UDL in 15 Minutes

With Brandon Bean

Episode 100 - The Transcript

[The UDL in 15 Minutes logo, a circle around the words UDL (in blue), in (in yellow), 15 min (in red) followed by a selfie of Brandon, a white male with close cropped red hair, posing in front of his classroom wall with college pennants.]

LOUI:

Hello, and welcome to UDL in 15 Minutes, where educators discuss their experiences with UDL. I'm Loui Lord Nelson, UDL author, and leader. Today, I'm talking with Brandon Bean, who is part of the Kansas Infinitec Cadre. Today, Brandon is going to share his focus on student self-advocacy and how he supports that. Hi Brandon! It's so nice to meet you!

BRANDON:

Hello! Thank you so much for having me on your podcast today.

LOUI:

Oh, you're so welcome. You're so welcome. So let us know a bit about you. What's been your journey in education and with UDL? [The Kansas Technical Assistance System Network homepage with events about UDL listed.]

BRANDON:

Sure, I've kind of taken an interesting journey into education. I actually started in music education. I loved music, but I discovered that I really wanted to teach and impact more students outside of that, so I kind of transitioned into elementary education, and that's been extremely valuable. Through my time as an elementary education teacher, I was a gen ed teacher and then moved into special education for the last six years. During that time, I got invited to be part of the Access for All Project with Kansas Infinitec TASN, recently being named the UDL project. Part of this project was to bring about

educational tools and incorporating that UDL framework to give all students access to learning within the general education classroom. So through this project, I have come to Kansas Infinitec Cadre and been able to help lead some trainings, lead some webinars and be a participant in some data dives with other districts. And then additionally to that, a couple of my students have earned statewide awards for the use of technology, and their access and independence within the general education classroom.

LOUI:

Awesome. So did you get started with UDL because of the Infinitec work, or were you already familiar with the framework before that? [Students looking at a screen during a Zoom interview with a guest]

BRANDON:

So before that, I was kind of introduced to differentiated instruction. But through this project, it really did set the framework of UDL as being the key to providing access to students. Through that UDL lens, kind of connected with the co-teaching that was going on in the state of Kansas and how we could use co-teaching and how we can use UDL to increase student independence within the classroom. How we can use those frameworks to give students access to grade-level materials and reduce that need for additional support? So really, this project that started a few years ago kind of introduced me to UDL, but through that process, I realized that a lot of the things that I was already doing in my classroom was UDL. I just began to put names to what I was doing in my classroom.

LOUI:

Yeah, Nice. And then I understand that you recently achieved a certain certification.

BRANDON:

Yes, I did. I just finished my building leadership license. I just got endorsed. So I'm really excited about future opportunities to be able to impact more students as a special education teacher. I honestly have been able to impact a lot of students outside of just

my caseload, but moving forward, my goal has always been to positively impact the most amount of students possible.

LOUI:

That's awesome. Well, congratulations on that, and I'm sure there are a whole bunch of people are gonna want to scoop you up. So, but let's talk more about UDL with your learner's you have a more specific story to share. [A bulletin board with "Ask me about UDL," the UDL Guidelines, and student comments.]

BRANDON:

So I really want students to be part of the process. That means teaching them what UDL is, how we can use the language of UDL into our everyday language, our learning, our experiences, and getting students involved in that process. So this past year, I created a UDL bulletin board. This bulletin board included all the pieces of the UDL framework, but then I made students part of that process. So this bulletin board was next to the workstation where I lead groups, and we would talk about UDL before we started a lesson. Kind of hitting those pieces of, you know, how are we going to be engaged? What does our knowledge look like? How do we use our background knowledge to already piece together what we know with what we're going to learn? What does it look like when we're using our resources? What are our resources? And all of this to that key of becoming an expert learner. So through that process, I wanted to make the students also involved in that, and we started to add the student language to the UDL bulletin board as we progressed through the year. For example, one of my third-grade students kept referring to being an expert learner as a brain master. When she said that, I was so excited because she's right. It is becoming a brain master and being able to use all those pieces of our brain to navigate what we know, what we're learning, and how we put those pieces together. This UDL bulletin board not only benefited my students, but it also kept me in a positive light and making sure that I was following those guidelines when I was setting up lessons with the students as we were progressing through those lessons. We were constantly being reflective throughout that process.

LOUI:

That's awesome. And you, there were some like real specific success stories in there from what I understand, but I don't know what they are, so tell me! [A female educator and Brandon flanking a student as they stand in front of a projected slide reading, "Infinitec, Kansas Infinitec Coalition, 16th annual outstanding student technology awards ceremony"]

BRANDON:

Yeah, so in the past three years, I've actually had two students who have achieved the Outstanding Technology Award in the state of Kansas through Kansas Infinitec. Both of these students used that UDL framework as well as technology to increase their independence maximum to grade level curriculum. One student, in particular, was introduced to technology in this UDL framework when I piloted the Access for All or UDL project. And this student had the benefit of being introduced to this technology tool and how that would help impact her ability to learn right before the pandemic happened. During the pandemic, when everything's being shut down, we're trying to do as much as we can remotely. The student was able to use the technology tools that she had been taught just before the pandemic. On top of that, the student used those tools immediately when she moved into middle school. And within a few days of being at the middle school, had begun to advocate for herself, knowing that these tools are one of her resources and how she best learns, and how she can be an expert learner within the confines of a general education classroom. Through the use of this tool, the student, instead of being pulled out into a resource room, was able to participate with general education peers within her general education classrooms and be successful while in middle school.

LOUI:

That's wonderful because what I'm hearing is so not only did you have a student who learned the technology and learned how that technology was going to support her, but she also was empowered through language. She also learned language to help others,

and more explicitly, adults understand that she knew what she needed and she could advocate for herself. So do you think that came from those bulletin board conversations? [Brandon, a female educator, and a student holding a teddy bear. All are wearing masks and the student is receiving her award]

BRANDON:

I definitely think the conversation helps. My goal is always to teach the students to advocate for themselves. And I feel like it's a process. When I was working with third, fourth, and fifth graders, third grade was really building that relationship with them, getting them to feel comfortable with me, understanding what our process is going to be within the room. Moving into fourth grade, starting to get them to recognize what is a strength of theirs, what is a weakness, and how can we use those strengths to mitigate some of our errors, problems, difficulties that we have within our weaknesses. And as we're doing that, to start advocating for ourselves. So by the time my students get into fifth grade, they understand what their strengths are, and they understand how their resources can mitigate those problems or issues in terms of trying to access general education curriculum and to participate with their peers. And this has led my students to not only advocate for the tools for themselves but to recognize their peers within the classroom who also might benefit from tech tools or other resources, and then they begin to advocate for those students. And I've had some of these students that have received these works that have gone on to then train the para's in the classroom and train other students on how to use these tools so that the other students can also gain access to the curriculum.

LOUI:

That's awesome. And so I think another clarification here. So these, this award is not necessarily based on technology, that's like assistive technology. This sounds like it's more universal technology. So first, if you could help people understand the difference between assistive technology and then universal technology, and then just kind of fill us in on how this award is, what's determined behind the award. What leads people to give

this award? That's a better question. So how about that? [A close up of Brandon standing in front of a tree limb and looking up toward the camera]

BRANDON:

Yeah! So, this award is given to only five students yearly through Kansas Infinitec. It's called the Kansas Outstanding Technology Award. The students are nominated by a teacher and then referenced by a couple of other people. So my student, I nominated both of them over the past few years, and we had other teachers, and one of them was actually a student teacher that year, that helped write the references for the students. Part of it is that these are students with IEPs and students that do have educational needs, but it goes beyond just having the technology. It's that piece of understanding the technology and understanding how it benefits them as a learner, how that increases their independence, and it really does thrive on that advocacy piece. It's really cool because each student that receives this award uses technology, or uses these resources in different ways. Some of them use it just to be able to communicate. My students definitely feel more of that advocacy, and understanding themselves that UDL framework and how they could not only benefit themselves, but how they can also benefit their peers through that process.

LOUI:

This is awesome. I love how you helped learners understand what journey they're taking within the UDL framework. So it's not something that's being done to them, but rather it's something that they're participating in and something that they are empowered with, and that they actually have some control over, and that control definitely comes from their language. So they're learning how to talk about these things, which then like we said, helps them advocate more, but then I hear you're doing other things that are helping them build that advocacy language. Just wonderful. And I love that story that you just told about the young lady that goes on to middle school and says these are the things that I need. This is how I'm going to be able to continue my activities throughout this building. It doesn't matter where I am. I understand that these helped me in all sorts of contexts. I can be in the context that I choose to be in. It's just brilliant. So my last

question. You got all these wonderful experiences, and I know you're hoping to move into a leadership role. How do you think that's going to impact you as a leader in your building? [Brandon in his classroom posing with a local business owner followed by video captures of theudlapproach.com followed by the UDL in 15 Minutes logo]

BRANDON:

I definitely think it goes back to the UDL framework and looking at that framework. Every student, every adult, every teacher, we all have variability in our strengths and weaknesses. And so really diving in and understanding that variability is important as a leader. And there are so many ways that we can elevate everybody's strengths and gifts to mitigate those barriers that we may have. And so, as a leader, as an administrator, I want to make sure that we are using everybody's gifts so that we as a team are being elevated and that everybody that we are working with are being elevated as well.

LOUI:

Yeah. Awesome. Wonderful. Brandon, thank you so much. This was great. And I know that last question was kind of like an interview question. So anybody out there that you know is interested, you've just heard a fabulous answer. But thanks for this and really hitting home that concept of how our learners become better advocates when they're empowered through not only language but then guided choice. Giving them those choices. Helping them understand how these technologies, specifically the story, can help them, and then they take that off for themselves. Just brilliant. So thank you again for being on UDL in 15 Minutes.

BRANDON:

Thank you again. I really appreciate what you're doing to help spread the word of UDL.

LOUI:

Oh, you're welcome. You're welcome. So for those listening to this podcast, you can find supplemental materials like an image montage with closed captioning, that montage with audio descriptions, a transcript, and an associated blog at my website, which is

www.theudlapproach.com/podcasts. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 Minutes, you can contact me through www.theUDLapproach.com . And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.