

UDL in 15 Minutes  
With Zacham Kabantiok  
Episode 127 - 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 Zacham Happiness Kabantiok, a teacher at Wauro Jabbe Community School. Zacham is going to talk about how she and others are using UDL to bring children back to school. Welcome, Zacham.

ZACHAM:

Thank you very much, Dr. Loui. It's such an honor to be here.

LOUI:

Oh my gosh, thank you so much. And thank you for your patience with the internet. So for those listening, we've had a bit of a trial, but here we are. So let's get started.

ZACHAM:

Yeah.

LOUI:

Tell me how you've learned about UDL.

ZACHAM:

Okay, so I was first introduced to UDL through the OTL project, Opportunity to Learn. So this particular project is implemented by IRC in collaboration with Plan International, ROHI, AUN, and IDP. So basically, the project focuses on addressing the challenge of out-of-school children in northeastern Nigeria. The region has been deeply affected by years of crisis, leaving the education system in much disarray. So as part of my work, I was introduced and I received training on UDL and it has opened my eyes to a more inclusive, flexible way of thinking about education. It allows me to consider the diverse needs of students, especially those who have been through traumatic experiences and just ensure that learning opportunities are accessible to everyone. And it has also helped me understand that every learner is different and that no child is truly dumb. So that was when I was first introduced to UDL at the OTL Project.

LOUI:

Wonderful, wonderful. So can you describe the program where you're applying UDL?

ZACHAM:

Okay, so the OTL program is dedicated to bringing back out-of-school children in Northeastern Nigeria who were displaced or affected by the prolonged crisis. So many of these children have been out of school for years and some have experienced trauma that impacts their ability to learn. So the OTL program uses an accelerated curriculum to help these learners catch up and

make up for the time they lost while out of school. So basically we use the TaRL, Teaching at the Right Level model, to administer assessments to these children to first ascertain their level of knowledge before placing them in a particular class. Then through UDL, we aim to create a learning environment that is adaptable to each student's unique need. We also integrate UDL principles in our teaching methods, allowing us to offer multiple ways of engagement with content, expressing understanding and demonstrating learning. And the program uses their local dialects and everything around them just to make them feel comfortable and focused.

LOUI:

That's so important. That's wonderful.

ZACHAM:

Yeah.

LOUI:

We know that's a key part of Universal Design for Learning. That's wonderful.

ZACHAM:

Yes.

LOUI:

So let's get to a specific story. Is there a story about how UDL has impacted a specific child, for example?

ZACHAM:

Yes, I have a lot of stories. Well, but the one that touches me the most is the one of my students, his name is Abdul. So Abdul stammers and he stutters a lot. So at home, he is frequently silent. And his peers laugh at him because he can actually complete a sentence which has caused him to lose confidence, become shy, and avoid interacting with others. When he first joined the program, he was distant, shy, and inactive in class. He does not involve himself in any group projects or whatsoever. He wouldn't answer any questions or participate in class activity. I later realized that he was quite intelligent but held back because of his stammering and low self-esteem. Now, using my knowledge of the UDL approach, especially the multiple means of action and expression, I began asking him to write down his questions, his answers, instead of speaking them, I also called him to the board to answer questions, to write down questions in front of the class. So over time, with constant encouragement, kind words, and applause from me and his classmates, he became more active in class. I made it one of my core things that during group projects or class work, I made sure that Abdul was the one taking notes or recording scores for a particular group project. Now, this would require him to interact with his peers to get the correct information, which gradually improved his social engagements because he would have to interact with his peers to get what they are doing. Now, while Abdul hasn't completely overcome his challenges yet, it is a work in progress. I've seen him transform from a shy, withdrawn child, to a more confident, happy student, eager and ready to learn. All thanks to the principles of UDL. And this is just one of my many stories that I've

experienced, and it is incredible, it's incredibly rewarding to be part of the solution that positively impacts the children's lives.

LOUI:

Oh, that's so wonderful. I'm thinking about the fact that these are children, as you said, in northeastern Nigeria, who you're bringing back to school, and it's so key for someone like Abdul to feel secure, and safe, and that he can be an active participant in learning so that he will stay in school. It's just so lovely to hear and I'm assuming that's part of the goal is to help Abdul stay in school.

ZACHAM:

Yes, yes that's the goal.

LOUI:

Fabulous. So how do you keep up your learning about UDL?

ZACHAM:

Okay, so at the OTL program, we have a regular practice of meeting once a month with our colleagues, just a little cluster of 10 to 12 educators. So these sessions are an opportunity for us to refresh ourselves on UDL principles. We share challenges that we encounter and we brainstorm on solutions. It's the space where we support each other and ensure that we are all staying true to the approach. In addition to that, after every school year, we participate in a week-long refresher training where we have a master trainer who reviews us on UDL practices and updates us on any new insights. So basically that's how we keep on learning about UDL.

LOUI:

That's so wonderful. And that's so important because you have other people that you're connected to other educators you're connected to everyone doesn't feel like they're alone in doing this.

ZACHAM:

Yeah.

LOUI:

And so I'm assuming you share stories with one another. Do you share how you've seen practices work in the classroom?

ZACHAM:

Yes, yeah, it's basically that's what we do. We share a lot of stories because interacting with these children who have experienced the whole trauma and crisis firsthand, most of them are usually resistance and all. So we have a lot of stories to tell, you know, success stories, and then challenges that we still encounter. So there are a lot of stories that we share during these sessions.

LOUI:

That's wonderful. I wish I could be a fly on the wall. I'd love to hear all of those stories.

ZACHAM:

Don't worry, when you have the opportunity to come down to Nigeria, we invite you to one of our sessions.

LOUI:

Absolutely. That is a goal of mine then right there. I've stated it to the world. That is a goal of mine to come and to listen and to hear the stories.

LOUI:

So in line with this, because you're talking with other colleagues, you know, UDL helps us shift the way we support our learners and make sure that their needs are being met. It's this powerful tool in shifting mindset. So for example, seeing that a student like Abdul can perform academically if we just give him some other ways to express himself. So have you seen this kind of mindset shift in other educators? And is there an example you can share?

ZACHAM:

Yes. So basically like we here in Africa, Nigeria specifically, the type of school learning system that we have does not really give us the opportunity to, to express ourselves in a different way. So most of us grew up knowing just the normal paper and pen examination. Like that's the only way to test a child academically. So I have a colleague, we share a class together. So she's adamant to that particular mindset, you know. If a child cannot write, if a child cannot express himself, with pen and paper, then he's dumb. He's not smart. But after the UDL, after the whole UDL training, it wasn't hard for her to move on, yeah to let go of that mindset. But then seeing that I let go and I picked up, I embraced the UDL approach and I used it on the kids. And she saw that there were changes in those children. She also adopted it. There was a mindset shift in her. Right now I can tell you that she's actually even embracing it more than I, because it has just been wonderful.

LOUI:

Oh!

ZACHAM:

She does it all the time. Like ever since she started and then she saw the results, she just cannot stop. It's all she does all the time. So yeah, I've seen that. The mindset shift.

LOUI:

Oh, that's perfect. That's perfect. So then specifically, she's moved away from the pen and paper approach. And so she's shifted to different ways to let the students really share what they know. And then is she also using more like representation examples for her students?

ZACHAM:

Yes, yes, she is. So basically what I do before she started, what I do is I don't just let my students, my learners express themselves in pen and paper. I give them projects, take home assignments, go and do it on your own. The way you feel pleased to express the particular assignments given to you. You know, they use what is around them to create representation. Some of them come to class to sing and tell stories about those particular assignments. So seeing that, she has also adopted this different ways of letting the children express themselves. In her true songs and stories and representations.

LOUI:

Fabulous, fabulous. So I just have one more question, it's the Teaching at the Right Level, and I understand you all use the assessment to help place them within a class, do they take that assessment every year or is that assessment just one time?

ZACHAM:

Okay, they take, we take the assessment three times. We have the baseline, we have the midline and the end line. The baseline, that's before we, while we are taking them on, before we place them in a particular class, just to know their level. And then the midline, we take that, we give that to them, just to be sure that there's actually progress. And then the end line, we use that to assess the whole program.

LOUI:

If a child were to show that they really had exceptional growth at the midline, would they change classes or would the teacher change the level of instruction that student is receiving, or is it still they stay in the same class?

ZACHAM:

They still stay in the same class. It's just, at the midline, it's just for us to assess and with the AS, we are actually progressing. And now at the end of the year, when the end line is being taken, children that has done exceptionally well and moved to the next level and those who still have work to be done remain in that level and then we continue with them over again.

LOUI:

I see. Okay. All right. What I'm reflecting on is with UDL, we're hoping that we see students advance more quickly and so possibly maybe in the future, if students are actually doing exceptionally well, then who knows, maybe they will be advancing more quickly. But that's further conversations. But this is a great opening to that conversation. And for those who are interested in having more of that conversation after listening to the podcast, I hope they're willing to reach out because I think we could do some more thinking that would benefit even more learners. But this has been so wonderful, Zacham. I really appreciate it. You have given

so many in the world a better understanding of what education can be like and the experiences that you're having in Nigeria and how you are benefiting so, so many learners. So thank you so much.

ZACHAM:

Thank you very much, Dr. Loui. It's such an honor to be here to share my experiences, and knowledge with everyone out there. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

LOUI:

Oh, you're welcome. 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 the <https://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 the <https://theudlapproach.com/> And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to build learner agency.