

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Chisomo Katunga
Episode 129 - 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 Chisomo Katunga, a primary school classroom teacher in Malawi. Chisomo is going to share the changes she's seen in her learners based on some UDL aligned techniques that she is using. Welcome Chisomo.

CHISOMO:

Thank you so much. Doctor Loui. I really appreciate for considering me to take part in this podcast. I don't take this opportunity for granted. It's an honor.

LOUI:

Oh well, thank you so much, and thank you for your patience. Chisomo and I have worked a lot to make sure that this could happen. So, oh my gosh, thank you for your patience. So how and when did you learn about UDL?

CHISOMO:

Alright, I was first introduced to UDL in December 2022, through the National Reading Program, NRP, which is supported by Next Generation Reading Activity, which is sponsored by USAID. During this time, Malawi was experiencing COVID 19 pandemic whereby schools were closed for about six months. This affected many learners, especially those in the early grades. Then the government announced the reopening of the schools, and due to the long holiday, the attendance and participation of the learners was poor, and this was the time when NextGen project came in with the trainings on UDL. In these trainings, teachers were introduced to UDL principles such as multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of action and expression. We were also introduced to UDL techniques. For example, pair-share, positive narration, morning greeting and passion of the day. All the techniques were introduced just to make sure that learners are coming to school and they are staying in a positive environment where they can interact and share knowledge, and that the end being able to read with understanding.

LOUI:

Wonderful. So it sounds like you came to know about UDL during a hard time around the world, but what I love is that you continued moving forward with UDL, as we've all...

CHISOMO:

Yeah.

LOUI:

... yeah, shifted forward. So thank you for continuing that effort and that persistence and that attention. So you've had follow up meetings since then, so what have those been?

CHISOMO:

Yes, we do have CPTs, that's continuous professional development. These CPTs are conducted during school holidays where we have refresher meetings on UDL principles and techniques. During these meetings, we share experiences like challenges, successes that we encounter during the teaching process. We also share the way forward on how we can handle the challenges in our school. We also have teacher learning circles, TLCs, where we also discuss the issues of UDL techniques and principles with our peers.

LOUI:

Ah, so in teacher learning circles, are all the teachers in your school learning about UDL? Or is it a few teachers are learning about UDL?

CHISOMO:

All teachers are learning about UDL. All the infants and the senior ones.

LOUI:

Okay. How many teachers is that?

CHISOMO:

Okay. By then there were 21 teachers.

LOUI:

Wow. That's wonderful. That's great. 21 powerful teachers.

CHISOMO:

We included teachers from infant sections, from junior sections, and from senior sections. So we were all 21.

LOUI:

Ah, yeah, good strength in numbers. So you mentioned to me earlier that learning about UDL made you see your students differently. So what did you mean by that?

CHISOMO:

Sure. UDL helped me to start recognizing learners with some learning difficulties. For example, I had a learner with low vision. He was sitting at the back, but when I recognized him, I moved him to the front. During my planning, I always make arrangements for him. I had also a learner who stuttered. This girl was always quiet in class and she was unable to participate actively in class. I started allowing her to speak what she want to say by giving her enough time. And sometimes I could even allow her to express her understanding through actions and expressions like thumbs up or writing the response on the chalk board. Gradually she started being active in class, and her performance changed positively. Again, I had a boy with cerebral palsy. He's unstable drawing and he speaks slowly. So his performance was poor, because he was usually quiet in class and participation was poor as well, and the friends would even laugh at

him because of his nature. So after being trained of UDL strategies and principles, I started giving him more chances to respond to the questions and engage him in classroom activities. I also tried to bring a good relationship between him and his friends, because at first, his friends were ignoring him. In so doing he started participating actively and he's transformed positively.

LOUI:

That's all fabulous to hear and what I'm thinking about is that when we learn something new, we start to see new things. And that's what I'm interpreting from what you just shared.

CHISOMO:

Yeah.

LOUI:

Yeah. So you've been empowered to not only recognize when learners are struggling, but you're finding ways to help them and keep them in class. And you've also learned some UDL strategies, but one of them was similar to something you were already doing. So how was that strategy different and how did it help your learners?

CHISOMO:

Okay, yes, we also learned about UDL strategies during the UDL trainings, and the strategies like pair-share, positive narration, passion of the day, and morning greetings. These strategies are our daily routines. We use them daily in our teaching practice. So we learned of pair-share as a UDL strategy, and in the past, we already had pair work as a method of teaching. So pair-share is different than pair work because this pair-share is a strategy in which learners share knowledge during a short conversation with a friend. And the difference between pair-share and pair work is that when using pair work, students are just given a task to share their knowledge without directions, wherein pair-share, students are given directions and signals to take care and to stop the conversation. So this strategy helps all learners to speak out their views during discussions, even shy learners are able to speak in these conversations. And when students are conducting a pair-share, the teacher moves around and gives support where necessary.

LOUI:

Yeah. Did you have students who had a hard time sharing, meaning they wanted to talk the whole time and maybe they didn't want to let their partner say anything?

CHISOMO:

Yes, I had.

LOUI:

So how did you know about helping the children learn how to take turns?

CHISOMO:

Okay. When they are conducting a pair-share, I used it to move around to make sure that everyone is speaking.

LOUI:

So you were moving around the classroom and yeah, encouraging them. Okay, and then you have other ideas.

CHISOMO:

Okay, so when moving around, if I see someone is just quiet, then I could ask him, or I do ask him or her, "Are you alright?" and the students know their turn after I give them the signal.

LOUI:

Okay, that's good. That's good!

CHISOMO:

Yeah, yeah. In short, when we are using pair-share every learner in the class, as of now, they are all used to it. They all speak because they know that, "This is my turn." When madam is doing this, it means that I should stop speaking and it is my friend's turn.

LOUI:

Ah, very good, very good. And that's a skill that you learned when you were learning about the pair-share is to help the students learn how to share time.

CHISOMO:

Yeah.

LOUI:

... and give one another time for a voice. Oh, that's excellent. That's excellent. And then there's another UDL strategy I know you learned about that's benefited your learners, and it has to do with, I think, positive narration?

CHISOMO:

Okay. Indeed, positive narration is another UDL instruction technique that benefited me and my learners. Positive narration is a situation in which a teacher narrates the positive behavior of a learner and shares it around to the whole class. This has been very successful, and learners are motivated. Every learner in the classroom wants to be praised. It works as a classroom management and UDL instructional technique. I can give an example of one learner in my previous classroom. The learner was Timothy. This boy was fond of making noise in class and was troublesome. He was sitting next to Michael, who was always quiet. So I used to praise Michael because of his good character. As a result, Timothy started taking from Michael. I remember one time Timothy was so quiet, but I didn't recognize him in the first place. So he was like, "Madam, today I'm quiet, and why you are not praising me?" So, everybody in the

classroom laughed, and I finally praised him. This made him excited. As I'm talking, he's a changed boy.

LOUI:

That's so funny. "Madam, you did not recognize me!". That's so good. You know, Chisomo, what I'm reflecting on in this conversation is that there are so many strategies that do align with UDL. People like me can teach teachers about these strategies...

CHISOMO:

Yes.

LOUI:

...but you're bringing in something that teachers also need to have to really make this work with UDL, and that's you are flexible in your use of the strategies, meaning you are trying them, and you're seeing how the students respond, and then you tried it a little differently when you knew that, oh, I need to add this in.

CHISOMO:

Yes.

LOUI:

And you're willing, you're willing to move around the room, You're willing to maybe have a lighter relationship with the students that you don't have to be in control all the time, but letting them have more voice, letting them speak more and these are such important pieces, and I want to make sure to honor you, say, thank you so much for bringing that in and to help others understand that UDL is more than just strategies. It really has to do with how we run the classroom, right?

CHISOMO:

Yes.

LOUI:

And so what surprised you the most about UDL?

CHISOMO:

UDL has helped me to understand that all children learn differently. As a teacher, I'm supposed to use various techniques to accommodate all the learners in a classroom. Through these different techniques and different materials, I have built a strong relationship with my learners. I remember there was a time when I got sick for almost a week. After recovering, I resumed work. It was on Monday when I visited my workplace. Upon seeing me, my learners were so happy to the extent that they ran towards me shouting with joy, "Madam is back! Madam is back!", and we were all happy to see each other.

LOUI:

That's a great, that's a great vision. So it sounds like maybe your relationship with your

students has changed a little bit, and so now there's more joy.

CHISOMO:

Yes, the relationship is strong. We have a very good relationship, and this strong relationship also helps more learners to read. I can tell you that most of my learners were reading. There was a time when there was supervision from One World team. They came to assess my learners. They just selected the learners randomly. And I was so happy to hear that all the learners passed the assessment. So meaning that these techniques are helping to enable learners to read with understanding.

LOUI:

Oh, that's so exciting. That's so exciting. Oh, well, I can keep talking to you for a very long time, but we have reached our 15 minutes, but the world is fortunate to have you as a teacher. So thank you so much.

CHISOMO:

You are welcome. I really appreciate for this conversation. I don't take this for granted. Thank you so much.

LOUI:

You're very 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 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 build learner agency.