

## Monica Watson-Bedard Transcript

### UDL in 15 Minutes

<https://theudlapproach.com/media/episode-11-monica-watson-bedard/>

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 Monica Watson-Bedard who is a Grade 7 teacher at Millidgeville North School in New Brunswick, Canada. Today, Monica is going to share how she's helped her students become their best. Hi Monica How are you?

MONICA: I'm great. I'm so excited it's my first podcast.

LOUI: Oh, thank you so much Monica for coming on to the podcast and I hope I can provide you a good comfortable environment so you can give us all the knowledge that you have. Well if you would go ahead and please share with us your teaching background.

MONICA: Well I've been teaching for 23 years and as I say that, I'm not sure where the time has gone I, you know, mind blowing how fast time goes. So currently I teach middle level, but the path there is a clear path, it's a bit windy. I started teaching kindergarten and then move back to elementary students, teachers at all which was Middle School. Now their unique fascinating and challenging individual. So Currently I work in a great three to eight school with both English and French immersion students have close to 500, students, and three to eight grades. We have a wide range of nationalities and approximately about 15% of them are English additional language learners or EAL learners.

LOUI: So, I was a middle school teacher. Totally get what you're talking about. I loved my eighth graders. Loved them, loved them, loved them. So, people in 25 countries listen to this podcast, so when we have terms like English additional language students, I like to provide some explanation for that. So, could you share with people what that means?

MONICA: Sure. So, those are students that come to Canada or specifically St John, New Brunswick, and are learning English or may have some knowledge of the English language but need additional support. So students within that first year to second year qualify for supplemental teaching to help bridge the English language and cultures and different things like that.

LOUI: Okay. Perfect. Back in 2017, you were part of a team that authored a research study that was published in a document and published by the University of New Brunswick and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and it was called Universal Design for Learning Action Research. And your article, and your team's article was "Menus. More than lunch: Options for recruiting interest and increasing engagement in inclusive education." Of course, that caught my attention. And so, also for podcast listeners, that link to this collection can be found on the video montage that's posted in YouTube. So Monica, would you be willing to talk about what led up to that research in the first place, and what you took away from it?

MONICA: Sure. Well, the spring of 2012, the Department of Education in New Brunswick put a call out to teachers across New Brunswick who would be interested in a, you know, unique, professional learning opportunity focused on UDL. The Department of Education also partnered with the University of New Brunswick to aid and that teacher research side of things and it's, it really was an interesting process to go through. I, I've always struggled with the idea of how to shape students' into being more active participants of learning, rather than passive observers. This also coincided with some lunch room commiserating with a group of teachers regarding something that we were seeing in our own building, you know, that lack of motivation and resiliency and basically the independence of our students. So when I saw that, I pulled a group together that consisted of four middle school colleagues across a range of different subjects. A math teacher. A French, Language Arts, and Social Studies teacher. Of course, our school guidance teacher, as she is a Gardner guru and myself, an English language arts teacher. So, a proposal was born to see if we could increase engagement by allowing choice through multiple means of expression which basically, of course, that

is the UDL term, but basically means that, you know, students can choose a way to, to show their knowledge and understandings. So, these menu board choices, were based on the use of Gardner's multiple intelligence. Our guidance teacher helped facilitate students figuring out what their strengths were and where they lied. So, this helped them to try to figure out what way was best for them to show or share their knowledge. So, we are afforded you know some fantastic learning opportunities as three of us were able to travel to CAST learn about UDL firsthand. You know, phenomenal and highly recommended. But you know, CAST has a great site with lots of information and videos, and really is the go-to, or one of the go-to's for figuring out how UDL can fit within your classroom. So basically, we, we put our ideas together and started out adventure into both UDL and teacher research. We did some pre-surveys and observations and then we set our plan into work. After presenting the, the menu boards, students were intrigued.

LOUI: So, what were those results?

MONICA: Well, I'm results were incredible. We, we really were surrounded by collaboration, and conversation, and creativity, and we really thought we'd found that kind of brass ring of teaching and learning. We saw engagement increased, we saw attendance improved! And certainly, no one was asking, "Why are we doing this?" You know, all of those wonderful things that make you feel good as a teacher. But, but then as part of teacher research, there is a bit of a blip that happened post survey. Something that shocked us because, really, we had seen evidence that there is 99% of those students engaged. We were thoroughly impressed and quite glad that, you know, the students had taken this opportunity. But in that follow-up survey, they still send they want a choice, but less than half still wanted traditional testing. And, boy, were we shocked you know? So, we needed to do a little follow-up interview and we realized that the students' requests for test were more course-based. They wanted testing for science and math. Social studies and English, it was fine to have mini-boards and choice, and to show their learning in different ways, but they wanted that quick in and out for math to science. So, that, you know, was interesting. They thought it was a little more time consuming and required more effort and sometimes they were struggling with

the whole idea about thinking outside of the box and really it was about them being independent, I really, think. So, we wondered if these UDL ideas, if they were utilized in younger grades and that became, you know, students were more used to being in those situations, what would, what would happen? Would the kids being more active and less passive or, you know, we even started to question, "Can you imagine what students would be capable of if choice was the rule and not the exception!"

LOUI: Oh Yeah. I mean that's such a beautiful dream and, so we know it's a possibility but what do you think has been the biggest impact UDL has had on you?

MONICA: So, the number one thing is that our pedagogy has been forever changed, you know I'm, I'm so grateful for this opportunity, for the Department of Ed seeing that this is an important framework for teachers for not actually not just teachers but for students, as well. You know, the greatest impact of UDL to my teaching is understanding that there is no one size fits all. You know, children's brains are unique and the importance of multimodal instruction or reinforcement of ideas through poetry and song and visual text and supportive technology. It really truly is empowering for both teachers and students. I really can't say enough about that.

LOUI: So, I love how you're expressing this and you're really pointing to the creation of expert learners. And so do you have, maybe an example that narrows it down for people to talk about what you do within your own practice?

MONICA: Anytime I give vocabulary to help support students with reading content. We take time to draw an icon or symbol, you know, to represent the terms pictorially to help them anchor their learning. And some students don't always think in terms of words and how they connect but more visual and, and that helps those students as well as tactile learners, because they have to draw a picture to, to represent that. So, it's, it's one of those multimodal strategies for sure. And I'll tell you, they're way more creative than I am, you know, I have an idea of images that would go nicely with certain terms, and they always surprise me. But I think the best part is seeing them do it independently, you know? It's just a little change and that is UDL.

LOUI: Exactly, that's exactly what I'm thinking. And then you've also thought about your students who maybe have a modified learning plan or they're receiving accommodations. So, talk about that a little bit.

MONICA: Sure. Well, I think the biggest impact of using the UDL framework is, is when the students are working and if someone came into my classroom, you would not be able whose being provided universal accommodations or who follows a modified learning plan, you know. It is, it is very inclusionary. It doesn't just remove barriers to learning, but I think it does more than that. It really is a leveling agent, you know, it allows for students who traditionally may not have found success within school. It really lets them gives them the opportunity to shine. And you know I could probably talk about all kinds of examples over the year, but just recently I have a student considered to have academic challenges and struggles with both reading and writing. And, you know, the students were given a task, to work in groups, to create a skit to show two ideas we've been working on or learning about in, in social studies. I am conscious enough to allow them to create their own spaces within my class, but I will tell you, I was so shocked because I observed this young man, giving suggestions which four ideas to be, which isn't out of the ordinary for him, he does like to share ideas occasionally. However, what I did see was when it came time to put their ideas into practice or to put their scripts together and practicing and run through different lines and where they were going to stand, he was the one correcting them and telling them how to say certain lines, you know, to show more emotion, or where certain students should stand, and how they should move so it would be more realistic and the class we get that main idea that they needed to show the audience, you know. He, he even edited some lines as he thought the ideas weren't always clear enough. And, I mean, other students were writing down his ideas because that's what it is all about in UDL. Like, sharing ideas and working together and being collaborative, and I just imagine the opportunity I would have missed if I just given a test.

LOUI: Yup! Yup!. This is a beautiful way to bring this to a close because we have actually surpassed our 15 minutes. This has been a great example of how, when we're providing our students all of these different options that you truly are taking them all on

their own individual paths toward becoming expert learners and they're choosing those options, so it's just brilliant Monica, it's just brilliant. And I really thank you so much for taking the time on a snow day for you guys to, to come on in and have this conversation with me, and for all the podcast listeners of UDL in 15 minutes, so thank you so much.

MONICA: Thank you so much for, for letting me share. I certainly do not feel like I am an expert; however, I love sharing the positiveness of UDL.

LOUI: Perfect. Well, thank you again. So, for those who are podcast, you can find supplemental materials like an image montage with closed captioning, that montage audio descriptions, a transcript, and an associated blog at my website [www.theudlapproach.com/media](http://www.theudlapproach.com/media). 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.