

UDL in 15 Minutes  
With Cindy Malone  
Episode 101 - The Transcript

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 to Cindy Malone, who is a Lead Design and Implementation Specialist for Kansas Infinitec as part of the Kansas Technical Assistance System Network known as TASN. Today, Cindy is going to share about the Kansas UDL strand, which is one strand of the TASN High-Quality Instruction in Inclusive Learning Environments Project. Wow, that's a lot. Hi Cindy, how are you? (laughing)

CINDY:

Hi Loui. It's great to be here.

LOUI:

So nice to meet you too. And let us know a little bit about you. What's been your journey in education with UDL?

CINDY:

I am a speech-language pathologist, and I came into the UDL work through the lens of assistive technology. I was doing a lot of work within Infinitec on providing digital text and read-aloud supports for students that were struggling decoding or needed more support for comprehension. And in doing so, I found out that there was a lot of students in the classroom that I was not serving that needed and would benefit from those services. So UDL just seemed like the way in which we could provide students what they needed when they needed it.

LOUI:

That's great. So how did you find out about UDL?

CINDY:

Our project really is rooted in UDL. We traditionally started as a technology project, really looking at assistive technology and incorporating universal support tools. But we know technology by itself is never the answer. So when I was looking at how do we really support our students? I really used the UDL framework to help guide our coaching conversations and planning our professional development. And it's just really taken off since then.

LOUI:

Nice. So can you share a little bit about Infinitec and how you serve all of Kansas? All those educators!

CINDY:

Yeah, so Infinitec really was created with the thought that there was infinite potential through technology, and its roots are in assistive technology- the provision of augmentative, alternative communication devices and things like that for those more complex learners. But we've really branched out. Shonda Anderson is leading the co-teaching branch of our project, and then I'm leading the Universal Design for Learning strand, but all three strands really prioritize accessibility, inclusive practices, equity, and engagement.

LOUI:

Nice. Nice. And you guys use data also to drive what you do, right?

CINDY:

Yes, so we are working with teams continuously using the data that they have in their districts—also encouraging them to collect baseline data and show that growth in that student impact when you use that Universal Design for Learning framework in your classrooms.

LOUI:

Awesome. So I got a little ahead of myself because that's getting into the design, but why don't you share the rest of the design with us? What does that look like for UDL professional learning?

CINDY:

Well, when I really started designing the UDL project, I really wanted to model UDL and really took the framework when designing the professional learning for educators. Our educators are so busy, they're so taxed, and they have so much already on their plate. I really wanted to provide professional learning opportunities that were flexible, collaborative, and provided a lot of discussion. So we do provide webinars and pre-recorded content with guided instruction if it's pre-recorded, but we also provide a lot of activities and discussions in our PLCs. We also do book studies for those that really prefer that method. And we also bring in national speakers.

LOUI:

Great. And how do you help those teachers collaborate and connect? Because this is statewide, so it's kind of a little more mind-blowing. It's not just in a district. So how do you help those teachers connect?

CINDY:

Well, each group comes to us and the teachers, they all have common goals, but they have flexible means. So they come in, and they all set a goal either in engagement, representation, action expression, or expert learning. They all use the same UDL review baseline chart too, so they come in. It doesn't matter where they are in their UDL journey, they kind of get their challenges is what we call them, implementation challenges that they do, and then they come back and report that. So if they're working, for example, on engagement in October, our theme is expert learning begins with engagement. Then we may have some of those educators share some of the things that they're doing in their classrooms, like one of our schools was doing entry and exit tickets to really engage student learning. So they share, and they collaborate and talk with others during those webinars to really expand our knowledge and like help everyone elevate what they're doing in their classrooms.

LOUI:

Nice. So take us back to the beginning, when, kind of, Infinitec was starting to think about UDL, and you were just starting to consider this idea. Was it always gonna be statewide? Did it grow out of conversations with different districts? I think people will be interested to hear what that planning looked like.

CINDY:

We started again in the assistive technology realm, and we knew we weren't serving all the students that we wanted to one student at a time. So that kind of was the beginning of looking at some of our provisions differently. We still do a lot of work in IT. Beth Zillinger leads that project. But when we were really looking at the UDL framework, we were looking at, okay, what if we provide these universal support tools and use that UDL framework so that teachers know when to provide options, for example, or perception, and what tools they have built into their devices or tools that they could possibly purchase for students that have them readily available for all students to support that variability in their classrooms.

LOUI:

Nice. And I think we also have to make this clear to people even though this comes through. It sounds like kind of a special education, which is an assistive technology arm. This is for all learners, and this is for all educators, correct?

CINDY:

Yes, we really are looking at all students becoming expert learners. When I explain the concept of expert learners, with even our educators, I say all of you, I want to be expert

learners. I want to continue to be an expert learner. Your complex students need to be expert learners. So we just really need to make that framework work for everyone. All students in the classrooms.

LOUI:

Nice. So how has this grown? I guess it should ask, how did it start? Like the numbers of people and is it, are doing multiple cohorts now? How has that grown?

CINDY:

Well, we have about 100 people registered for the webinar each month. Not everyone can come to the live webinar, but we have about 13 teams on average that go through the training where they set goals, do their baselines, do their post data, and then do a reflection in our May let's celebrate meeting, where they can really congratulate each other and show their successes throughout the year. So we are continuing to grow. Word of mouth, but we also have some educators in Kansas that join us not necessarily on a team but just as an individual educator that just wants to learn more about UDL. We provide that opportunity for them as well.

LOUI:

Nice. And I know I'm going to be talking with groups who are leading book studies and some other individual educators further on along here. You've been so kind to share names. So everybody, listen for those. But I think people would be really curious to hear about how you kind of piqued that interest in these different districts. So I know you sent out information about it. But did you also do any kind of personal follow-up with specific people that you thought, oh, you know what, I bet they'll be interested in this, especially if they've never heard about UDL before?

CINDY:

Yes, we reached out to directors across the state that had really had roots in our Assistive Technology Project. And then we also have the benefit of having Kansas Infinitic Cadre members that have been leading assistive technology in their districts. We also have coaches for the co-teaching arm of our strand of our project. So we reached out to a number of different people, from directors to cadre members to coaches for co-teaching, and really just explained what our goal was, was really to promote that high-quality instruction within those inclusive learning environments. And we've had really good and continue to have really good response.

LOUI:

Nice, nice. And is it all digitally based, or do you have some face-to-face parts of this?

CINDY:

So currently, we bring in national speakers, and those are face-to-face, and then we have the book study, and the webinar are virtual. Just for the fact that we do have educators zooming in from all across the state for those discussions, and we really want to keep it that way. But our coaching, when we go out to districts, we do UDL walkthroughs in classrooms. We may go and do some lesson designing with some teachers. We do and go in the classrooms for those. So it's kind of a hybrid approach.

LOUI:

Nice. Okay, and then when it comes to, this sounds like it's built into Infinitec. It's not necessarily like a three-year project or something like that. Am I picking up on that correctly, that this is now built into a structure?

CINDY:

So currently, teams can join each year, and we initially thought it was going to be a three-year project, but we also had to respond and change to our education team's needs, and we realized that change takes a lot of time. And so, really, it is a multi-year project and a professional learning community where you're always welcome to join us and to learn and to, collaborate and to grow. So it is not just like a year one, two, or three. Currently, we're encouraging teams to stick with it. When we worked with Elizabeth Berquist, making sure that we were really using a protocol to help teams grow and establish, we really looked at it takes multiple years for teams to really learn and improve their UDL practices.

LOUI:

Yeah, it does. Awesome. So good. So good. So, last question here. What's the focus for the next school year? How is this designed to even grow more?

CINDY:

So we have more individuals that are going to be coaching more teams. Our cadre leaders are going to help me coach more teams and the Infinitec staff. And we're also really focusing on improving our student impact data to make sure that we're sharing our students' growth. Really getting their voices in that data to make sure that we're not only using our stories, but they're able to tell what they've learned about their learning preferences or barriers that they've been able to overcome or how they've made their learning more rigorous and meaningful. So we're really going to really focus on getting our students involved in the UDL framework and involved in their own learning.

LOUI:

That's awesome. Well, Cindy, this was wonderful to talk with you. Thank you so much.

And thanks for answering all of my different questions. I think people are going to be really interested to hear how you've done this statewide and the fact that you broke it down so well, I have the feeling that other states are gonna be like, oh, oh, we're gonna just contact Cindy and see if we can ask some more questions. So thanks for getting that conversation started for so many people.

CINDY:

Well, thank you, Loui. I'm so excited and so proud of my Kansas educators that are in this project. So come back and listen to their stories because they have more to share.

LOUI:

Yeah, absolutely. So for those listening to this podcast, you can find supplemental materials like image montage with closed captioning, that montage with audio descriptions, a transcript, and an associated blog at my website, which is [theudlapproach.com/podcasts](http://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 [theudlapproach.com](http://theudlapproach.com). And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.