

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Kade Friedman
The Transcript

[The UDL in 15 Minutes logo, a circle around the words UDL (in blue), in (in yellow), and 15 min (in red) followed by Kade, a white person with very short brown hair wearing a white collared shirt and standing in front of a blue tiled wall.]

[Peppy music]

LOUI: Hi everyone. At about the four-minute mark, you will hear a siren. It lasts for maybe 30 seconds, but just wanted to give you a heads up.

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 Kade Friedman who is an adjunct professor at New York University and works with educational organizations around the world to create inclusive learning environments for all learners. Today, Kade is going to share how they use UDL to create spaces where all adults can be more effective. Hi, Kade, how are you?

KADE: Hi, Loui. It's so nice to be on the podcast with you. I'm good.

LOUI: Thank you so much. It's so nice to meet you. So let us know a bit about you. What's been your journey in education and with UDL? [Kade and 9 other educators grouped together in front of a classroom projector screen after a class on assistive technology at Bank Street College.]

KADE: So you know I grew up in a time where both autism and neuro-divergence and also being non-binary and gender non-conforming, this was the late 80s, was not really like a known thing. And so, I had a lot of experiences being bullied and like not really making friends and struggling with school but not the academic portion of it. And I really just like knew that when I grew up, I would figure out how to teach adults to manage that better and make sure that, that educational spaces felt safe for kids. So, I was an educational TV for a while and then I was a kindergarten special education teacher in the New York City public schools. And from there I sort of burnt out and I moved to India and I lived in the forest. And I realized that like, I needed to come back and attack this from a different angle, and that I wanted to have more impact with teachers and even though I loved working with children, I just really wanted to ensure that teachers have the right skills and so I started as an adjunct at Bank Street College and now I'm at NYU and also just consulting with organizations who really want to do the work. And my, like,

barometer for if an organization is the right organization for me is if they internally also want to be more inclusive and use UDL within their internal structures and not just for the teachers or children that they work with.

LOUI: Excellent. That's an incredibly powerful story. Thank you

KADE: Thanks!

LOUI: Oh my gosh, so okay, we know that NYU is a huge campus and has a presence well beyond New York City. How many campuses does it have? How many students? [Kade seated in a circle of chairs with other educators in Agastya, India]

KADE: I mean, I think we're in three continents. And then in New York, there's two campuses. There's one in Manhattan and one in Brooklyn, although that doesn't include all of the medical campuses that are within hospitals. And then within the main, downtown New York Campus, there are 11 schools.

LOUI: Wow

KADE: It's really large.

LOUI: It's huge. It's huge. And okay, well, we'll go back to that a second. So anyway, but you're using UDL to create more effective learning spaces for adults. And I understand that this means everything from learning spaces to meeting spaces. So, to dig into that.

KADE: Yeah. So, I mean, I think the thing that I've discovered, you know, as a, as a professor of Special Education and Disability Justice, that there's this expectation that we're going to teach our students who will be teachers to use UDL, but there isn't necessarily an expectation to use UDL in your own teaching as a professor or within meetings across like-departments. So, the thing that I've been focusing a lot on is really designing my courses using UDL and being super explicit and naming it for students and saying, like, "Look, you probably haven't experienced this before because you're in some kind of top-down schooling process. This is one where there's choice. There's freedom, I'm going to share power with you. I'm going to give you ways to, like, hold the classroom space. And now that you've experienced this as a student, you have a model for how to then replicate this when you are the adult in a space with children." [A screenshot of a Zoom class with 20 people]

LOUI: Nice. Are these undergraduates? Graduates? All the above?

KADE: Their undergrad and grad and I often have postdocs, audit classes.

LOUI: Nice so when it comes to the undergraduates, this idea of sharing power, many of my colleagues in higher ed, definitely struggle with some students coming that maybe don't seem as prepared for what goes on in the college setting versus the K-12 environment. And my colleagues, watch other colleagues, like, locked down, like locked down on those students because they're like "They need to learn!" but it sounds like you are using a completely different model. So would you just talk about that?

KADE: Yeah, I mean, I think a lot of it is like just you need to have a reason for everything you're doing and be able to explain it. And so for example, I make my syllabus his full of emojis that code everything so that you can really scan for every week, the whatever the pre-work is there's options. So, if I'm asking you to read an article, there's also a video option that covers that same content, and usually a podcast, or some kind of like audio that you can listen to. And so, like building into the syllabus choices and options for receiving content, and then in the classroom when we're all together and we're processing also having space to be like do you want to work by yourself today? Do you want to work in a small group? Do you want to just have a big group discussion? And sort of more often than not throwing out options that I'm okay with that I know how to facilitate and letting the students say what they need in that moment, you know, there, there have been moments even this past year where like, students were like, "We're all really having a hard day. Can we just like talk in pairs?" You know? And I'm like do, do something that feels really like intimate and manageable. And I think that that's part of that's so much part of UDL and, you know, the representation and action and expression are very easy. They're concrete, right? We can exactly see how to implement them. We know which spaces in our lesson plan or syllabus that we're embedding that. I think the engagement piece is much more elusive and I think it's the most important and so this is part of that, where throughout the entire lesson, I'm thinking of how to engage them? What are their needs right now? What is a way that they can choose that will be the most meaningful for them to like, engage with this content and get something out of it that they can then use the next day when they're in their student teaching placement? [Kade with two young children at India Art Break Day in 2014]

LOUI: Yeah, absolutely. And talk about how you, and I don't like the word balance. I've gotta come up with a better word here. But the idea of recognizing that they're having a hard day, yes, they want to talk in pairs, but then you're also maintaining high expectations. They are still gaining content. They're still gaining skills. They're still required to be a student. And I think there's a misnomer out there that when we pay this much attention, which is the good thing to do, to those social emotional needs, that for

some reason, people drop off on rigor, but you're not. So can you talk about that?

KADE: I mean, I think as humans when we're having a hard time and someone can acknowledge it, it changes the experience that we're having. It takes it away from being this like, isolated, private thing to like, it's out in the open and it's okay. And it normalizes that it's okay. And so, I actually find that by acknowledging the students' emotional states and letting them share what's going on for them. You know, it takes two minutes at the beginning of class where we do an SEL check in. I showed them one of those nine grids that's like a drag queen and in nine different emotions and say which one do you resonate with? And very quickly, I have a sense of the room and can say, okay, let's, let's forge ahead, or like, okay, let's pause what's going on for everyone. And in just that 30 seconds, two minutes, however long it takes to sort of tap in, lets them know that it's okay to show up to class with these feelings, that they don't have to hide them and it makes them certainly much more open and present to whatever's going to come after that. But it also lets me know like, okay, if I was going to do some kind of scenario later about how to react to gun violence, and they've all just experienced some kind of like horrific active shooter drill, that maybe today is not the right day to do that. It doesn't mean I'm not going to do it. It just means that I now have a little bit more information about what they can handle in this moment. And I might move things around.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. [Kade posing with 6 men and women in Agastya, India all wearing brain hats they've created out of cut up paper patterns] Okay, I could keep going down this rabbit hole. Definitely. But I know you're also using the framework with your colleagues in how meetings are designed or how information is communicated, all the above. So just dive in there!

KADE: Yeah, you know, it was something that I realized over the pandemic, when we were just in so many zoom meetings that someone had to take notes, and that a lot of people were taking notes and it actually worked better to open a Google Doc and have shared collective notes. And I've done this in meetings within the university, also within the union, and also in my classrooms with students. Instead of everyone taking notes in separate places, which is still an option, if you want you can tap into a collective note doc. And I think that this kind of like sharing information, normalizing that, like some people are going to want to type everything out and that works for them and some people can't but we'll need that written note later to remind themselves of what happened that we can all sort of take part in that in the way that feels right for us and benefit from what each other are doing. Right? It doesn't have to be everyone just doing something for themselves.

LOUI: Yeah, that recognition of the jagged profile where you're really strong in one

moment and someone else would prefer or needs a support in that moment. In the very next moment, you might be the person who would really appreciate that support and somebody else is strong in it. And so...

KADE: Totally!

LOUI: Yeah!

KADE: And you know, some people show up with iPads and sketch things out, and like the ability to like sketch out a drawing or a diagram, and then just plop it right into the Google Doc. Also like for a lot of people that kind of visual spatial drawing, making things visual is hard, but they benefit from the images. And so, if someone wants to make those images, let's all benefit from them. Right, like?

LOUI: Exactly, exactly!!

KADE: Yeah.

LOUI: So like, okay, so starting with the collective notes, and then people probably had some a-ha was around there maybe silently or maybe they shared them, but then where is it gone from there? [Kade leading a Teach for Italy Zoom course with 20 students in 2020]

KADE: You know, I think that it's really valuable to share power in whatever way that you can. I think it's a way to be anti-racist and anti-biased. It's a way to combat against ableism and normalize all the different ways that we can contribute. And so, I have seen myself do this in meetings where I take on a role it's not necessarily like offered or given to me but I say like, "Okay, in this meeting, I'm going to be the note taker," or "In this meeting, I'm gonna try to make as many connections between what people are saying as possible." And I've started doing this with my students also where like our class jobs, right, just like kids have in elementary school up through high school, I think it's really valuable in learning settings to also have a role that you play. And like maybe your role is the skeptic and you are just like playing devil's advocate with everything everyone says, and that's something you would naturally do and it might be like, admonished, but in this setting, we're making space for that, right? And it also takes the pressure off of me or whoever's the facilitator to have to like remember to hold all the perspectives because it's now someone's job to call in the perspectives that are left out.

LOUI: Yeah, I love that.

KADE: Yeah.

LOUI: I love the, the not having to hold all of the different perspectives but rather, obviously in the design, the thinking ahead, what are all the perspectives, but then I'm sure you're also saying to your students, so what are their perspectives are maybe the different languages used, but they're engaged in discovering what these different perspectives are. And then...

KADE: Yeah.

LOUI: they have those jobs, it sounds like...

KADE: Yeah.

LOUI: That's just incredible. I love that. I love it. I love it! How do you feel others can come to UDL when it comes to the faculty side of designing. Like you were saying, meetings but the distribution of ideas the sharing I mean, especially my gosh, your campus is so huge, so looping back to where I was like, my brain was blowing up because of how big university system is, but, how do you think more people can come into this and see the value of it as a tool for the faculty side?

KADE: You know, I think there's then a push lately to think about affinity groups and having people process content with people who have had similar life experiences. And I think I'd like to see more of an extension into language and like native languages and home languages. I've been doing this in my classroom for a few years where the end of each class students you know, get into small groups to process and reflect, and if they want to go into a Mandarin speaking group they can, if they want to go into a Spanish speaking group they can, if they want to just do ASL, they can. And I think that I'd like to see more of that at the like faculty level of just really like honoring people's cultures and home languages, and not just sort of the surface level, like well we'll have racial affinity groups, you know. [Kade holding up a children's book during a read aloud online session called Learn with Kade followed by video captures of The UDL in 15 Minutes webpage and the UDL in 15 Minutes logo]

LOUI: Right. Right. Oh, this was such a brilliant conversation. Thank you, Kade. Thank you so much!

KADE: Yeah, thank you, Loui. It's fun to share!

LOUI: Great! 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 associated blog at my website, which is the 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 and revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.