

UDL in 15 Minutes  
With Dalitso Ntambalika  
Episode 128 - 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 Dalitso Ntambalika, who is a primary school teacher who currently leads foundation classes in Malawi. Dalitso is going to share how UDL has changed how she teaches all her learners. Welcome, Dalitso!

DALITSO:

Thank you so much, and thank you so much for having me here.

LOUI:

Ah, you're so welcome. So I introduced you as a primary teacher who currently teaches foundation classes. So for those of us who are not from Malawi, can you describe the difference between primary school and foundation classes?

DALITSO:

All right. Thank you for that question. A primary school teacher is a teacher who is qualified to teach all grades in primary sector in Malawi. That is from grade, of course, we call them standard one up to eight. That is the grades. Then when we say foundation classes, these are foundation classes. That is standard one and two, three and four. These are the foundation classes where we teach our learners how to read. They are starting their school. That's why we call them foundation classes.

LOUI:

Ah, I see. So our foundation classes then, classes students take before grade one, before starting into the grades?

DALITSO:

The foundation classes are the classes where learners, students, are learning basic things for primary schools, for primary school, for their learning. So that is standard one and two, grades one and two.

LOUI:

Ah, okay.

DALITSO:

And then three and four. So we have the junior, the junior sector that is grade three and four, and the senior sectors is for five up to eight, grades five up to eight. So we call them foundation classes because it's where we are building foundation on how they are going to go on about their primary, their whole primary school level.

LOUI:

Ah, I see. We have so many different ways of talking about levels of teaching around the world. So I think it's important for people to understand, yeah, which levels we're talking about when we're having these conversations, so thank you so much. So talk about how and when you started to learn about UDL.

DALITSO:

I learned about UDL around, in December 2022, where we had trainings with Next Gen Chemonics. So UDL was one of the training that we did, and it was presented by Augustine. I remember vividly about the presentation that was done by Augustine. That's when I learned about UDL.

LOUI:

Ah, so you and I have Augustine in common. I got to work with Augustine on another contract. So I'm so glad that he was the person from whom you were learning. That's wonderful. So what was one of the things that struck you about UDL? What made you interested in UDL?

DALITSO:

I was interested in UDL because we usually thought that it's only a specialist teachers who are specially taught in that areas how to look at the learners with special needs are supposed to look into that. So when I learned that all of us teachers, even those who are not specialists, can learn about how learners learn and they learn differently. So I was very interested and I went back into my class and relate what I learned about UDL, that it's really happening in my class, and I didn't have time to look into it because I didn't know.

LOUI:

Yeah, so learning that UDL is applicable for all learners instead of just learners with disabilities. That is such a key part of learning about UDL and helping us all remember that every learner needs that kind of support. Everybody needs a little bit of support every once in a while. And it's not just support. Every learner needs different opportunities. And that's what it's really about. So you have some stories to tell us, and I'm excited to hear about them because there are two different learners and so one of

them really blossomed when you shifted to the UDL aligned strategies. I think that student started off as being more quiet, so can you share that story first?

DALITSO:

Oh yes. There are stories and I'll only share two stories about my experiences in class with UDL. So as you said, Dr. Loui, that I learned that all learners learn differently. And it's all about understanding what the learners' needs are. Then that's how we help them. So in my class after I learned about UDL, I went back into my class and I have this learner who used to sit quiet in my class, always quiet at a corner and the learner didn't want to mix up with anybody else, so I thought that maybe I should leave them as they are. It's so okay before I knew about UDL. So when I learned about UDL I said no, the learner needs help so that they are able to interact with other learners and the learner is also able to learn what others are learning. Because the learner was just able to write zeros, zeros, zeros, zeros instead of writing words or letters. So I started using UDL techniques that I learned at the training. And one of the UDL techniques that I used was pair-share. I started involving the learner in pair-share. I would pair him with another learner so that the learner should at least say something instead of just staying in the corner. So the learner was able to share. That was a good development, and also I gave extra time to the learner to help the learner repeat my instructions to the learner when I'm teaching. Repeat the things that I'm teaching or even give the things, represent the things that I'm teaching in different ways. So I saw that this was helping and the learner was able to conversate with others, especially in pair-share a little bit. That was a huge step for me. And also at the end of a period, the learner was able to write at least an A, an E, and an I, instead of the zeros only that he was scribbling. So that was a huge, huge change in the learner. And it was a proud moment to see that UDL really works. The learner needed help so that they improve.

LOUI:

Oh, that sounds so wonderful. And something that I'm reflecting on is that by interesting the student in learning, maybe through the think-pair-share, these different representations, that this student then emerged and was able to show some other pieces of knowledge. So we don't know if the student was just drawing zeros because that's all the student knew, or if now the student felt safer or more excited, and more engaged, or there's all these different things. But instead of getting weighed down in, oh, we have to teach it in this specific way, it was more about, oh we want to make sure that this student can take part in the learning. That this student can be a part of the learning, and can participate with peers and start to engage more in the learning. That's what I was hearing. Is that the really the case? Is that kind of true?

DALITSO:

The learner, as you said, may be it was what he was wanted to express something, but we didn't know how to help him. But at the end of the day, he was able to express himself. And also, he was able to feel that he was involved in the class. The teacher was giving attention to him, and he was feeling a part of the classroom, and part of the learning process.

LOUI:

Excellent. And then you have another story of a student who would be on the other end of the continuum, maybe the opposite of quiet. This particular student had lots of energy and you were trying to figure out, oh, how do I help him use this energy in a better way? So share that story.

DALITSO:

Wow. I also as you say and opposite of the learner who was quiet. So the learner that I had, this one, I'll give an example of this one because they are quite a couple of them, but this one was always up and down. Never sat down. The moment he sits down, he wants to go out. He's touching his friends. He's disturbing his friends. He's all over the class. Then I was like, all right, that's what I've learned, that learners learn differently. And also, they are different. We need to accept that. But how do we help the learner? So also I learned that students from classes, from the foundational classes, that are starting their primary schools, they love to be all around. They love songs. They love games. So that's what we learned at UDL when UDL was presented. There are so many techniques that we use to cater to the needs of all learners. So I used that. I started using different techniques to the learner. And also I started to do an understanding of the learner's background. So first in class, I used the UDL technique, which we learned in December, which is positive narration. Positive narration is when we give a praise to a learner who is doing well and narrating exactly what they are doing well so that the other learner learns from what the others are doing well. So I used positive narration to narrate exactly what the other learners were doing well, of which I wanted the learner who was always up and down to learn from them. So the learner was like, why are you praising these other learners, not me? Then I told him what's happening. And then next time I saw him doing what I wanted, what was expected of him in classroom, and he was like, okay, now I'm doing that and I also promised him and encouraged him that if he do good, sit down and listens, and do well in his class, in his work, he'll be a leader for a week. So he was like okay, I can also be a leader. Then he started imitating what is good when I narrate something that has been done good. Let's say I say something to a student you have done this good, and he does also the same thing and says why are you not praising me? Then I praise him and he was getting back in doing what is expected of him. So when when I did background check of

the learner, I learned that he was staying with the mother, and the mother works at night. And the learner was left alone at night up to morning around 8. So the learner is supposed to come at school before 8. That means the learner prepared himself to school. And the learner i'm talking about is seven years old. So that also had to do with where he's coming from. So I learned that he has needs and also we need to accept him into classroom. So when I used those UDL technique the learner really improved. He started to listen more, behave better, and doing at least good in his classwork.

LOUI:

That's excellent. What I'm so drawn to in that story is that in many cases, these children who have such big personalities and lots of energy that so many times the strategy that is used is punishment, or it is to make the student feel badly about who they are and all of that energy and telling them that they're not a good student. And instead, you were finding those ways to say, you're a wonderful person, and I want you to be a leader in this classroom, and I want you to learn how to be a leader in this classroom. And that is such a different message.

DALITSO:

Yes. Very different message.

LOUI:

Yeah, and I think that the child really responded to that.

DALITSO:

Yes, the child responded to that because, as you said, maybe they expect to be punished, and they expect not to be included because they are not somehow behaving like they are supposed to be. So accepting them and bringing them closer made him realize that, no, I'm included. I'm part of this. And he felt loved and he felt part of of the classroom. So that improved his behavior. And also positive narration, the UDL technique that we were taught, it encourages attention to positive behavior. That means if a learner wants attention, they need to behave as expected, to do better as expected. That's when they get the attention. So this UDL technique that we learned always encourages positive culture in classrooms.

LOUI:

Yes. And another reflection that I have is that everywhere around the world, we talk about having high expectations for our learners, but that term can be misinterpreted in so many ways. And one of those ways is, well, I have high expectations for you, so I'm going to make things much harder for you, and you're going to have to work up to those standards. And the interpretation that you have used, and that definitely aligns with UDL

is, I'm going to model for you and show you, and other students are going to model for you what the expected behaviors are. And I'm going to let you know when you've achieved those because those are my expectations of you. You can achieve these things. And I'll let you know when you've achieved those things. And then relying on the fact that we know that every human being likes to be positively recognized. We yearn for that. And so the more we provide that opportunity, and the sooner we provide that opportunity, like in foundation classes, then our students are going to respond to that. So, Dalitso, I thank you so much for sharing these two stories. I think they're going to be powerful for many people to hear, so I appreciate it. And I wish you the best of luck and good fortune in your teaching in Malawi, and I hope someday to meet you in person.

DALITSO:

Thank you so much, Dr. Loui, for having me and giving me this opportunity to share my classroom experience and also my experience with UDL. And I'm so grateful that I am one of the teachers, among is the many teachers who are trained about UDL. That it's really working out and it really has improved our teaching and also the learning outcomes. Thank you so much.

LOUI:

You're welcome. Excellent. 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 build learn agency.