space was created to push one another's thinking, build upon one another's ideas, and nurture trusting professional relationships. Iterative Design Cycles for a variety of participants could be explored in the future—not only for seasoned SEAL educators to explore UDL but also for seasoned UDL educators to explore the SEAL approach and for educators who are new to both UDL and SEAL. These different versions of Iterative Design Cycles could uncover deeper learning about how each approach strengthens the other and how they can be used in complementary ways.

- Iterative Design Cycles could be inclusive of all education staff (content educators, education specialists, specialists, instructional assistants, school site leaders, etc.) to support a collaborative learning model.
- School leaders could take part in Iterative Design Cycles to support the sustainability of the model.

Photo courtesy of SEAL



Continue to draw from the SEAL approach when developing future iterations of the UDL Guidelines. The findings from this study led to important updates in UDL Guidelines 3.0 that served to strengthen the focus on equity and ensure multilingual learners' assets and needs are centered. As noted above, it will be important to explore more fully SEAL's emphasis on the critical role of oral language development, the integration of language development with content learning, comprehensible input to ensure access and participation, the central role of family partnerships and their connection to language development and Dual Language pedagogy, and best practices in future iterations of the UDL Guidelines.



Recommendations for California State Policy

The findings in this study highlight how, when SEAL is implemented, UDL can reduce additional barriers. Therefore, to ensure coherence and deepen equity, we recommend that schools and districts leverage systems and structures already in place to:

- Ensure the Statewide Systems of Support (SSoS) Initiatives can be maximized through integrating a focus on multilingual learner (MLL) best practices and Universal Design for Learning. All initiatives (i.e., Early Childhood, MTSS, The English Learner Roadmap, Community Schools Partnerships, etc.) promote evidence-based, research-based practices and have equity as a throughline. Nonetheless, current practice isolates each of these initiatives as separate and discrete. A focus on MLL best practice and UDL can serve as a mechanism by which to deepen the reach of these initiatives by supporting the variability and intersectionality that exists between/within each of these areas of support.
- Explicitly delineate how MLL best practice and UDL can simultaneously support the expectations required of teachers and leaders, via the [California Standards of the Teaching Profession 2024](#) and the [California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders](#).
- Foster partnerships and learning opportunities between experts in the SSoS to increase statewide capacity to meet the needs of MLLs.

The findings in this study also highlight the importance of leveraging multilingual learners' families and communities as a critical component to their success; therefore, we recommend that California establish partnerships with local organizations to support multilingual learners and their families with a focus on learning variability.

Consider partnering with existing state-led programs that focus on strengthening partnerships with families and schools to leverage the initiatives they are already leading in this area.



Photo courtesy of SEAL

Recommendations for Federal Policy

Since 2008, UDL has been incorporated into key federal education, career training, and workforce laws¹ to ensure critical federal investments are available to blend with private, state, and local funding so that UDL-centric initiatives are promoted within research as well as K-16 education and employment programs.

The findings in this study highlight how, when SEAL is implemented, UDL can reduce additional barriers.

Therefore, we recommend that the U.S. Congress expand both appropriations and authorizing legislation to include critical funding and policy initiatives designed to increase and strengthen the education and employment opportunities for multilingual learners through the use of UDL in concert with MLL best practices:

- Continue to fund the **Comprehensive Literacy Development Grant Program** as authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to promote literacy growth initiatives, especially in Title I and rural school districts.
- **Support K-12 research and technical assistance** so that states and districts can provide accessible technology and learning materials to MLLs, including those with disabilities.
- Update the **Higher Education Act** to ensure institutions of higher education develop, support, and sustain high quality school leader and teacher preparation programs designed to effectively incorporate UDL and MLL expertise into classrooms and schools.

- Invest in and promote **school and community-based, research-to-practice initiatives** that increase access to CTE and STEM engagement, multi-disciplinary learning, and opportunity for multilingual learners.
- **Invest in career and technical education (CTE)** so states can develop career training pathways responsive to the needs of business and of learners that includes MLLs.
- Modernize the **Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA)** to ensure state and local workforce board planning and each of the authorized National Activities may jointly incorporate UDL and MLL best practices to increase services to MLLs who may experience language and cultural barriers to employment.
- Expand federal grant opportunities that incentivize research and technical assistance at the intersection of supporting multilingual learners and students with disabilities.

1 See: P.L. 110-315, P.L. 113-128, P.L. 114-95, P.L. 115-224, National Education Technology Plan 2024, U.S. Department of Education.

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