

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Kelly Ackerman and Lisa Renz
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 with Kelly Ackerman, who is a resource teacher, and Lisa Renz, who is an English teacher. They both work at Hayes High School in Hays, Kansas. Kelly and Lisa are going to share a few stories from their first year of UDL implementation. Welcome to you both! I'm so glad you're here.

KELLY:

Thanks for having us on. We're so excited about UDL.

LISA:

We are! Especially after we kind of have our first year under the belt. We are excited to push on and use it more and more in our classrooms.

LOUI:

Oh, that's great. That's so good. So, let us start with a little bit about each of you. What's been your journey in education and with UDL? So, who wants to start?

KELLY:

This is my 31st year in education. My first seven years I spent as an English teacher, and then I've been a special education English teacher for the last 24 years and have collaborated with Lisa all 24 of those. Last year was our first year for UDL. Our school psychologists came to us and asked if we'd be willing to be part of a pilot team for Hays High at our school. We had no idea at that time what those letters meant. So, we started with Unlearning by Alison Posey and then wanted to know more. So, we have looked for more information and attended meetings and book studies since then.

LOUI:

Wow. 24 years of collaboration. That's like a marriage.

KELLY:

It is.

LISA:

Honestly, it is we laugh because oftentimes we can finish each other's sentences, and

we have been known to dress alike. Ya, funny. It's exactly like Kelly said, we were approached with the UDL by our school psychologist, and we have elementary schools, and we have middle schools here in the Hayes district who are using it. And really, they thought that it was sort of a natural fit for our collab classes to begin with. Because Kelly and I have worked together for so long. I've taught for 33 years, and this is new to me, but I'm loving it. And it's just been a natural progression to add this into our classes here at Hays High.

LOUI:

Oh, that's so awesome. So, before we go down that UDL path, can somebody share some information about Hayes High School?

LISA:

We are a rural district in Kansas. We are on I70, and we are actually about halfway between Denver and Kansas City. We have just recently passed a bond, and we are in the process of getting a brand-new building that is going to integrate departments. and we are so excited about that. Our partner will be social studies, and so we will be sharing the same classroom space, commons area, and then also teacher planning area. So, we are very excited about that. And we're going to talk more a little bit later about how social studies has jumped on board with us.

LOUI:

Oh, that's good. Thank you. Okay, so you guys have been teaching together for a long time. And it's so obvious that you're both lifelong learners. And you're always looking to improve your art and your practice because being in the classroom that long and then saying yes to something new, a framework. That's a huge gift to your students. So, what are some examples of things that you chose to shift based on what you learned about UDL?

LISA:

We have taught our English two sophomores, a career unit, for years and years. We were getting rather bored of it. Our students, we could tell, were getting rather bored by it. So, we decided to change it up, and we created a choice board, allowing students to get their information for research from podcasts, from videos, from interviews, from websites, and then we gave them a choice on how they wanted to take notes. Some chose to do traditional note cards. Some chose PowerPoints, others used words, some created tables, some were pen and paper, some were not. We just were amazed at the variety of ways the kids decided to find their information and jot it down.

KELLY:

One young man made a tree for notes. He started with this subject at the top and branched out from there, and it made zero sense to me. But several times, he said I love that I can do this this way. And I said, "Does that make sense to you?" And he goes, "It does!"

LOUI:

That's so awesome. And so, I want to take that even a little bit further. So sometimes, you know, as teachers, when we see what the students are doing, and you're like, I don't really know where you're headed with this. And so ultimately, he needed to demonstrate that that tree format benefited him, so did it?

KELLY:

It did. His project was really good. He's one who we give them a choice for how they wanted to show the transfer their knowledge and show us what they had learned. And he is a young man that used that tree to make a podcast. That was a first, that we've given them that option. So that was really cool.

LOUI:

Yeah, that's so awesome. So, you opened the door for both representation, right? They're finding their own ways of looking for these things, but then you also open that door under action, and expression, allowing them to say, "Hey, I'm gonna show what I know in the way that feels comfortable to me." That's so awesome.

KELLY:

So, we did have students who did the traditional thing and did posters, and then they of course, PowerPoint is their comfort zone, and the slideshow, we said, how about Sway or Smore or Canva, and a lot of them chose Canva and then realized that an infographic might work better. So, we had posters, we had infographics, we had slideshows, too, and videos in addition. We did not create a rubric before that project. We said, notice when we're going over this that your rubric page is blank. So, we actually created the rubric with our students for that project, which was interesting because we have two different classes, so we kind of put them together, and they were similar, but one class was totally against like a three-point rubric, they thought you should get a point for being on the rubric, even if you didn't do that part. So, it was fun to talk through things with them. And then they shared their projects in a small group. We just went to the library, and they set up their computer or whatever they had and just went around in pairs and looked at each other's projects in a non-threatening way. So, it was really cool. It was so much more fun to work through the project with them and for the outcome of the project for their expression than it has been when we listen to bad speeches and read bad papers.

LOUI:

I love that. Yeah, actually, so the rubric part, can you share how you guys started that with the students? How did you even enter into that conversation with them?

LISA:

So, we put up there you know, okay, what are the requirements that you need to have? What are the areas that you need to cover? And then we led a discussion while I just projected a Microsoft Word document, and with a table there and we started out. What would you guys consider to be a five on this? What would you consider a three what would you consider a one? And then the students actually didn't like the 54321 rubric. They wanted, one class wanted a four-point rubric, the other class wanted a three-point rubric. And so just went through and asked him in which area, what would be exemplary? And then what would be a midway mark? And then at the end, what would be zero points or, like the one class wanted, and what would be one point? And it was so funny on that too, because the other class said, "Why are you giving them points if they didn't put anything there?" And so, it was just very interesting, their different takes on what the rubric should include.

LOUI:

Yeah, that's really interesting. Did you guys talk about the standards that linked with this unit when you guys were talking about the creation of the rubric?

KELLY:

One of our school's focuses is teacher clarity, right now. So we're using that along with UDL and they just do really tie hand in hand nicely. And so, we went over the standards. They were the first thing that we went over, here's what you should be able to tell us. Here's what you should be able to know by the time you finish with this project. So yes, the rubric was connected to the standards that we wanted them to achieve.

LOUI:

Yeah, I just think that, like you're saying brings clarification to the students, right? It talks about what we address under engagement, right? It's really their interest. Why am I doing this? Well, it's because it all fits under these standards, but then also let's find that personal connection through what you're doing. Oh, it's just brilliant and I know people are going to be so happy to have heard that thorough explanation. Okay, so I really want to hear about this next thing that you guys did.

LISA:

So we started a year ago in the spring with our short story unit. We've always taught the

short story unit. However, this year we decided we were going to sort of adjust what we were doing and we were just sort of getting into UDL, so that's sort of when we got into this. We used scaffolding to help acquaint the students with what the assessment's going to look like. We had done several poetry analysis maps and then also detailed plot maps with the short stories and the poetry that we had read in class. At the end, for our summative assessment, we ended up giving them 7 choices of stories and poems to read, and then they would analyze those. And they could do it with a partner or they could do it by themselves. We also had notes that we had taken and annotations over stories that they could use on their assessment. We incorporated one day just for reading and annotating. And like I said, some chose to work with a partner and some chose to work by themselves. They could ask us questions. But overall, they really, really liked that time just to read and reflect. They could listen to the story. They could read it out loud to each other. They could read it silently. Just however it fit best for them. And then we came back the next day for an in-class assignment, and with that, they already knew the format. They knew how to go through the analysis. And so, they use their class time really, really well. And we had such rich conversations over the text. Occasionally they would ask Kelly or I a question but for the most part, they worked on their own. We thought this would work really, really well. So, I'm a nationally board-certified teacher. And so I chose to use this as my maintenance of certification for my national boards. And I'm waiting to hear my results, won't know until December. But this just worked so well in our classroom that we will absolutely do this again.

LOUI:

That's awesome. I love the fact that you looked and thought, this was such a fabulous lesson, set of lessons, what have you but that you said I'm going to send this in for my national board certification because it's that good. That's wonderful.

LISA:

It really was. The videos we shot were just absolutely amazing. And you know, we survey the class at the end of the unit and we said, did you like this better than taking a test or writing an essay or whatever? Overwhelmingly yes, they did.

KELLY:

And their conversations were so deep. Like walking around listening. We kept looking at each other over them going, oh my goodness.

LOUI:

Ya. I know. It's my favorite part when we release them and we say, you know what? I'm not going to hold you so tightly. I'm going to give you some leeway here, but I'm putting structure around it. But I'm giving you some leeway because I believe in you and that's

what you guys did. And you got the rewards. I love it. I love it! Okay, so I have one last question. I understand that you've been really taken by UDL and you wanted to share it with others. So what has that sharing look like and how did that go?

KELLY:

Really anytime we do a unit now, we think about how we can incorporate UDL into that unit and because we share a lot within our departments at school, it's gotten other teachers on board kind of organically as they implemented our units in their own classrooms, instead of our Holocaust unit been one book in our room this year, which all sophomores do at the school, we're going to do book clubs and incorporate UDL. But we also have a book club now for UDL. We took social studies teachers with us to Alison Posey when she was in Kansas this fall. And they were very, very, very excited about it and she suggested a UDL club so now we have a UDL club that meets on Wednesday mornings at seven because we think it's that important and that's a time that works for all of us.

LOUI:

That's awesome! Every Wednesday at seven. I wish I could be a fly on the wall. Oh, this is so awesome. Thank you so much. This podcast in particular, you guys brought in some examples that are lesson specific that I know people are going to really appreciate especially that conversation about the rubric. And then this other part of sharing the National Board Certification and helping people go "Oh, yeah, I could do the same!" And then this last part of the UDL club and getting that enthusiasm going in your building and keeping that going because that we know, we know that's what's necessary to help all of us because we ultimately go into our own classrooms, especially if we're not in a collaborative relationship, then we go in there and we do it kind of on our own. So having that club is just brilliant. So, thank you so very much for participating with UDL in 15 Minutes.

KELLY:

Thank you.

LISA:

We are just so excited to be here and continue on in our UDL journey. Thank you so much for having us on.

LOUI:

You're very, very 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.