

UDL in 15 Minutes  
With Jana Nicol  
Episode 115 - 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 Jana Nicol, the First Nations Education Coach in the New Brunswick Public Schools in Southern New Brunswick, Canada. Jana was a guest for the 10th episode of UDL in 15 Minutes and has graciously accepted my invitation to return and talk about how she has grown and changed through her use of UDL framework. Hi, Jana. Welcome.

JANA:

Hi Loui, I'm so excited to be back! It's just wonderful to be here. I'm just joining in from the unceded ancestral territory of the Wolastoqewiyik, near Menaqesk – where the sea takes the land, which is also known as Saint John, New Brunswick. Thank you so much for inviting me back on.

LOUI:

Oh my gosh, absolutely! So, when I interviewed you last, you were a grade three elementary educator at Island View School in St. John, New Brunswick, and we talked about how you promoted executive functioning. And I can't believe it was four years ago. So why don't you catch us up on what other positions you've held since then and what you're doing now.

JANA:

Oh wow. Yeah, no, it's it has been wild. And I will also mention too, that I mean, it's been four years since we've done this, and I've been doing the UDL Project now for it's we're coming up on the 10th year. And you know, so, but the UDL, I think, has been the constant because everything else seems to change. So I returned to the classroom. I was teaching Grade 3 when we were last together, and then I returned to resource teaching position, which I had done previously supporting the K-2 team at Island View School and then COVID started that March, and stuff changed, as it did everywhere. But there were a lot of teachers, you know, mass redeployment of staff just to try to have class sizes as small as possible in our system. And so I ended up returning back to the classroom teaching a sweet little Grade 2 class, and then I started my journey with district office as a math coach. And then, I returned to Island View to do Grade 3 for a few months before coming back to district as a First Nations Education Coach, which I've been doing for just over a year now.

LOUI:

Awesome, awesome. And I'm going to clarify because we have listeners literally from around the world so redeployment in Canada sounds like they pulled every available educator and had them working directly with learners. Is that right?

JANA:

Yeah, the idea, I guess, was to make the classrooms as small as possible, you know, to um, you know, kind of help limit the spread as much as we could. And our education in New Brunswick, especially for K to 5, was continuous for most of the pandemic. So that was really great. But to try to keep those numbers down on a temporary basis, you know, yeah, a lot of people did return to the schools. And so thankfully, you know, we've since been able to have people return to roles that they were in prior to the pandemic and we're back to capacity in that fashion. So it's great.

LOUI:

Yeah, that's great. That's great. Thank you. Okay, so how did UDL affect how you approach those positions that you talked about? And then, do you think you approached the work differently than others who don't know about the framework well or at all?

JANA:

I'd say so I think UDL influences a lot of how I approach teaching and learning, you know, regardless of what role I'm in within the public education system. So if I'm supporting students or teachers or or even instructional leaders, UDL is always guiding how I'm trying to design a learning experience for anyone, including myself, you know. I mean, we're all learners. So I think we try to design those experiences differently for different audiences but also offering options for everyone. You know, so things that I might suggest, choices I make, or options I might suggest to colleagues are guided by the better practices that are all embedded in the UDL framework. So I think when we're respecting variability and always making efforts to make those learning environments more inclusive to everyone, we can teach students or any learners where they are. And so the UDL mindset is evident in our practice, in our discussions in any role we serve, if we're always thinking in that way.

LOUI:

Yeah. Nice, nice. So like you said, you're now the First Nations Education Coach, and I'd love for you to describe that role but also share how you utilize UDL in that role.

JANA:

Sure. So I work in southern New Brunswick, and I support the Kindergarten - Grade 12 teachers. And there's about 70 different schools across the school district. And so, what we're trying to do is help all the teachers incorporate indigenous cultures, histories,

languages, and worldview in the classroom. And so this is really significant right now because our curriculum's undergoing some big change. We're piloting it this year, but it goes system-wide next year, and there is Wabanaki content in every grade and subject area. So yeah, I guess for the listeners, the Wabanaki Confederacy would include First Nations communities of Atlantic Canada and Maine. And so every teacher will be expected to teach Wabanaki content, so building their capacity to deliver that content, effectively and also respectfully is really important.

LOUI:

Got it. So then, when you're thinking about, gosh, delivering this information to the teachers, what does that look like? What does professional learning look like?

JANA:

You know, so professional learning is really important with this portfolio because I think so many of us grew up learning very little about indigenous peoples and cultures, especially those of us who are not indigenous, and what little information we were given throughout our education may have promoted stereotypes or misconceptions or fossilized indigenous peoples in the past. And so, I think teachers might lack comfort in teaching this content because they may not feel like they know enough. It's important to consider how we can reduce the barriers for teachers to access this information. So ways that we can do that is just to help them learn more, so they feel more confident in the delivery of indigenous content in the classroom. You know, it's like we say, you know better you do better. And so, I think I use UDL a lot in this role. When I'm thinking about the delivery of professional learning to teachers

LOUI:

Yeah, I was just thinking that that phrase you used "fossilized indigenous peoples in the past" that's so powerful because it's so true, and, and what I'm connecting it to is in UDL, we need to help our learners build relevancy, connect with whatever they're learning. And so you're helping educators create their own sense of relevancy with new information to them, or maybe they're shifting gosh, what they knew. So how are you helping teachers do that?

JANA:

Well, I think there's a lot of other factors at play too, because there's the Truth and Reconciliation is gaining a lot of momentum. And there does seem to be a lot more indigenous content like becoming more mainstream, like in social media. And also, most importantly, well, I guess, as an educator, I'm just wearing my teacher hat right now, is that this is embedded in our curriculum and well for the schools who are currently piloting it and then for next year, so that we have a professional obligation to teach

about indigenous peoples and cultures to all of our students, Kindergarten to Grade 12 In every single subject area as a part of the Calls to Action from the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation because we have to undo some of this. And in order to move forward, we need to get out of the habit of ignoring or misrepresenting indigenous peoples in the education system. So it's important to learn more so we can more effectively teach this content in our classrooms.

LOUI:

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So we had a little bit of pre-conversation, which I really appreciated, and we talked a little bit about the co-planning and co-teaching aspect of your work, and I think that would help listeners, like, really crystallize it in their brain. Can you talk about that?

JANA:

Sure thing. So co-planning and co-teaching is a wonderful way, I think to help build relationships with the teachers while also helping them learn indigenous content, you know, because we are curating our resources locally. Like these aren't things that are widely available to teachers, so they're things that we make, and we include original languages from the territory. And we do all this in consultation and collaboration with our local indigenous elders and knowledge keepers. So when we're using these materials, like, we could sit in a meeting with the teachers and share the resources or share books or any other materials and ask if there's any questions, you know, kind of get comfortable with the content. And from there, we can also plan how we're going to deliver this content. And so I think that it helps build capacity in delivering indigenous content, but also in better teaching practices grounded the UDL framework. So through gradual release model, I might begin by modeling how myself, a non-Indigenous educator, would teach about indigenous cultures, worldview histories, and languages. And in doing so, I'm trying to weave in those UDL practices my teaching. So we might talk about why we're learning and what we're learning and how it relates to our learning goals or our curriculum but always in student-friendly language, and then I tried to employ wait time. Making efforts to maybe build collaboration and community through just getting to know them in the short time or together, or giving them time to work in pairs or small groups, giving some opportunity for self-assessment and reflection, offering some choice to students in how they learn or how they show what they've learned. And also, through those conversations with teachers in the planning and the reflection stages of the coaching process, I explicitly communicate better practices that I've modeled in the lesson, many of which are embedded in the UDL guidelines.

LOUI:

That's great. Thank you. Okay, I have one last question of someone like you because you've been within the UDL sphere for so long, and there are a lot of people who are learning about UDL for the first time, but there are also a lot of people who have known about UDL for a long time and they might think they're done. Like they think they know everything there is to know about it. So do you feel like you're done? And if not, what experiences have you had that have told you something else?

JANA:

I think so much has changed with UDL and continues to change. I started learning about it, when I was doing my master's degree in 2010. And there's a lot of developments. The guidelines evolve and change. I think there's a big overhaul coming out later this year and I'm really excited to see what that's going to look like. And then I think that's going to be an opportunity for everyone to kind of like trying to relearn some aspects of UDL. We'll all be learning it together, no matter where we may consider ourselves on this journey. But I think UDL is more of a mindset and it's a commitment to challenge ourselves, to elevate our practice, to help us teach students where they are by considering those barriers to learning and working to remove those barriers all together. And I just don't see how we can ever really be finished doing that just because there's so many different challenges that we face as classroom teachers and as learners.

LOUI:

Yeah, I totally agree. I totally agree. Well, Jana, I thank you so much for giving your time and coming back onto the podcast. Thank you for your valuable, valuable work and for sharing not just universal design for learning, but all of your background knowledge that comes into your work and helping, I think, create a much better system for New Brunswick and for the rest of us who are listening to this podcast. So, thank you so much.

JANA:

Oh, thanks so much for inviting me back. It's been such a pleasure.

LOUI

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](http://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](http://www.theudlapproach.com) And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.