

## UDL and Language Learners: Part 2

- Sooming Chao We're thinking about our students who have a primary language other than English, right? They enter our schools and they are given supports to grow and expand their English language proficiency. And when we think of our students who are English learners as multilingual learners, we as educators are also providing the support to help them grow in their primary language as well so that both of their linguistic proficiencies are expanding and they're able to really become multilingual learners. And so, all that to say is that, you know, in California, we have one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse communities and students. And so it's important for educators to see the variability within our multilingual learners as well. And this is completely to be expected because, you know, as I mentioned, we do have that rich diversity and that range within our students. So when we look at the diversity within the diversity we look at, our students who are coming on one hand from many languages, many cultures but even within the languages we have our students who contribute a diversity of language experiences, right, from proficiency level to academic backgrounds and experiences, strengths, interests and students who are perhaps dually identified as, you know language learners and also students who are in need of special supports.
- Also, something to consider is, are students with gaps in their learning perhaps newcomers who are refugees as well as students who have interruptions in their ELD program services. And this may be a scenario that's experienced by some of our students who enter our classrooms maybe over the past couple of years and it's an experience of their families as well. And so it's important to be mindful of that support.
- Elise Yerkey So I really like that you focus in on variability because that is one of the foundational concepts of UDL and the fact that you're able to focus in on the variability within English learners or multi-language learners themselves. When we talk about UDL, we talk about how it's effective for a range of students because of all the options that we can offer for how they engage, how they perceive information and how they act and express that information. I see some alignment between the ELD standards and even the UDL principles. Can you talk more about that?
- Soomin Chao Yes, and I think that part of it is the assets based approach, right? Which is present in both the UDL principles and the ELD standards and framework as well as the California EL roadmap. I think one important thing to note is that we have a chance

to see this variability in our students for all the opportunities that a diverse learning environment brings as an opportunity to empower student voice and agency while also providing opportunities for reflection and for growth of all of our learners at a school site and in a district. So what's good for a few, what's good for some is good for all within a learning community. And all of this aligns with, as I mentioned, principal one of the California English Learner Roadmap that focuses on the assets oriented and needs responsive approach to engage students. And I see some very clear connections with UDLs engagement principles as well.

Elise Yerkey

Yeah, and I do too. So when we talk about engagement we're talking about optimizing relevance. And although the UDL guidelines don't point out cultural relevance, I know that the principal one of the EL roadmap does. Can you talk more about the EL roadmap and what it says about its assets based approach? Because sometimes we frame barriers and we place those barriers within the student rather than their design. So someone might say they can't speak English and so the perspective they're taking is not an asset based approach.

Soomin Chao

So an asset based lens in the classroom makes all of the difference for a language learner. As a language learner, myself, I can absolutely attest to the experience of being a student in the classroom feeling nervous, feeling maybe a little bit less at ease and yet being fully accepted having students and teacher interested in me interested in learning about my culture valuing the language perspective that I bring to literacy tasks, to literacy assignments. And you know, with that decrease in nervousness as a student, it really creates an opportunity and a comfort level for students to be able to engage right, to be able to trust and take risks in learning. And a big part for a language learner is to make sure that they feel comfortable speaking, right? And that's any language learner at any level. We're talking secondary, we're talking in the primary grades. We're talking students who are newcomers and also students who are a little further along the continuum as they're, as they're learning English or learning a second language.

Elise Yerkey

Can you talk a little bit more about how language supports in the classroom can benefit all students, not just English learners, especially if you're looking at the principles of UDL representation, how students or learners might perceive knowledge or content and action and expression how they might demonstrate what they know or what they can do?

Soomin Chao

So this is also in keeping with the circles of implementation that you might find in the EAELD framework. It looks like a turtle in a waiting pool, right? So this might be an image that's familiar to you where the ELD standards are nested, right? They're represented in a circle concentric located in the tummy of the turtle, right? And so

you see the ELD standards and then you see overlaying that and overlapping that the California Common Core Standards for English language arts and literacy. And so that actually speaks directly to I believe what you referenced, Elise, where they're not siloed, right? Where English language arts and literacy and English language development are overlapping. So students have the opportunity to have learning experiences that are fitted to their learning needs. And where instruction for some may also benefit the whole especially when you're talking about integrated ELT learning experiences. And these experiences involve a weaving of the three parts of California's ELD standards.

If I could give a little brief overview of it, right? So ELD standards are broken into three parts. The first of which outlines the ways that students can interact with each other, they can collaborate with each other, they can work together to interpret and produce language whether it's in speaking or writing. And they're also incorporating listening skills. We want to empower and equip our students with the skills to use language to interact with each other and also with the world around them, right? So they're using language kind of like a person drives a car, right, to get them somewhere, to explore their environment, to learn something new. And then that is also in tandem with part two of the ELD standards which involves students learning how English works, right? How the structure of cohesive texts can further their learning and their understanding, how tasks of expanding enriching ideas can engage in learning. And then the skill of connecting and condensing ideas as well.

And so part two in an, in this analogy the car analogy is the student popping the hood, right? Of the car to really get into the mechanic sensing how it worked. And going even deeper into it, part three involves establishing and developing foundational literacy skills. And all of this, like this is I'm gonna switch analogies here. It's a little bit like the gears of a bike, right? If a student is going uphill, right? And this would be a scenario where the rigor of the text is, or they're learning something new, then the gears would shift, right, to accommodate and fit the learning experience of the students versus if the student might be going downhill, right? And that's a different learning task. And so they can then adjust accordingly. And so when we think about part three of the ELD standards we're thinking about phonemic awareness, print concepts, phonics, and vocabulary, right? And so all things that are important to note that work together to maximize language development.

Elise Yerkey

So the more I hear you speak to me the more I see the connections with UDL. You were talking about interaction and under engagement, one of the checkpoints is fostering collaboration and community. When you were talking about specific language and kind of the explicit instruction that goes with how language works

under representation there is a guideline called language and symbols. And so we want designers and teachers to provide options for how students interact with language and symbols. And that includes clarifying vocabulary making sure that students understand syntax and structure. So these checkpoints are designed to appeal to a wide range of learners, not just English learners but also other students who might struggle with language. For example students who have individualized education plans or IEPs.

The other point I got from what you just said is how integrated everything is and how much overlap there is. So one of the challenges with anything new is sometimes teachers are suffering from fatigue or they have so many things to do. And so UDL is not another thing. It's a way to frame what we are doing for English language learners.