

UDL in 15 Minute with Melissa Toland 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 Melissa Toland who is the district resource teacher for the Ocean View School District in Oxnard, California. Today, Melissa is going to share how implementing UDL in her classroom led her to take the job of district resource teacher so she could help other understand and implement UDL. Hi Melissa, how are you?

MELISSA: I'm doing great Loui, thanks so much for having me.

LOUI: Oh, you're welcome and thanks for coming on. I just introduced you as a district resource teacher. Can you help people understand what that role is?

MELISSA: Sure, so a district resource teacher in our school district is a lot like a teacher on special assignment in others, meaning that we help teachers with instructional strategies, we lead our professional development, we observe teachers, we do demonstration lessons for teachers, we help lesson plan, we help with some of our curriculum adoptions, so we wear a lot of different hats, but it's wonderful because we're able to see and work with a lot of different teachers, which has been amazing also.

LOUI: Yeah, I bet you get a lot of great ideas that you're able to share with other teachers. You've been you've watched something fabulous and then you can share that with other people.

MELISSA: Absolutely. And I think that's been one of the biggest benefits of being in the position is we're really fortunate with a wealth of very wonderful teachers in the districts, so being able to work with them, learn from them, and share that knowledge forth has been powerful.

LOUI: That's nice! And then what about before that? What helped you prepare for this role?

MELISSA: So, before this position, this my first year in this position, I was a predominantly a seventh grade English teacher for the last eight years at

our junior high. While in that position I stumbled across UDL and my own kind of research and my own learning. And so, I started implementing some of those strategies and trying to kind of find my way with it. And from there we had a professional development on it with one of our local kind of gurus in UDL, and I became even more interested in it, and started implementing it more in my classroom from there.

LOUI: Can you give people a feeling of the size of your district like how many schools there are that kind of thing?

MELISSA: Sure, so we're a relatively small district. We have two preschools, three elementary schools, and a single middle school/ junior high that serves sixth, seventh, and eighth grade.

LOUI: Okay. Then other districts come together to send students to a high school that's joint?

MELISSA: Yeah and then the high schools are not a part of our district, but we filter into two local high schools within the city of Oxnard.

LOUI: Okay, so I'm going to backtrack a second because you started to talk about how you were kind of dipping your toe into UDL when you were in the classroom. The seventh grade English. So, can you share a little bit about how you started off with UDL in your classroom?

MELISSA: Sure, so I saw, Katie Novak on Teaching Channel and so, she also taught seventh grade English and so I was drawn to that and I started following her work a little bit and wanted to, without any formal kind of training, just kind of dip my toe into it. And so what made the most amount of sense for me was to look at the Action and Expression piece and kind of that very primitive of giving the students choices and how, in the assessment piece, was kind of where it seemed most natural to me. From there, we had more formal professional development on it and I learned that that was really just kind of scratching the surface. I became very interested in Todd Rose's jaggedness principle through this training and really looking at the variability that each student in my room has and how that really moves beyond just how I'm assessing them but it really encompasses like their entire learning experience. And with that kind of new knowledge, it was also very overwhelming to think about how I was going to completely make this shift. But I knew I wanted to do it, and so I

decided for me, it made the most amount of sense to just start with one of the guidelines, one of the categories of guidelines at a time. And so since I was already kind of exploring the Action and Expression piece through the assessment piece, I decided to really focus on that and, and try to, kind of make that my focus for the rest of last school year.

LOUI: What I love that I just heard you say was that, you know, you learn this stuff and then you use, you even used the word “overwhelmed”, but then you just thought, “Okay, I'm just going to take hold of, and I'm going to start with what feels comfortable to me.” And since you'd already been within that principle of Action and Expression you thought “Okay, I'm just gonna stay here for a while and I'm going to let myself learn about this and feel more comfortable.” And I think that's such a lesson. I talked about starting small and that's exactly what you did because, well really started small and you started comfortably.

MELISSA: Mm-hmm. Absolutely. And that's what I tell people as well. I found that by starting small just within that one principle, I saw the results that I needed to see to be able to move on to the next section.

LOUI: Yeah, when you say move on to the next section then I'm assuming you started to kind of dabble in engagement you started to dabble in representation, then?

MELISSA: Yes, so from there I really moved into the engagement piece, and I really focused on self-regulation, and recruiting interest. And I really tried to help the students kind of set their own goals and monitor their own learning through self-assessment. And then also having them try and make those connections between what we're learning, and how that did fit with what they were already interested in.

LOUI: Right. And so, you were talking about how you were really drawn to Todd Rose's jaggedness principle, and then how thinking about variability felt so huge. How did you think about variability when you were thinking about self-regulation?

MELISSA: So, in terms of providing options for self-regulation, I really focused on that self-assessment piece. So, really before we would start a lesson, kind of asking the kids what they already knew, what they felt comfortable with, what they thought might be a challenge for them in the

day's lesson, and giving them that opportunity to analyze their own needs. Which then as I would circle around and I could check back in with them, would kind of helped me to see where they were as well. So, I was able to address learner variability through self-regulation in that way. And then also having them, assess at the end, so that they could also see how far they'd come in their own learning.

LOUI: Yeah, that's just a great example and thank you so much for giving that because I think a lot of people struggle with, they learn about variability, they learn about the jagged principle, they learn about how different students can be, but then translating that into, "What does that really look like when I'm working on one of the guidelines?" And so, like self-regulation, you just gave a great example that's awesome.

MELISSA: Thank you.

LOUI: Yeah, so I want to make sure we have a little bit of time here to talk about your role as the district resource teacher and how you have taken UDL to other teachers. So, what are some things that you're doing to help your teachers, your fellow teachers move forward?

MELISSA: Sure. Well, I was very excited to take the position because I truly believe that UDL is one way that we can meet the needs of all learners so I was excited and enthusiastic to share my passion with others. You know, it started with presenting at one of our initial professional development days which I presented to the junior high about UDL, and I really wanted to start with the "what", so you know Simon Sinek's golden circle. I really wanted to start with the what, so what is UDL, which I think we already had a pretty good idea of so I just kind of grazed over it. And then, why, why do we need this. So, we started there and then from there I had our next professional development a couple months later and I was really struggling with where to go with it. And also trying to be mindful, and I also feel that it's very important that when I am presenting or providing these professional development opportunities for teachers that I am keeping the UDL guidelines at the forefront, so I really wanted to make sure my session reflected those three main principles of UDL. And that's where the UDL implementation rubric came from. I had been really studying, Katie Novak and Kristen Rodriguez's UDL progression rubric, and I was really wanting to find a way to kind of scale that down and summarize that for our teachers within the district, so that they could use it as a self-reflection and

self-assessment piece. So, kind of like bringing that self-regulation into that training like this is one way that you can do it with kids. I went to our Associate Superintendent of curriculum who's my direct supervisor and she's been wonderfully supportive and kind of told her this is what I'm thinking. Like, what do you think of this? And she jumped right on board and gave me some great ideas to add to the rubric itself and so I was able to take that in that second session and have teachers really look at each of the different categories and kind of self-reflect on where they were on their UDL journey, and then set a goal for our days learning based upon where they currently were. So, yeah, one way I've been able to support teachers in this is through our professional development, and then also through, you know, co-lesson planning time like I will go and I'll sit with a teacher or teachers and we'll plan UDL friendly lessons together. I will provide demonstration lessons to teachers where they can kind of look for where they see the different pieces of it. So, it's been it's been a really great way to get out there and work with our wonderful teachers and kind of bring my passion for UDL alive within our district.

LOUI: That's awesome. And so, another thing that you're doing in this description, which I think is so helpful, is you're talking about how you take in tools that are out there, and then you're doing some revision to ensure that it works within your local context. And so, going back to Katie and saying, "Hey I've got this!" and then she sends that back out, that's just awesome! Any of us in this field that have work out there, we love that! That's like the best thing because then that means that you're modeling the characteristics of an expert learner. And then we get to model even more effectively the characteristics of an expert learner and we all just get better and better and better! It's wonderful. It's a great example! [laughter]

MELISSA: Yeah, thank you! The support from this community has been amazing. Working with Katie has been amazing. Having you reach out to me has been amazing. Just all of the support and the feedback I've gotten. I've been so appreciative of, and it just, it's encouraging to keep moving forward with the progress.

LOUI: Well we do talk about it as a UDL family and I think we are really serious. That can sound so kind of hokey and corny to people, but it really is true because we each understand that this is a big framework, and there's so many ways into it, and so many ways to think about it and that's

just why it's so important for us to all keep this connection and communication. Yeah, it's so fun to be connected! I like it a lot. [laughter]

MELISSA: It is.

LOUI: I like it a lot! So, I just have one last question, where are you guys going with this? Maybe towards the end of the year, do you have like your next training setup or next professional development setup? What are the next thoughts?

MELISSA: So, I think in terms of UDL to finish out the year, we don't have any set PD for specifically on UDL until next school year. So, I think continuing to reach out to teachers and do that joint lesson planning time, to observe, to assist with UDL lessons to demonstrate UDL lessons. I also run a UDL club, so it's off of Katie Novak UDL Now. And we meet once a month and we discuss, whichever chapter we're on just like a normal book club would. And so I'm going to continue with that through the end of the year. And then really try to focus on, you know, where we're going to go next year.

LOUI: That's great. That's perfect. Well, I really appreciate you coming on to UDL in 15 Minutes Melissa so very, very much.

MELISSA: Thank you so very much. It's been a pleasure.

LOUI: Oh, you're very welcome. So, for those of you 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 theUDLapproach.com/media. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 Minutes, you can contact me through theUDLapproach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.