

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Liz Hartmann
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 Liz Hartmann, a professor of education and chair of the graduate education department at Lasell University in Newton, Massachusetts, and an adjunct lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Liz was a guest for the sixth 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 the UDL framework. Hi Liz! Welcome.

LIZ:

Hi Loui! Oh my god, it's great to be back. Thank you so much for having me here on the podcast again. I have to say I really enjoy it so much. I listen to it when I'm out walking. I'm so inspired by you and all your guests.

LOUI:

Oh my gosh, thank you so much! When I interviewed you last, you and you were teaching about UDL at Lasell College and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. So why don't you catch us up on what you're doing now.

LIZ:

Yeah, so I'm still doing those things. I'm the professor of education, chair of the graduate ed department, as you said. Working mostly in the teacher ed program at Lasell training future teachers about disability, special ed, and UDL, of course. And this year, I'm really excited about a workforce program in UDL that I'm collaborating with my colleagues Amy Maynard and Chris Haverty on. We're working on this really cool multi-agency collaboration with the National Educational Authorities in Ireland, Microsoft, and teacher leaders in Northern Ireland in The Republic of Ireland, and we're teaching a

cohort of teachers about UDL and having them apply it in their practice as they go through this academic year. So, that's one thing that I'm doing right now that I'm really excited about. And then the other thing that I'm doing right now that I'm really excited about is continuing my teaching at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. Teaching for the eighth time, T560, which is the first course in UDL, and we've gone through various formats. I think last time when I spoke to you, we were teaching it in person but then we moved it online for two years, and then now we're in a spot where we're teaching it mostly in person, then we have some online classes. And I should say upfront too, that it's not just me who teaches that course. I co-teach it with my colleague Jose Blackorby. Then we have this amazing teaching team of Lee Yanica, Sung Park, Ari Fleischer, Christina Bosch, and Timmary Leary

LOUI:

Wow, that's a lot of brain power, like UDL brain power. That's awesome. That's an incredible group.

LIZ:

It is.

LOUI:

And, so I am going to ask a question about the Ireland work. How is UDL helping with that? How is that working?

LIZ:

Yeah, it's a great opportunity to kind of use UDL as a language, a framework to bring people together. And I think one of the things that I learned through my colleagues and the faculty that we're working with over in Ireland is that, you know, we're really working in different systems here. There's different countries. There's different laws. There's different procedures. And UDL is really interesting in this environment because it provides a common language, a common framework, for both of these sets of teachers leaders teacher leaders to come together and look at persistent inequities in their

classroom. And those inequities can be very similar even in very different systems. So, the teachers that we've been working with have really enjoyed it because it really has moved them from this place where they're focusing on all the differences between their different countries, and procedures, and legislation, and whatnot to a place where they've learned about UDL, they're using the language of the framework, and kind of enacting it in problems of practice in their classroom. And just having that common foundation of the UDL Framework gives them that common language that then they can really begin to collaborate as professionals, as teachers, and get into the real important conversations they want to have about inequity in their classroom, and how they could make the learning for their students just that bit more just. More equitable. More inclusive for their students.

LOUI:

Excellent. The thinking about the common language. Knowing that you have the same meaning behind the words that you're using does break down so many communication barriers. When everybody knows that this is what we mean when we say variability. This is what we mean when we say barriers. This is what we mean when we say recruiting interest, right? Boy, that does sound very powerful. That's awesome.

LIZ:

Yeah.

LOUI:

So, you have the advantage of staying within your roles, you have for a while, so you can really think about how your interpretation and application of UDL has changed. And I'm making an assumption here, but I'm betting those have changed for you. So, how have those shifts showed up in your work, your design, and your teaching?

LIZ:

Yeah, the last time we talked, I remember discussing how I was using UDL to encourage risk-taking, in the Harvard course T560, all while maintaining academic rigor,

which you know is very I think important at Harvard. And we were talking more about providing flexible options to students, to meeting learning goals, and really having students see that you can be knowledgeable and, strategic, and rigorous in nontraditional formats like creating concept maps and poetry and art when you're reflecting on learning. And, I'm happy to report that that work continues on, but I am thinking about UDL in new ways, especially in that course. And I think a lot of the shift in my thinking emerged from my pandemic teaching and my own learning at that time. You know, at that time, I felt like we all had to be really clear on our goals and flexible in our means, and there was less time lot more constraints due to the tools that we were using. And I know personally, like many others, there was just a lot of emotional ups and downs, and that led me to reflect more on my practice as a teacher and a learner. And I began to notice that there were times when I entered learning spaces and I immediately felt like I belonged. And in those spaces, I was able to, you know, take risks, and learn a lot, and meet high expectations. And then, in other learning spaces, I just felt more constricted and I could muddle through, you know, dialing up different aspects of myself and downplaying others, but it just got harder than it used to. So, I was acutely aware of kind of those barriers I was experiencing myself as a learner. And I share all this because this is my shift. I realized just how much of my own identity of myself is connected to who I am as a learner and a teacher, and also how that's all really connected to the design decisions I'm making, both the skillful ones and the less skillful or biased ones I was making. So, around that same time, I was just feeling a lot of frustration like many educators with like variation in the attendance I was seeing in my classes, especially like Zoom classes or students having cameras on, camera off, even at Harvard. And, you know, I was asking questions like what are the barriers to coming to class or fully engaging with the learning community. And so this led me on this journey to think more deeply about the importance of designing learning experiences that are much better at welcoming learners and keeping that intention of really cultivating belonging and active engagement over time throughout a course. I realized I really needed to get better at creating a community of care in my courses. Being a little bit more authentic and knowing that if I was able to do this, it would really help to empower my students. I wanted them to take more risks, be, you know, more

reflecting in their work, and create, you know, these new flexible paths for learning. But at the same time, I was seeing a lot of variability in students' experiences, you know with doing kind of learning in a community and their own motivations to engage in activities that build like inclusion and belonging in a course. That's kind of where I am now with my UDL implementation and designing and really trying to think more proactively and intentionally about belonging and what that looks like as I design courses from the beginning to like the absolute last day of the semester.

LOUI:

That's beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. And your self-reflective process, just genius. But to be able to take what you were experiencing but then at the same time reflect on what the learners were experiencing, using your frustration to propel forward, and to consider what barriers your learners were facing, and just to home in on the concept of belonging. And we know, I mean Maslow helped us understand, I mean that's so primary and basic for our need, and I think it's beautiful. And you're communicating the fact that even our learners who excel academically, that's why they've made it into a University. That's why they've made it into certain programs. They, too, need to belong. It's so primal. It's so part of us. So beautiful. Thank you, thank you!

LIZ

Yeah.

LOUI:

So, there are a lot of people who are learning about UDL for the first time every day, but there are also a lot of people who've known about UDL for a long time, and they might think they're done. So, like they think they know everything there is to know about UDL. So, do you feel like you're done? And if not, what experiences have you had that have told you something else?

LIZ:

Yeah, I'm nowhere close to being done, and that's, I think, exciting, but I think it's also important to acknowledge that it's also exhausting. And that UDL sometimes I think for me at least can be exhausting, but whenever I get into that place, I like to think back to a teacher who was in a research study I was doing of UDL implementation in the Boston public schools, and she had this great like one-liner that with UDL you need to like think big and start small. So I think, you know, that's something I come back to, and I ask myself. okay, Liz, what level are you thinking at? And even going back to that podcast episode that we recorded many years ago, you know, I think at that point I was, you know, speaking at the level of the assignment, which is great. You know, like I was talking about how there was one assignment I was able to clarify goals and really build flexibility around. And you know, if you can think about, you know, your own teaching, and you implement UDL in an assignment, that's great. You get success, and then you think, okay, you know what's my next step? Maybe I'm going to think about assessment. You know how could I design a more flexible, rigorous assessment for my students. But you know, back to what I was saying before about my most recent shift in UDL implementation, you know, I think what I'm doing more recently is just using my own frustrations and wonderings to inspire me, and this has really led me to think about you know what does it look like to specifically create UDL environments that are more authentic learning communities that allow people to bring their different identities into the learning environment. A you know, how do I continue to use UDL to empathize with my students, to not assume I understand you know who they are but to really be open to who they are and allow them to share that with not just me, but the entire learning community that I'm creating. So I guess I just say all this that I want to encourage people to think about their UDL implementation, especially if you're you're feeling maybe overwhelmed or powerless so you don't know where to turn that, you know you can you know come back to UDL. Use it as a lens that will help you to make your learning more equitable, and you know, although the ultimate goal of UDL is very aspirational, I mean, we're designing for all, we're promoting justice for all. We know that this is impossible because of how dynamic learning is and our contexts are, but we still do it, and we still commit to it, and we do what we can. We know we can't do it all, and you know, be okay with that.

LOUI

Yeah, well, in 2 things, so like what you just said, the dynamic nature of a learning environment of the moment of learning and then giving ourselves the space to say, but you know what it's dynamic over time and so if I didn't do that one thing, this one time, it's okay and especially when we have our relationships with our learners for longer than a single course, or a single meeting where we get to see them over time. And we have to give ourselves that grace. And the other thing I was thinking about is, I think it's in parallel to what you were just talking about, but it's kind of if you get caught in the dangerous loop within UDL thinking, which is almost one-upmanship. It's like, oh, I have to do this, and then this, and in this and that you start layering things on or sometimes. I can see this happening when people are talking about the design of their environments, and it almost is like one-upmanship between the 2 of them and like no, no, no, no, no, that's like closed thinking. You need to have open thinking, which is this is just this is all about lowering barriers and the graciousness of lowering barriers, and if you enter into this with graciousness, you're going to feel a lot better about it because you're being gracious to your learners but you're being gracious to yourself. And you need to do that because it's a much better place to exist.

LIZ:

Yeah, and just like you said, I think the students feel that right, and you know, I feel a responsibility to model what that looks like specifically. I think that's, you know, the next edge of UDL, and we know that UDL 3.0 is on the verge of being released. I think we're going to see a lot more guidance in how UDL helps us with that.

LOUI:

Yeah, I think so too. Oh, Liz, thank you so much for coming back on. I can't believe was the sixth episode. That's so long ago. That's so great and for sharing how you've grown, how you've changed your experiences and modeling that that's what is part of this framework; we grow with it. We grow alongside it. We grow within it, and it grows. So that's just so awesome. So thank you, thank you, thank you for being here.

LIZ:

You're very welcome, and maybe I can come back in another hundred episodes.

LOUI:

That would be awesome. Awesome, 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.