

UDL in 15 Minutes  
With Heather Avery and Anthony Carey  
Episode 121 - 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 Heather Avery, a Learning Specialist with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for the government of New Brunswick, and Anthony Carey teaches technology, grades 6 through 8, at Bayside Middle School in Saint John, New Brunswick. Today, Heather and Anthony are going to talk about asking the important question, "Am I leaving anyone out?" Hi Heather and Anthony! Thank you for being here.

ANTHONY:

Hello.

HEATHER:

Thank you. Hello.

LOUI:

So I always like to ask guests to share a little bit of their background in education and your connection to UDL. So, Heather, why don't you get us started?

HEATHER:

Great. So hi, my pronouns are she/her, and I'm joining from the unceded ancestral territory of the Wolastoqewiyik, which is also known as Hampton, New Brunswick. I've been in the role of an educator for close to 20 years, with a diverse experience in education from kindergarten to about 20+. So, at a young age, I had mobility problems and I'd had surgeries at the Shiner's hospital. I saw the hospital teacher provide lessons

to learners and that had a profound impact on me wanting to be an educator that ensured everyone had access to education. So, I began the bulk of my education career in Nova Scotia, and this is when teaching jobs were scarce. So, no one was hiring at the time when I graduated. I taught at a private school for learners with learning disabilities, grades 3 through 12, and then I taught an Indigenous school, primarily high school learners. And then I worked at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, now Dalhousie University, as a Special Cohort Coordinator. I then worked at Nova Scotia Community College as a Student Accommodation Advisor and then as a Disability Resource Facilitator, and NSCC was a great place to start to learn more about UDL. I was the lead for the Atlantic Association of Colleges and University Student Services Accessibilities Division for two years as well. And through conferences like AHEAD and learning about CAST I learned a lot about accessibility and usability, and how to design courses and or provide professional learning through a UDL framework. I then moved home to New Brunswick, and to the beautiful small town of Hampton, New Brunswick, and this is actually where John Peters Humphrey, the principal author of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was born, and he's buried here. It's a little town, in a small province, but it does have historical significance and I am fortunate to call this home. From there, I worked at New Brunswick Community College, but the pull to work with children and youth was really strong, especially since my twins were about to start school. So, I eventually returned to teaching at a middle school as a resource teacher, and at that time, I started my Masters of Education in Exceptional Learners from the University of New Brunswick. I completed my M.Ed., in 2021. In January 2023, I was provided the opportunity to be the Learning Specialist for Inclusive Practices & co-lead for UDL, as part of my portfolio, and I went to the UDL-Implementation and Research Network (UDL-IRN) conference in Florida in 2023. Actually, I had my book signed by you there, Loui. So, I met a plethora of fantastic UDL practitioners there. And that encouraged me in September of 2023 to enroll in the Post-Graduate Certificate for UDL at Atlantic Technological University, in Sligo, Ireland, taught by Maureen Haran, and I just wrapped up that certificate up and hope to someday complete my Master of Arts in UDL from the same university.

LOUI:

Wow! Oh my gosh! Such a varied and rich background of everything!

HEATHER:

Yeah, yeah.

LOUI:

So, I'm so glad that you are in the UDL world because you bring, oh my gosh, such rich experiences.

HEATHER:

Thank you.

LOUI:

Thank you so much. Oh, and Anthony how about you?

ANTHONY:

Hello, my pronouns are he/him. I've been teaching in the Province of New Brunswick now for about 15 years, since 2009. In that time, I have I think I counted up once, and I'm just shy of 50 schools that I've been at...

LOUI: Wow!!

ANTHONY: ...and my teacher and as a regular classroom teacher. Most of that time was spent teaching Humanities to middle and high school students. So history, language arts, political science, world issues, etc. Recently, however, I've transitioned to, in a completely different direction, to technology, now teaching all manner of technological subjects at the middle level. So that's grades 6 to 8 here in New Brunswick, and we're actually piloting a new technology curriculum here at Bayside. One that is far more broad and practical than what we've had in previous years. I'm sure as most of your listeners would probably assume, technology has generally been

assumed to be working on computers in most schools and classrooms over the last ten years. Our technology class, however, also incorporates woodshop, cooking, sewing, fabrics and materials, etc. and we're expanding it as we go, as we hit the ground running. So, it's been a big change for me going from an ordinary classroom with ordinary concerns and ordinary issues, and especially someone who studied UDL when he was in university and then would later apply it in those classrooms, and now coming at it almost as a completely different direction with suddenly safety, and working with hazardous tools, and heat, and cutting edges, and all of that it's completely changed my approach to UDL, which I always approach it from who am I leaving out? What barriers do I have to remove? And I find now that I've made this switch to technology, I'm adding barriers out a necessity and it's been an interest working with Heather working with Beth, that's been an interesting process trying to find the middle ground between bringing in as many as we can into these opportunities that they never had a chance to go or have, while also having them do it safely.

LOUI:

This is why when people ask me, "how do you measure UDL?" I'm like yeah, we haven't figured it out yet because it's contextually based. It is completely contextually based and so yeah, there are some guiding underlying things that need to be there, but if anyone were to go from space to space and use the guidelines as saying, "Oh well, this is happening, and this is happening, and this is happening," then possibly, Anthony, when they would come into your environment if they didn't understand the underlying design purposes, then it wouldn't look quite right possibly, in their eyes. Okay, so you are both here to talk about an important project you have there in New Brunswick that focuses on inclusion, so you guys can tell that story as you wish from any angle, and I'd love for you to describe it for us.

ANTHONY:

So, I have a personal example from earlier in my career which set a very important standard I think for me when it comes to inclusion. I had a lovely little girl in grade nine, who was blind, deaf, and mute, just because of her disabilities, unable to communicate.

But she had such a spirit to her and even though she couldn't speak, that spirit shone in her writing, in her face, and in her hand because if you didn't acknowledge her, she was going to make sure that you saw her. She would not be ignored and I love that about her. One of the things that she did, when I was teaching her in grade nine English, she wrote an essay about why subtitles are a human right. Closed captioning is a human right. And up to that point, I like many young millennial teachers, hip with YouTube, I watched a lot of videos, played a lot of videos, but I didn't include closed captioning. And it was a lightning bolt moment in just who I had been excluding, up until this point. This was a student who was perfect, who despite her disabilities, she would have been more than capable if I had provided the accommodation. If I had provided a way for her to take part. And as I got to know this student over the years, I saw this student playing basketball, I saw her in the classroom, and I would not remember students with her disabilities being in my classroom when I was in school. So, it was a real awesome example of exactly what I could have been missing when I was in school, and exactly what our students have gained now that I am a teacher. And that case of her being included to me has always kind of stood out as the gold standard of inclusion done well, especially within New Brunswick. There's a lot of mixed feelings about our inclusion policy, and how effective it is, but it's certainly far better than alternatives. Far better than what we had previously when students like this one never would have had those chances to succeed.

LOUI:

Lovely, and Heather I think you're going to continue.

HEATHER:

Yeah, so just to give you a little background, Bayside Middle School is where Anthony teaches at, and it's an inner city, urban school in Saint John, New Brunswick, and has grades 6, 7, 8 and it's one of the largest anglophone middle schools in our province. It offers English Prime and Late French immersion. And it comes from 7 feeder schools, and they could be from rural areas of the province to the urban center of Saint John. Has many diverse learners with a high number of students with exceptionalities, influx

newcomer families, and learners from all socioeconomic backgrounds. And they have lovely people who donate and clothe and feed nearly 100 students daily. So, in New Brunswick, we have 2 official languages, French and English, and it's the only bilingual province in Canada. So, with that in mind, New Brunswick has 2 education sectors, Anglophone, Francophone. Both sectors are part of what Anthony was talking about, that inclusive school system, since 2013. So, Policy 322 is our Inclusive Education Policy, and that was introduced after years of collaboration, various partners, government agencies, stakeholders, and parent and guardian groups, all advocating for inclusive education. So, at the time UDL was introduced with various professional learning workshops, and government websites, and in 2015 actually they did an action research project with the University of New Brunswick, and those educators at the time, were on UDL in 15 minutes.

LOUI:

Yes, yes, yes!

HEATHER:

Yes, yes, yes. So, when I was offered a position in 2023 to come on, they saw my experience with UDL, and my passion for it and they said, "Hm, I think this is something that we should breathe fresh air into again", and that was exciting, so I got to connect with this beautiful, beautiful person at the department, Beth Henderson, and she had designed this graduation pathway called Essential Skills. And it is a UDL graduate program design. Phenomenal. And so, we were looking at revising UDL in our Province, the K to 12 system. So, we designed our implementation pilot project. We really mapped out the UDL checkpoints to how we wanted to design this, what was flexible, and personalized approach to professional learning. We pitched our idea to Anglophone South School District, Curriculum and Instruction. They welcomed such an opportunity, and the principal Angela Marr, phenomenal principal at Bayside Middle School, welcomed the opportunity as it was part of her school improvement plan. So, we started our pilot. This included a presentation of the whole school, including teachers, educational assistants, to discuss what is UDL. And then from there, if they

were interested, they started as our professional learning opportunity as the first interest group. We had close to 16 educators, and actually, 3 educational assistants asked to join at a later date if it was offered later. We brought in together, in-person workshops, we had group 1, group 2, participating in daylong sessions. We covered foundational knowledge of UDL. How it aligns with revised holistic curriculum in New Brunswick, modeling UDL. We use a QSSA to bring out discussion, and that stands for a question (give learners a question stem) provide sentence stems, signal (think individually) share with a partner, and assess. You call on the learner and ask for volunteers. We also provided Microsoft Teams to ensure any content was accessible. We provide a UDL-aligned strategies toolbox for educators to access when designing their lesson plans. And then from that workshop, we provided choice to what professional learning educators could sign up for with either myself or Beth as part of their own goals that they established. And so, the professional learning opportunities we offered was classroom observations and instructional coaching. So, we provide the observation opportunity with feedback and coaching on the same day with Beth or myself. And then we do that in the morning, and then in the afternoon we provide the feedback. And then we had 1-on-1 planning, collaborative lesson planning, instructional coaching. This was really fun because we got to talk to educators, look at their goals, how to improve their lessons, and we would either observe or record it once they felt comfortable doing that, so we could come back and see that. We also did a book study. We used Dr. Jennifer Pusateri's book, "Transform Your Teaching with Universal Design for Learning: Six Steps to Jumpstart Your Practice". As it aligns really nicely with the K to 8 learners, and we had a virtual session and we met 3 times throughout the academic year to discuss the book. As I said, we had the UDL Microsoft teams there as that toolkit. I will be offering, once school starts, closer in September, Accessibility, Accommodations, and UDL, and looking at accessibility tools, assistive technologies for learner variability. We also had Dr. Pusateri provide a 1-hour presentation to Bayside Middle School, and also provided another session to the Anglophone South School District, Curriculum and Instruction, and on top of that, we just met to talk about credentials. So, earning their UDL Mindset badge. So, we're going to cover the cost of that for the learners that participated in the first interest group. And so, we did some surveys, we did some

feedback to figure out where the scope of the professional practice was to be. We collaborated with Jodie Black the consultant in UDL from Ontario in guiding the project, and Dr. Jennifer Pusateri also provided some great deliverables. And so now, we're doing our part of a reflective process. Actually, this week we're having our swan song, our farewell with our educators, so it's been a really great journey but we personalized it and tried to make it flexible for each of the educators taking part.

LOUI:

This is huge. So, what I love about this is that as we introduced the podcast the question that we all agreed upon, am I leaving anyone out? And to kick off the podcast, I'm sure people were thinking, oh we're going to talk about inclusion, and are we thinking about including every learner? And that is so true, but really, another part of this that's so strong is you've been asking that question about your professionals. You have designed a professional learning process and system, where you're asking yourselves that about your adult learners, "am I leaving anyone out?" You're looking at this from so many angles to ensure that your adults are getting the content that they need but also receiving that individualized support that they need.

HEATHER:

Yes.

LOUI:

That whole social emotional support that they need. So, you've asked that question of yourselves in the design for your adults, and I love that. I'm so excited about it. I love it.

HEATHER:

Thank you, Thank you very much. Yeah, it was a great process and we worked with phenomenal educators. We couldn't have been more fortunate to have this school on board.

LOUI:



Yeah, so I know we're over here, just a few minutes, but I do want to loop back around so, Anthony, and in your participation with this because like you already said you've had to in a sense think about barriers, not differently, but you've got some things that are in place based on safety, that do create barriers for participation for some learners. So, I guess, it's how have you attended to those? And has there been a part of this process that's helped you as a classroom teacher?

ANTHONY:

Absolutely. So I was observed not by Heather, but by Beth, in my technology class. I think, at the time, we were doing either software or lead-up to our cooking unit. As I mentioned, we have a new curriculum here, and it's very wide-ranging, and I'm also new to this new curriculum. So, it's all new. It's new to the school, new to myself, new to the students. We're really kind of reinventing it right from the get-go, and that involves a lot of trial and error. That involves a lot of professional reflection. So that professional reflection never turns off, particularly with in my mantra going through my head, "Who am I leaving out? Who am I leaving out?" My goal going into this technology classroom was so often in places where they do have technology classrooms, specifically wood shops, electronic labs, things like that. The hands-on type stuff. Typically, things like this are handled as electives for students who are seen as more able, and that is necessarily not inclusive in its thinking. So, I was going to be teaching all the students here. Almost all 600 of the students at Bayside over the course of three semesters, so right from the get-go, I started from a position of hands-on tools. How can I get the most hands-on tools that I can? And how do I include the most people that I can? And it has been a balancing act because yeah, especially when it comes to woodshop the big machines. There are a lot of rules. There are a lot of shutdowns. There are a lot of asking people to leave if they've demonstrated that they're not safe. Balancing that with this is access. They've never had this before so we're teaching them how to do these things responsibly as they go, and doing it safely as they go. When Beth was observing me, she made the comment, really well done. There's a lot of ways that I'm differentiating that I may not have noticed until someone was actually in there observing, but I very consciously remember her saying you might be retired in 10 years

like I don't see you lasting that long. There's a lot of energy, and we discussed at great length about setting up systems. How in a classroom where it's just me, and I have 600 kids on and off coming in throughout the year, if I put myself as the block, if I put myself as the throttle, to all the things going in the classroom, that creates quite a bottleneck that weighs quite heavily on me. If the kids are waiting for me to show where the tools are, waiting for me for instruction, waiting for me for this, so learning to input systems so they know all of that beforehand. That you frontload it at the beginning in the planning stage, and then you don't have to worry about it so much in the end. And that's kind of how I've been designing it this year, being my first year. I knew I was going to work quite hard this year getting it off the ground, and looking back now as we're almost finishing our third semester, I think we've done that largely. We've set those systems up and I can already see that the kids that I get back next year, the ones who now have a year's worth of experience, they're going to be that much better off, that much more informed, and most importantly, both enabled, while also being safe.

LOUI:

Excellent. Two reflections that I have. So, first of all, your question of "Who am I leaving out?" I want to thank you for personalizing that question because what you've done is you've turned the question of, "What is the barrier?" and shifted it from being depersonalized, to an act of personalizing it and putting yourself in there. "Who am I leaving out?" And that, to me, is the sign of truly inclusive thinking. I love the question of, "what are the barriers?" But I think many times it's kind of, it's the safe question to ask because it depersonalizes it, and when we ask ourselves and we put that word "I" in there, "What am I doing?" The weight can be great, but when we have colleagues around us, which it sounds like you're surrounded by wonderful colleagues to help you process through, and ask these questions in a way that maybe won't weigh as heavily, then you can do that. So, I want to thank you for having a truly inclusive mindset. And then I also wanted to point out and say that I loved the scaffolding and the differentiation that you're doing, and just like Barb was saying, oh my gosh, it could burn you out. But this fact of sitting setting up systems. That's when we, in the UDL world, UDL land, we talk about learning environments, right? And that's exactly what you're doing. You're

setting up a learning environment. So, it's the consistent use, it's the embedded use of the UDL guidelines and framework into your setting so that you don't have to go through that burnout, so you won't go through that burnout. So now it's that flywheel that Jim Collins talked about in "Good to Great", so long ago. But when we have these things embedded in our learning environment, that flywheel can go, and then we can attend to those individualized needs that we know are going to be present. So, brilliant. Just brilliant. Oh, so I want to thank both of you for being here and giving us access to some of the information that you've been sharing. I appreciate that. For those who are interested, I'll have a link to Policy 322, the Inclusive Education Policy, that Heather referenced earlier. We'll make sure that that's available and anything else that can be made available, we'll make sure that it's there for you. So, Heather and Anthony thank you so much.

HEATHER:

Oh, thank you, Loui, so much. It was a great pleasure to be here, and thank you, Anthony, for your participation. It's great.

ANTHONY:

You're very welcome. Thank you everyone.

LOUI:

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.theudlproach.com/podcasts](http://www.theudlproach.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.