

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Gayle Hines
Episode 109 - The Transcript

[UDL in 15 Minutes logo, a circle around the words UDL (in blue), in (in yellow), and 15 min (in red) followed by Gayle Hines, a white woman with shoulder-length, straight blond hair and wearing a red/orange top and black beaded necklace]

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 Gayle Hines, who is the principal at Matoaca Middle School in Richmond, Virginia. Today, Gayle is going to share how she prepared her staff to learn about UDL. Hi, Gayle, how are you?

GAYLE:

Hi, Loui. I'm awesome. How are you?

LOUI:

I'm great. 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?

GAYLE:

So I was a classroom teacher and department chair at a high school. And then, I moved into a what we call an instructional specialist for social studies for my division. And then, after that, I decided I wanted to be an assistant principal and to be able to be an instructional leader in a building with students. And so I went back to a building as an assistant principal at a middle school this time. And during that time, I got a fellowship to Harvard, and when I was there at Harvard, I had my first sort of introduction to UDL because the gentleman from CAST came, and he was one of the presenters, and then, fast forward a few years, and I became a principal at Matoaca Middle School, which is actually the feeder pattern where I started teaching at the high school level, which is something I always wanted to do is go back to that same feeder pattern. So I started working with one of our local state department, sort of like a liaison for what we call TTAC, technical assistance here in Virginia, and while working with her in the middle of the night or in the early morning, I had, like, Oh, I was really looking for an umbrella for which we were going to do all of our work. And so, I sent her a text at 4:30 in the morning and said, hey, do you know anything about UDL? It just so happened that she was the local representative for UDL here in the Richmond area. So it was a perfect setup, and little did we know that that's how it was gonna be, and so since then, we've been working a lot introducing UDL to our school and framing our instruction underneath that umbrella. [A screen shot of the Matoaca Middle School website

featuring 7 boys from the cross-country team]

LOUI:

That's awesome. I was middle school all the way. That's the level that I taught all the way through, and I love, I love middle school. I to my description is, yeah, I always say, you know, they want to be so independent, but they're still dependent, and you find that little balance right, and oh, I just the curiosity that's there, and I know they're little the attitudes are coming out and whatever but I just there is it's a time of exploration that's like no other time in life. And I just, it's awesome. Yeah,

GAYLE:

Yeah, what I tell my staff all the time is this is the time when they make the decision about how they feel about learning. So, if we can grab them now and make them love learning, then they will be lifelong learners. Because when they're in elementary school, they want to learn everything. When they're in high school, if they haven't made a connection to it, I think I think you have to get them in middle school. So, that's what we talked about all the time.

LOUI:

That's awesome. I love that. I love that. I think it's perfect. So, can you share a little bit about Matoaca Middle School's demographics what have you let people kind of know that context?

GAYLE:

Sure. So Matoaca Middle School is in what I like to call southern Chesterfield County, which is a suburb of Richmond, Virginia. It is a very big division. We have over 65,000 students. We have 68 schools and counting. And we are as south as you can get in that area, and we are rural. And that's by design. Our county board of supervisors keeps his area very green because all the other areas are developing very quickly and getting big, you know. developments with townhouses and homes and apartments, and so they're on purpose keep it very rural. And so it's a small community. We have about 900 students on average, sometimes a little bit closer to 1000, sometimes a little bit under 900. But it is what I like to call like a real family community because everybody that is in Matoaca mostly has always been in Matoaca. So when I interview people, I say, you know, this is where I always wanted to come back to. This is the place I love because once the kids that I see now as middle schoolers are the children of kids that I taught when I was a high school teacher there. So it's very much like, I want to say, a bedroom community, but it is also very traditional, like southern rural. So it's basically a black and white community. We have about 45% Black students. We have a lot of free and reduced lunch. But then we have the other absolute opposite because we have some

very wealthy neighborhoods that feed into, so it's a really nice mix of students for us. It is my passion. We have two Title One schools that feed into us. So, we do struggle with some of the things that come with that set of circumstances. This year, for the first time, we are federally identified, so we are currently in the process of using some school improvement grant funds that were given to us from the state through the federal government. And so we have a lot of the same struggles I feel like that everybody has coming back from COVID, and also we have special ed students that are struggling, we have some black students that are struggling, and so we, you know, we deal with all of those things as well.

LOUI:

Yeah. And in the middle school structure, are you guys grades 6-8?

GAYLE:

Yes, we are 6-8. We do a block schedule. So we do four classes every day. Most of the kids take English every day, math every day, and then science social studies on the rotating every other day, and then they take elective, two electives every other day.

LOUI:

Awesome. Thank you.

GAYLE:

Yeah, no problem.

LOUI:

We know that UDL can be challenging to get into, and there's a lot of information in there, and you identified a way to begin that process, and it's proven to be effective. So can you talk about that first? [Two teachers dressed in a western theme standing in front of a paper cut-out barn, a rocking chair, a carriage wheel and some stacked wooden boxes for an instructional unit]

GAYLE:

Yeah, so we sort of build our whole year around June. We call it our June week like. I have teachers that go like it's almost June, it's almost June! They get so excited. I can't pay them to come, but I feed them really well. I get people to donate food, and then we spend a week building our instructional model, but it's every year is based on a big theme, right? So, one year, we did Gradual Release of Responsibility. One year, we did learning targets. Last year, we did discourse. This year, we're moving to like leveling up the discourse and including writing in that. And then, we come together as a school, and the first time that we did it, we introduced UDL like a whole. It was a three-day

workshop. The first day was spent on building all the foundational UDL things that they needed to know. Everything that from the whole big picture of UDL down to just all the little things. We identified a corner that we call the cautious corner so that we could tell them that these are, you know, sort of our own version, but we didn't use the UDL 2.0 to get started. But what happens is they do UDL the first day, but it's always we give them the framework, and then they can use it on in their own work. So, they get the framework the first day. We finish up the second day, and then they are sitting with their peers the whole time. They go into their PLC, and then they start looking at their instructional sequence and building their units using the fundamental concepts of UDL. And so that's kind of how we built it. We also, I did start a small pilot with my sixth-grade English Language Arts team. I'm a big pilot person. So because, if you can pilot it with a small group and other people see them having success, it's easier to get them to change their mindset to be able to see that there's a way to do their work.

LOUI:

Yeah. And so what, like what you were just saying, they're gaining new skills, they're given time to think about their mindsets, and even how those mindsets shifted. So, were there specific reflection questions or tools that the teachers used? Like, were they using the four critical questions?

GAYLE:

Yeah, we always use the four critical questions for all of our work. We are very much a PLC school. And so, actually, this year, we're moving forward even more when I say we're leveling up. We're also leveling up our PLC and, so I don't know if you're familiar with the Amplify book, which is the new book about PLC, coaching collaborative teams, and PLCs at work. We have a really strong peer coaching team in our school that we developed as part of all the UDL stuff. That they would be able to help the teachers as they move forward, but it would be coming from their peers and not from always from the admin. And so those are a lot of them are my leadership team, and today we'll be moving into we're doing the Amplify Your Impact as a book study, and then that's what how we're going to level up our PLCs and make sure that we're keeping that in the forefront because the PLC work that we do is great, but it can be even greater.

LOUI:

Right, exactly.

GAYLE:

So that's how we're supporting each other and making sure that we're using UDL to, you know, remove the barriers before we design instruction.

LOUI:

Yeah. That's excellent. Knowing that I have listeners from literally around the world, so Rick DuFour, the questions are, those four critical questions are: what do we want all students to know and be able to do? How will we know if they learn it? How will we respond when some students do not learn? And how will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient? So, I just wanted to make that clear for our friends who are not around here.

GAYLE:

Yeah, and that's built into our PLC notes document those questions. More for how it worked for each one of them, you know, each PLC, but those questions are built into into the reflection document that they use.

LOUI:

They're just brilliant framing questions. So, the next idea you had was to give your teachers space to learn about UDL. We kind of talked about that, but you didn't have the funding, and you touched on that earlier. You fed them, but how else did you pull this off? Because I know there are administrators listening to this going, how did she make this work? [Students sitting in desks and on the floor. The teacher is leaning over, helping one student who is sitting on the floor]

GAYLE:

Well, like I said, we piloted it first, and so the English teachers that have been a part of that pilot were able to talk to the success that they saw in their classrooms, but also, we started small, right? So the first year, we did all of English and Algebra, and really, English did great and Algebra, not so much. And so that was kind of a working through that the whole year. And then the second year was when we came back, brought the entire staff, and all my admin team is responsible for one department, or if it's electives and some other things, sometimes it's multiple departments together. But we all work together with Dr. Croasdaile, who's the UDL person that I worked with who also worked for TTAC here in Virginia, and she helped us from the first year we made that training just a little bit different, a little bit better. We did a whole group together for the people that needed to have the basics. Then we did a little bit of catch-up for everybody that have been there but needed a little bit more. Then we split up into groups, and each admin took their content areas to work with them individually to make sure that they were taking then the fundamental concepts and adding them to their work that they were doing.

LOUI:

Nice. And you guys are working at the unit development level? [Students at lab tables

and desks working collaboratively]

GAYLE:

Yes.

LOUI:

Or are they also working at lesson development level?

GAYLE:

So they do all, right? So we start we have an instructional sequence which they designed it when we first started so each group, and we still have, you know, people that have been with me the whole time. Of course, we have turnover just like everybody else. COVID, we couldn't control a lot of that. But we have a new teacher week. So everybody gets UDL during the new teacher week since their new now instead of having like whole group. So, they started with an instructional sequence. They took our state curriculum, and they said this is what our kids need to know. This is what we think they struggle with. This is what they picked apart in the regular state curriculum, and they design their instructional sequence. This is how we think it should go. This is how it would flow best for our kids. This is what we know they know coming up this we know they need to know for the next grade level. They created an instructional sequence. From that instructional sequence, then they created their unit, we kind of told them like ten or less units. That's how it should be. And so then they created their units, and then they created their learning targets, and then when they PLC, they look at, say, we have two meetings, one called the PLC, and then they do what we call content area planning on the next day. So PLC, they look at some sort of similar, you know, formative data or summative. But it's a common assessment of some sort. And then the next day, they plan their lessons using the data but also, you know, their unit plan. There's a whole sort of big circle. [Students manning a table while they are selling holiday cards]

LOUI:

Yeah, it is. It's a lovely cycle. And I think one telling piece is tucked in there when you were describing it is that when the teachers are picking apart that state level, instructional sequence and putting together the curriculum, in that comment of we know that the students know this and so instead of saying the students should know this and putting the marker possibly way out, it's instead reflecting on, okay, historically, this is what students have walked in with. This is what we're hearing from previous grade levels, or this is what we're seeing in our own data. And we're going to start with, we think this is where they're going to be, and this is where we need to start, and then we can reframe as we move along, and that's so powerful and so different. [Two teachers standing on either side of a student who is holding a bouquet of flowers]

GAYLE:

They adjust as they need it, and we always look. We have a test here like everyone else. And so, you know, they had all their data before we left for the year. And they'll have all their data when we meet again, coming in. And then they will look at that data and see if anything shifted. You know, COVID had a huge impact on our students, not only because of what happened but also because we're in a very rural area, and so a lot of our kids don't even have internet, and so we were given out hotspots, and those were sketchy at best. And so a lot of our kids were impacted exponentially. And so they have to keep looking at it to make sure that what they know or what they believe to be true from other times. It may not be true right now, and so they're constantly looking at data. We also give we have growth assessments. Now, we used to give the NWEA, but now we give a scape growth assessment in the fall and the winter. And then, we give our Standards of Learning test at the end of the year. And so we also have that data throughout the year plus all of their PLC level data that they bring to the table. So they all are always adjusting. Sometimes right in the minute, and sometimes you know, they have luxury to plan ahead. But not always.

LOUI:

Yeah. Well, I really appreciate this. Gail, thank you so much. You are a clear model of instructional leadership and helping your staff grow in their instruction and understanding of Universal Design for Learning. That it's clear you also create a culture of learning, and that's just beautiful. So thank you for coming on to UDL in 15 Minutes and describing all of that.

GAYLE:

Well, thank you for having me. We are all about growing on the talk of scholars.

LOUI:

Yes.

GAYLE:

So that's our whole deal.

LOUI:

Wonderful. [Screen captures of www.theudlapproach.com followed by the UDL in 15 Minutes logo] 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.