A School Library Diversity Model and Assessment Guide

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In the fall of 2017, I was afforded the opportunity to participate in a university-sponsored diversity fellowship. As part of the fellowship, I elected to produce a diversity-themed website toolkit (<http://wp.towson.edu/librarymediadiversity>) for the Towson University School Library Media Program. In seeking a theoretical foundation for the toolkit, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) emerged.

UDL is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn (CAST 2019). In organizing and assimilating research for the development of the toolkit, a model was developed to reflect various diversity components in school libraries. The model, titled “The School Library Diversity Model (SLDM),” represents an application of UDL to organizational, curricular, and instructional practices common in school libraries. The model promotes diverse, culturally competent, organized, and accessible school libraries.

The following article presents the core components of the SLDM, with the UDL framework serving as the mechanism for facilitating a diverse school library learning environment that is supportive of all learners. An evaluation instrument is included to assess a school library based on the SLDM and supportive literature.

Overview of Literature

Cultural Competencies

The ALA Library Bill of Rights serves as a guiding document for the rights of all library users regardless of "origin, age, background or views" (2006). The Library Bill of Rights’ foundational tenants supported the development of the SLDM, in conjunction with utilizing key terminology/definitions for diversity and cultural competencies recognized in the library field.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) defines diversity as "the state or fact of being diverse; different characteristics and experiences that define individuals" (2012). For the purposes of this article, cultural diversity refers to "the participation of individuals in organizations, regardless of the race, ethnicity, or gender. It also includes persons who are physically challenged as well as those who are concerned about sexual orientation" (Josey and Abdullahi 2002, 11). Cultural competence is defined as "a congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a person or group to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (National Association of Social Workers 2015, 13).

Universal Design for Learning

UDL is a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice. It:

- Provides flexibility in the ways and means in which information is presented.
- Provides flexibility in the ways learners respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills.
- Provides flexibility in the ways learners are engaged.
- Reduces barriers in teaching and learning.
- Provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges.
- Maintains high achievement expectations for all learners, including learners with disabilities and those learners who have limited English proficiency (The Higher Education Opportunity Act 2008).

The UDL framework enhances inclusive school library experiences for diverse learners and fosters independence for learners with disabilities (Blue and Pace 2011). It also provides proactive valuation of diversity (Zhong 2012). UDL’s guiding principles revolve around three primary brain networks: the Recognition Networks (the "what" of learning), the Strategic Networks (the "how" of learning), and the Affective Networks (the "why" of learning) (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014).

The Recognition Networks are best supported in learning environments that facilitate multiple means of representation of concepts and provide flexibility in modality, explanations, and examples. The Strategic Networks are supported in environments that facilitate multiple means of action and expression for learners to present and express materials, and to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. The Affective Networks are facilitated in environments that facilitate multiple means of engagement by providing multiple means of engagement and interactions (CAST 2019). The application of UDL promotes equitable learning for diverse learners. UDL is evident in the implementation of highly effective teaching practices.

Highly Effective Practices

In the roles of teacher and instructional partner, the school librarian can optimize learning via the UDL framework and by utilizing the practices outlined in Linda Darling-Hammond’s and John Bransford’s Common Practices of Highly Effective Teachers (2005). These practices include:
• Assuring instructional expectations for the learners are clearly stated and exemplars of previous administrations of assignments are shown to learners as models of what to produce.

• Organizing the library instructional areas and lessons so that the organizational scheme is evident to all learners.

• Making materials easily accessible when needed, so no instructional time is wasted from lack of preparation.

• Providing learners with formative guidance and assessment during instruction by covering every part of the instructional area (i.e., not lecturing and standing still) and monitoring every activity that takes place.

• Providing multiple small-group activities in various groupings.

• Encouraging high levels of instructional discourse. Learners are encouraged to ask questions, discuss ideas, and comment on statements made by educators and other learners (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005).

Curriculum and Instruction
In order to support diverse learners instructional methods should be varied to meet the needs of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners (CAST 2019; Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014). These varied methods are facilitated in an environment where:

• Learners are actively engaged in a wide variety of activities (e.g., research, media production, educational gaming).
• Learner grouping varies among activities.

• The school librarian actively covers all instructional areas of the library.

• High levels of discourse are encouraged and assignment expectations are clearly outlined.

• Assistive technologies are available and utilized for learners with learning disabilities. (CAST 2019; Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005; Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014).

The research on UDL, effective teaching practices, curriculum and instruction, and cultural competencies form the framework of the School Library Diversity Model (see figure 1). In graphically representing these practices in the model, organizational diversity, and curricular programs serve as foundational pillars. UDL and cultural competencies serve as cohesive agents.

**Figure 1. The School Library Diversity Model.**
Organizational Diversity: Layout, Design, and Usage

Consistent with Linda Darling-Hammond’s and John Hammond’s Common Practices of Highly Effective Teachers, organization themes represented in the model include:

- Promoting representation of diverse cultures through items on display, promotional materials for the library, and posting learners’ work throughout the library.
- Creating an atmosphere where all learners feel representation in the school library.
- Making diversity in school libraries easily identifiable in a review of the collection.
- Assuring the school library has an accessible layout and design.
- Checking for ongoing usage of the school library by all learners through representation in the collection of data.

Diversity through Curriculum and Instruction

As represented in the SLDM, UDL provides a flexible learning environment in which multiple means of expression, representation, and engagement are used to address the needs of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners (CAST 2019; Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014). When appropriate, learners should be given choice in action and expression to best meet their learning strengths (e.g., students conduct research and are given the option to produce a paper or a slide presentation) (CAST 2019; Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014). School library staff should be flexible in meeting the instructional and cultural needs of all learners.

School Library Cultural Competency

Cultural competency serves as a foundational feature in the SLDM spanning the organizational structure. As illustrated in figure 1, culturally competent school library staff serve to support the diverse organizational components of the school library and the curricular/instructional needs of learners. Extending the UDL framework can reduce barriers for culturally diverse learners and increase the learning opportunities for all learners (Chita-Tegmark et al. 2012; Parker 2007; Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014). Culturally competent school librarians provide English language learners, gifted learners, and learning disabled learners with needed equitable access to school library staff and resources (Wideman and Odrowski 2012).

School Library Program Diversity Assessment Guide

A final step in the quest of defining and evaluating school library diversity was the creation of an analysis tool, the School Library Program Diversity Assessment Guide (SLPDAG), to compliment the SLDM. The SLPDAG includes the following areas/criteria to be used by school librarians in the diversity assessment of school library programs:

**Collection Development.** The assessment guide is aligned with the principles in the Library Bill of Rights that guide the development of a diverse print and non-print school library collection. Key collection development principles in the assessment include assuring all viewpoints on issues are represented in the collection and that learners see themselves represented in the collection. The collection should "represent the diversity of people and ideas in our society" (ALA 2006). Recommended formative practices for applying and assessing the guide’s collection development criteria include adherence to formal collection development policies, and the distribution of collection development surveys to constituents.

Advocacy. Visual representation of diversity in the school library can be supported via displays, posters, and visual media. The basis for visual advocacy relies on the principle that media "should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation” (ALA 2006). Learner work samples from school library-related instruction and other instructional areas of the school can be displayed in the library (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005).

Advocacy assessment is an ongoing effort that can include the school librarian keeping a journal or calendar of displays and other visual media to assure diverse representation. Encouraging learners to create displays representing aspects of diverse cultures assures inclusive representation of multiple viewpoints and perspectives in the school library.

Culturally competent school librarians provide English language learners, gifted learners, and learning disabled learners with needed equitable access to school library staff and resources.
Organization, Compliance, and Accessibility. The organization of the library and lessons should be evident to learners (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005). This can be assessed via a formal survey of learners and by formatively noting the ease or difficulty in which learners access the collection and instructional materials. In the varied school librarian roles defined by AASL (2010) (i.e., leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator), it is incumbent upon the school librarian to assure the diverse needs of learners are addressed. Reviewing learner individualized education plans (IEPs) and 504 accommodations promotes formative assessment of learner needs, while providing data to acquire appropriate school library resources to meet diverse learner needs in instructional and non-instructional activities (Every Student Succeeds Act 2015). Intermittent review of ALA/ADA guidelines (ALA 2019) for libraries can assure the school library is compliant and accessible.

Usage. Various data can be collected to examine trends in learner usage. Maintaining a sign-in log where learners note their purpose (e.g., reading, quiet study, research, media production, etc.) for using the school library in non-instructional situations will present data to assess the types of activities learners are engaging in during their free time. The school librarian can maintain a schedule of formal class instruction and non-instructional activities. These data can serve to denote if the activities are inclusive of all learners.

Instruction. UDL principles can help assess the school library instructional program’s capacity to meet the needs of all learners. In planning collaborative instruction, the school librarian can encourage classroom teachers to utilize UDL in presenting varied instructional methods to meet the needs of diverse learners. UDL criteria can function to assess the flexibility of the school library instructional environment. These criteria include:

- Using varied instructional methods and modes (audio, video, and text) to address auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners.
- Providing assistive technologies for learners with learning disabilities.
- Providing learners with choice in expressing knowledge in select assignments.
- Having clearly stated assignment expectations.
- Sharing exemplars of the previous year’s assignments as models of what to produce.
- Having clearly organized lessons.
- Providing accessible instructional materials.
- Ongoing monitoring of all instructional area(s) and activities.
- Planning and implementing multiple small-group activities in instructional situations.
- Encouraging learners to ask questions and discuss ideas. (CAST 2019; Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005; Meyer, Rose, and Gordon 2014).

Formative and reflective analysis of instruction can be utilized to assess the effectiveness of these instructional practices in meeting learner needs.

Dispositions. A school library staff that has a positive temperament and nature can help promote active participation of learners and faculty in the school library “regardless of race, physical challenges, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity” (Josey and Abdullahi 2002, 11). The staff’s ability to display the dispositions needed to work effectively in cross-cultural situations can be self-assessed using the ACRL Standards (2012); these dispositions may be more effectively assessed via a confidential survey distributed to learners and faculty.

Using the Assessment Guide in Professional Practice

School librarians can utilize the SLPDAG to enhance their professional growth, compliment formal program and professional evaluation, and as a collaborative tool in the following areas:

- **Self-Assessment**: The guide can be used as a self-assessment tool for collecting data in the improvement of diverse practices in teaching and administering the school library.
- **Professional Evaluation**: As a data collection tool, the guide can be added to a professional evaluation portfolio presented to principals, supervisors, and
administrators. The guide facilitates more holistic evaluation of the school library than the common practice of evaluating school librarians based only on teaching evaluations.

**Program Evaluation:** The assessment guide can be used to set short- and long-term goals for program improvement in diversity initiatives by capturing all-inclusive data about the school library. The guide can provide data as to patron patterns of using school resources, and provide prompts for the administration of surveys, conversations, and other modes to assess diversity needs and promote advocacy.

• **Peer Evaluation:** Sharing the data collected with peers can provide opportunities to brainstorm and share ideas on diverse practices.

• **Collaboration:** School librarians can partner with other educators to use data collected via the guide to brainstorm and share ideas of diverse practices within the school and school library.

**Conclusion**

UDL provides a logical framework for school libraries to meet the diverse needs of all learners. The SLPDAG reflects the principles presented in the SLDM and is correlated with the UDL primary brain networks. Multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression are aligned with each criteria to illustrate potential means for addressing the respective criteria. While evolving and not all-inclusive, the SLPDAG is intended for school librarians to self-access diversity components within their school libraries.

**Works Cited:**


### Collection Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UDL Primary Brain Network(s)</th>
<th>Provides for Multiple Means of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The print collection reflects diversity (all viewpoints represented; learners see themselves represented in the collection).</td>
<td>Affective Recognition, Engagement, Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The non-print collection (including subscription databases) reflects diversity.</td>
<td>Affective Recognition, Engagement, Representation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Advocacy

| Displays, posters, and visual media are reflective of diversity. | Affective Recognition, Engagement, Representation |
| Learner work samples are displayed in the library. | Strategic, Action and Expression |

### Organization, Compliance, and Accessibility

| The organization of the library and lessons is clearly evident. | Affective Recognition, Engagement, Representation |
| The facility is ADA compliant and accessible. | Affective, Engagement |
| The curriculum is accessible by all learners. | Affective Recognition, Engagement, Representation |
| Assistive technologies are available and utilized for learners with learning disabilities in non-instructional activities. | Affective Recognition, Strategic, Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression |

### Usage

| Statistics denote usage representative of the entire school population. | Affective, Engagement |
| Statistics reflect utilization by diverse learners (range of learning abilities). | Affective, Engagement |
| Learners use the library in non-instructional situations at varied times. | Affective, Engagement |
| Learners are actively engaged in non-instructional situations. | Affective, Engagement |
| Multiple small-group activities are evident in non-instructional settings. | Affective Recognition, Strategic, Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression |

### Instruction

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<tr>
<th>UDL Primary Brain Network(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varied instructional methods are utilized to address auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners.</td>
<td>Recognition, Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varied instructional modes (audio, video, and text) are utilized to address all learners.</td>
<td>Affective Recognition Strategic, Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression</td>
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<td>Assistive technologies are available and utilized for learners with learning disabilities in planned instructional settings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The organization of the library and lessons is clearly evident.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional materials are easily accessible when needed; preparation is evident.</td>
<td>Affective Recognition, Engagement, Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school librarian monitors all instructional area(s) and activities (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005).</td>
<td>Affective, Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple small group activities are evident in instructional (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005).</td>
<td>Affective Recognition Strategic, Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression</td>
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<td>Learners are encouraged to ask questions, discuss ideas, and comment on statements made by the school librarian and other learners (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005).</td>
<td>Strategic, Action and Expression</td>
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</tbody>
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### Dispositions

| Learners and faculty actively participate in the school library regardless of race, physical challenges, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity (Josey and Abdullahi 2002, 11). | Affective Recognition Strategic, Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression |
| School library staff display the dispositions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (National Association of Social Workers 2001 as cited in ACRL 2012). | Affective Recognition Strategic, Engagement, Representation, Action and Expression |