

UDL in 15 Minutes  
With Laura Maly-Schmidt  
Episode 136 - 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 Laura Maly-Schmidt, the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program Coordinator and Deputy Principal at the International School of Dusseldorf. Laura is going to talk about her beginner's journey with UDL and how she's applying the framework as a leader. Welcome, Laura!

LAURA:

Thanks so much, Loui. It is great to be here with you.

LOUI:

Ah, thank you, thank you. So can you share a bit about your background as an educator and what your role is at the International School of Dusseldorf?

LAURA:

Sure, happy to. I was certified to teach English literature and my first job, internationally, was at a school in Thessaloniki, Greece. And when I arrived there, it became very clear, very quickly that the job was actually teaching English language acquisition, which was very different from what I had actually been prepared to do. So after three years there, loving the community and learning by doing, I went back and got my master's degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages. And then I came to the International School of Dusseldorf, and ironically, my job, when I started here, was to teach English literature. So, this is my 32nd year at the International School of Dusseldorf. And I've been the Middle Years Program Coordinator for the last 20 years, and I'm also one of the Deputy Principals. And really with the middle years program, my job is to oversee the written and taught and assessed curriculum, and work on implementation of the MYP. And we're also most recently bringing in the MYPE assessments. So we've been quite busy with that most recently. And as a deputy, my role is to also support our department heads with the running of the school and achieving the goals and especially with looking at how each department is implementing the middle years program and our IB diploma program.

LOUI:

Okay. And just in case listeners didn't pick up on it first, but MYP is Middle Years Program, and that's language that's used in the International Baccalaureate Programs. But then I also wanted to point toward how many years you've been at the International School Dusseldorf, because that's a long time to be in one place, isn't it?

LAURA:

It really is. And it is a shocking number even to me. I often tell people I came here when I was 10, but I'm not sure how well I can get people to believe that. But it really was a place that I fell in love with from the very beginning. And I recognized it as a place where there's an incredible focus on learning. It's a real learning community, and it's something that has been true about ISD since the very beginning and continues to this day. The relationships between the adults and the students here is one that really supports learning and is very focused on helping students be successful.

LOUI:

That's fabulous. Well, you're obviously a gem because you have all of this wonderful, like, historical knowledge. That's awesome. So having been there and having such a solid grounding in that school, I'm really curious what compelled you to learn about UDL and what steps you've taken?

LAURA:

I was lucky enough to attend a session with Beth Stark on UDL when the ECIS Leadership Conference was held here at ISD and I was intrigued by her approach. I didn't really know much about UDL, to be honest. And when I saw how she was considering the variety of ways, the incredible range of ways that she was making learning accessible to the adults in the room in the session, I started to be very interested in the transfer of that to working with students. So when the opportunity came about to join the ECIS UDL Certification Programme for Curriculum and Instruction, I was really honored to be offered the opportunity to take part in that because as a curriculum leader, thinking about our school goals of like high quality pedagogy and coherence and inclusion, I thought it was a great opportunity to really learn more.

LOUI:

Fabulous. And so to be transparent to all the listeners, Beth Stark and I lead that course, created that course together and led that course. And so Laura, you were part of that course, which is why I said, "Hey, would you like to be on the podcast?" Because for those who are listening, Laura just has a fabulous story, and how she's used UDL in her work as a leader. And so I was like, "Would you please be a guest?" And she gladly said yes. So that last question was honest because I was like, what compelled you? I didn't know. But now, you've taken this path. And even with these actions that you've taken, what are some experiences or information that empowered you to make changes to what you were doing and applying UDL?

LAURA:

Well, it's really interesting because when I started the course, I didn't really understand UDL. And I thought, I'm an experienced educator. I've been doing this for a long time. But it was through bumbling a bit at the beginning of the course when you were asking us to really start to implement some of the learning that we were doing. And I thought I was doing that. So over time, I think some of the things that helped me to shift my mindset was really one, exchanging ideas with others, coming into our discussions and hearing about the different ways that people were implementing UDL tools and techniques and conversations. I think that helped me to shift what I was thinking about in terms of reaching all of the students. So some of the tools that we

were exposed to through the course helped me, and practicing with them, like making what we're talking about to students and to our learners in our buildings more accessible through having the visuals, and the audio, and the subtitles, and opportunities to present things in different languages. That sort of exposure to seeing how people were using different tools helped me to start to see how I hadn't been doing that in the past, or I had the potential to do it much, much more. And so, that was one of the big learnings for me going through the course.

LOUI:

When I think about just some of those light touches that you talked about, there are loads of leaders out there who are either considering UDL, some have learned about UDL, but they just haven't even found their own first steps. So what are some of those first steps that you've taken, whether it's been those tools or other kinds of technologies? Because I know that's what people are eager to hear about.

LAURA:

I think some of the first few steps that I'm making and continue to make, I still feel very much a beginner with UDL, trying to model, in every meeting I run, how am I trying to think about every person in the room? And how am I trying to honor their time and their abilities, and so trying to set up whatever meeting I'm running by modeling some of the approaches that aim to make the best use of everybody's time that's attending a meeting, for example. Making sure that everything that I'm doing with presenting, creating materials that, for example, with department heads, welcome people into whatever the range, for example, with department heads, welcome them into the meeting in a way that engages them. Trying to offer opportunities for different sorts of activities or tasks or ways to work on different things that the group is working on. So multiple means of action or engagement in what we're doing. I've tried to make use of LUDIA, which is the AI tool that is built around UDL. And that has been also incredibly helpful in terms of creating materials that help teachers see different ways that they can, for example, adjust an assessment so that they can offer more choice to students about how they can show their learning. LUDIA makes it so simple because it creates multiple ideas that that I maybe wouldn't have been able to think about on my own, but I can go through every MYP subject and and show people how they could provide an alternative task to whatever they were thinking about that might offer a different way for students to share their learning. And really just keeping in mind that I want to try to include everybody-hear everybody's voice or include or make a place for everybody's strengths. So, you know, those are some of the just the things I try and keep in mind when I'm running a meeting, or those are some of the things I'm trying to keep in mind when I'm creating things for other people to use.

LOUI:

Yeah. One of my biggest takeaways from the first thing you talked about, which modeling UDL in your meetings, it's that purposeful planning that we talk about with Universal Design for Learning and you're doing that when you're thinking about all of your staff; honoring their time and their abilities and thinking about, hmm, how can i like you said, engage them? How can I represent this information to them in ways that will be meaningful? And that they're going to take it away and then apply it, and it sounds like they also maybe have some time to experience the

application and thinking through things. I'm curious to know whether or not staff have picked up on the concept of your modeling or if you've been forthright with that and saying, "Hey, I'm modeling UDL for you and this is the way I'm modeling it. How have you approached that?"

LAURA:

Well, I'll tell you when I get my feedback from this group in the next couple of weeks, I have not really been direct about saying, "I'm modeling UDL techniques." We're at the sort of beginning of our school-wide UDL journey. So this has been more for me to practice just being mindful of wanting to value all the people in the room, and have people in the room feel like they're getting something, they're able to participate in what we're doing. So I haven't said, "This is what I'm doing," at this stage.

LOUI:

Mm-hmm. I think it's going to be so interesting to hear from them. I'm betting that you will have people say, A)they enjoy the meetings more....

LAURA:

I hope so, I hope so.

LOUI:

...yeah, and then B) That they're able to take away the information. And then I also appreciate you chatting about LUDIA. So for those who haven't listened to the episode, but 108 in my UDL in 15 Minutes is an interview with Jérémie Rostan and Beth Stark, who created LUDIA. And it is a useful tool whether it is for adult learning, whether it's for our K-12 or whatever the age the learner, whatever the situation of learning is, you can ask it for suggestions and it can provide great ideas. And even if they're just starter ideas, they get you going. I'm curious to know if there are any ideas from LUDIA that have stood out for you or that maybe you were... an early on example, or it can be later on example, where you were like, "Oh, I hadn't thought about this. This is a possibility!"

LAURA:

I think one of the benefits of LUDIA for me in terms of my own personal learning about UDL was just to experiment and see the beauty of AI, right? You put something in and it shows you new ways of looking at, for example, designing an assessment that you hadn't thought of. For me, maybe just creating some guidelines for people to incorporate a global context into a task, there were things that I hadn't thought about. So it's for me, just the process of practicing and seeing what a difference it makes when I'm actually designing with everybody in mind, and LUDIA helps with that, and gives you examples.

LOUI:

Yeah, I totally agree. Laura, I really appreciate this conversation. Thank you so much. I think you've given some people great ideas of how they can take those first brave steps forward, but do it in ways that feel comfortable for them within their leadership position. So thank you for offering those suggestions.

LAURA:

It's been a pleasure to be here with you.

LOUI:

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 [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 the [www.udlapproach.com](http://www.udlapproach.com) And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to support learner agency.