UDL in 15 Minutes
With Lauren Boop
Episode 137 - 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 Lauren Boop, the elementary librarian at Carlucci American International School of Lisbon. Lauren is going to talk about how UDL is influencing the design of their new library space. Welcome Lauren!

LAUREN:
Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here and thank you again for thinking of me and letting me talk about my UDL journey.

LOUI:
Oh, absolutely. It's so wonderful to have you as a guest. So first, can you give us a snapshot of your background in education?

LAUREN:
Yes, and I'm going to actually go pretty far back because I think it helps paint a better picture of how I got to where I am today. In high school, I thought I was going to go pre-med, and I took all of the AP courses, everything to prepare me for that. But then I discovered that I wanted to be a teacher when I was doing some coaching and tutoring at the end of my junior year of high school. And so I applied for a scholarship, a teaching scholarship, at some of the universities in my home state of North Carolina. And I got the scholarship, and I went in to be a high school biology teacher because I wanted to go pre-med. But after my first semester, I decided that I didn't want to do high school. I wanted to do middle school or be more of a specialist and have all of secondary. So I got certified 6-12, but I really loved science and history, but my coursework only allowed for getting a dual degree in English language arts and history or math and science. And so I decided to do the English language arts, social studies route with a science add-on. And then I taught in middle schools, both in the United States and now abroad here in Portugal. From this background of science, social studies, English language arts, was really interested in inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, and that's what I kind of brought to the table. And when you look at that, it all summarizes up into informational texts, inquiry-based, project-based learning, and research. And so... long story short, last year, my director asked me if I'd be interested in going into the elementary library position and kind of bringing some of that same energy to the library, and I was super interested and so that's how I got here today. It's

my first year being in the library position. And so that long journey brought me here today, and you know I've loved every minute of it.

LOUI:
Oh, that's so interesting. Thank you for sharing that. I'm excited that you were able to put together the new position and learning about UDL. When did you become interested about UDL?

LAUREN:
So I'm gonna reveal my age only because I think it is helpful to help answer this question, but I graduated from my undergrad in 2012, and then I worked in a public school district in the state of North Carolina for nine years before I moved to Portugal in 2021. And I think that when I was graduating, like in that time of 2008-2012, when I was at university it was something that was discussed and talked about. And when we were planning lessons, we focused some on UDL, but there was a lot more mention, of course, of the word differentiation. And it wasn't until I got to be a teacher when I was sitting in a course that was provided by our county where they were like differentiation and UDL are different and here's how you can apply the differences. And I remember being like, wait, wait, wait, what do you mean? And talking with one of my colleagues about the difference between the two and learning and exploring from there. So I'd always been interested in UDL and how I can support my learners. Like how can I make learning accessible for all the learners in my classroom? And then I started to do some professional developments for teachers. So applying those same principles to leading professional developments for adult learners as well. And then I started to become a curriculum writer within my county. And so I had to not think just of what my school had available, but what the entire district had available to provide and write, you know, curriculum and lessons for. And it started coming from learning about understanding by design and using that formatting of writing curriculum design and looking at Universal Design for Learning. And so then I transitioned to Portugal and applied those same principles. But I was always doing my own learning and understanding about it. But I led some professional development at my school in a book study about understanding by design. Then my principal was like, “There's actually this Universal Design for Learning course that I think you would find very interesting and that would be really relevant to like what we've been talking about with understanding by design and how we've been supporting EAL learners here at our school.” And I was like, yes, sign me up! I am all in! So it was very exciting to be seen, of course, by my director and to be asked, is this something that you'd like to pursue? And at first, I will say, I had a moment of just, “Ooh, I'm going to be learning a brand new position while also, like, digging much deeper into UDL and understanding more about UDL.” But instead of letting myself, I sat in the stress for 10 minutes and I was like, nope, this is a great way to immediately apply best

learning and thinking practices in my library. So it was great to be doing them both at the same time. And I really enjoyed it as a learning experience. Everything that we were talking about in the course, whether we were looking at multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, whether you were a principal or you were in the library or you were a teacher of little ones or your teacher of high schoolers, there was something that you could immediately drop and use the next day that would benefit all learners, students or adult learners. And that's the type of professional development that I think is so impactful that I'm getting to choice design what is best for my needs, but I'm also able to immediately apply my learning. We've all been in professional developments where you're like, oh, that's great, I'll use that in four months when we're doing XYZ unit or activity. This was not like that. This was like, I am constantly thinking about UDL and I'm thinking about it in my conversations in both my professional life, but even in my personal life as well. So it was so impactful and I think that everybody should take the course or think about how they can use UDL and take different pieces of whether it's welcoming interest and identities, perception, interaction, expression and communication. All the different things that we talk about underneath the three realms, like how they can take that and make one small change tomorrow that can immediately impact their learners.

LOUI:
Awesome. Well, thank you. I appreciate that. I will say to the listeners that this was not a contrived situation. So I really appreciate it, Lauren. She's talking about the ECIS UDL Certification Programme that Beth Stark and I have led. So I'm honored. So thank you very, very much. I really appreciate it. So I really, I do want you to share the early childhood through second grade library you were talking about how it's in the process of renovation. There's an automatic set of principles to follow, and those focus on establishing physical accessibility. But you've applied your UDL thinking, Universal Design for Learning thinking, to the proposed designs, and I'd love for you to share those examples.

LAUREN:
Absolutely. I, of course, again, can't thank the two of you enough, you and Beth, for offering this course and kind of, throughout it, providing me one-on-one support to think about these things for the library. Because honestly, it was sort of, lack of better words, like a lifeline for me when I was like, when I was trying to back up what I wanted to say and like, this is what I think is best for kids. And here's why I think it's best for kids. Like I had so much information to be able to support that. Not that I wasn't being listened to prior to that, but when you come and you have just so much evidence to support what you're saying, you are able to command a room, you know, and get ideas flowing that are addressed and understood. And so it was really helpful to be able to do that while

thinking about redesigning our elementary library space. Because I'm an American and I live in Portugal, and so when we're sitting in these meetings and we're talking with like our entire team, whether it's students, adults who access the library, parents, the community, teachers, principals, and architects, and we're all trying to give ideas and sum it up into like, what do you want and how can we make it happen? And there's obviously things that need to happen in terms of following code and what is allowed and not permitted on our campus for whatever reason. But there was some freedom to be able to explore. And I got to explore that. And I did it all through a UDL lens. How can we make sure that early childhood through second grade students, like what is going to make this space the most magical for them? But the magic comes from physical accessibility, and multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression being addressed in the design space and then through the lessons that I'll be offering in the space. And so one of the things that we kind of focused on is I wanted to make sure that we had more student centers as part of our library rotations, which is something that you would do in an elementary or a middle school classroom. But I wanted physical spaces to be prepared and ready that I could be like, okay, we've done story time, we've checked out books,you have a choice now of reading quietly, or taking some headphones and listening to a book quietly, or building with the Legos on the Lego wall of, a scene from something that we just read or using the makerspace cart to build something related to a book that we've read. When I was talking to our entire team, my library team, my admin team and the architects, that was what was in mind. So some of the things we considered were the student centers, but accessible books, like how low we want bookshelves to be. And we sort of wanted books to be available on lots of shelves. A person on my library team described it best as like, when you go to like a record shop and you're going through all the records, letting the books for the really, really small kids be available like that, because it's hard for them to look at the spine of a book and they're, you know, not even reading yet. They're emerging readers. So they don't know that that says “cat” yet. They don't see the physical picture on the front of the cover. So it's harder for them to even visualize, what is this book about? So even just like that change in accessibility, we wanted tables much lower to the ground so that students can kind of sit on the ground and have a table. And I fought really hard with my library team, who was very supportive, to have whiteboard tables so that we can use those to draw things and relate things to books that we're reading and create these little collaboration centers for the young kids as well. Not just when we're doing that for high school students. We wanted to have a Lego wall and have accessible Legos. We have a makerspace cart and we wanted a space to be built for that. and we want to get a little area that has a listening station. So some small headphones so they can listen to some of our books from our online library catalog called Sora. And so those were like some of the big things. I remember talking with the architects at one point and something that was different for them in some of the Portuguese schools versus like our

international school is that libraries didn't hold classes the way that our school was holding classes. Some did, but many didn't. So they were like, oh, like you have classes, there might be like 20 or 25 people browsing at one time. And I was like, yes. And they were like that changes, you know, because we were expecting five or six at a time. It's like, no, we have full classes in here, and then we go off and we are providing books and other things for them. And so that was like something that had to be talked about related to UDL. How are we going to make sure that there's enough room for the books and spaces to sit and beanbags for kids while still also bringing to life my vision of this student-centered library space that has multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression?

LOUI:
Yeah. So I think in this, this last part here, what I'd love for you to share, you've given some great descriptions of what's going to be a fabulous library. That sounds like I want to live there. I don't want to ever leave. And I think that a lot of listeners would think that's just smart. It's a smart design. It all makes sense in a library. It's creative. And you did touch on UDL a little bit and say, bring up the principles and it being a student focused learning environment. But I'm wondering if you could, just even using one of those examples, or just narrowing it to a, this is really how UDL influenced my thinking, how it shifted, how I approached this design than maybe how you would have approached it before?

LAUREN:
Absolutely. I love that question because it's something that I had to think about too when I was trying to describe what I wanted to my administration and to the architects. I think the best way to talk about that is that I was able to look at my learners and specifically think, using UDL, what would be the most purposeful, authentic way for them to be able to access books and reading material? And because I was only using this UDL lens to look at it, it was very easy to say things like, that looks great, but that's not great for our space. And here's why. Where without having the UDL background and the understanding, there are things that I feel like we might've compromised on, or we would have been like, yeah, let's, you know, we don't need to move the carpet there, or we don't need, you know what, we can just do all large tables there. And we would have maybe like, I don't want to say, you know, compromised our principles because that's certainly not what it is but we might have just been like you know what okay we can see that perspective we're but there were things that we like were like nope this is what we need what is best for kids to make things accessible for all of them, and we need these options available for voice and choice within this library. And so it was quite lovely to get to be able to be growing as a librarian while taking this course and getting this unique

opportunity to kind of inform about our space. And I can't wait to see the magic that will happen over the summer.

LOUI:
That is just a wonderful example. You wove through that so beautifully. And we talk about in UDL, intentional design that lowers barriers for all learners. It's a phrase that's used over and over. And you just exemplified that beautifully in your description. The intentionality of the design, because it was so focused on what you all knew you wanted your learners to experience and to enhance their outcomes and to build on and to grow their learner agency. You've done that. It's a great example. So again, I just need to know when this library is going to be done and somehow I'm going to figure out how to come to Lisbon and I'm going to come sit in this library and you may not get me to leave.

LAUREN:
That's how I'm feeling too.

LOUI:
Oh my gosh. I'm so excited for you. Well, thank you so much, Lauren. This was beautiful. I know people are going to love hearing this specific example, and good luck with all of this. And I can't wait to hear as it moves forward, the updates.

LAUREN:
Thank you so much again for having me. I would just like everybody to also know, working on UDL is something that I will be doing for the rest of my education career because there's so much to learn about how we can, every day, remove barriers to learning for all of our learners. I can't wait to keep on the learning journey. And thank you again for having me.

LOUI:
Excellent. Thank you so much. So for those listening to this podcast, you can find supplemental materials like an image montage with closed captioning, 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 support learner agency.