UDL in 15 Minutes with Rebecca Chappell
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 Rebecca Chappell who is a Middle School Special Education Teacher at Campton Elementary School in Campton, New Hampshire. Today, Rebecca is going to share some of the little changes she's made to her instruction and the impact it's had on her learners. Hi Rebecca, how are you?

REBECCA: I'm good. How are you, Loui?

LOUI: I'm great. Thank you very much. Thank you for coming on to UDL in 15 minutes.

REBECCA: Yes. Thank you for having me.

LOUI: Great. Will you share with us how long you've been teaching and how long you've been at Campton Elementary?

REBECCA: Sure, this is my second year as a middle school special education teacher at Campton. Prior to that I worked as a para-educator in the school, so this is my fourth year in total, I believe.

LOUI: Nice. You know, that's how I got started, too. I was a para-educator first and then I went into being a full-time teacher and there are benefits there. [overtalking]

REBECCA: Oh, definitely.

LOUI: We see things a little differently from having seen both sides of that coin. [overtalking]

REBECCA: Absolutely!

LOUI: So, what is the makeup of your school?

REBECCA: We are a public elementary school in a rural community in Campton, New Hampshire. We have a population of about 300 students for a Title I school. We have a significant free and reduced lunch population there. And we're a K through eight school. We do also have a preschool program.

LOUI: Okay, now does your school join with other districts to then feed into a high school? Is it a shared high school?

REBECCA: We're a part of the SAU 48 District, which has, I believe, eight schools in it that filter into the Plymouth Regional High School.

LOUI: Yeah, I've gotten to know New Hampshire a little bit from work with another project, and you all have kind of smaller groupings of schools K-eight that then feed into this bigger high school. So, kids meet a whole bunch of new people when they go to high school, it seems like.

REBECCA: Yes.

LOUI: So, I know that your school is part of a specific training about UDL, and we'll want to hear about that, but you learned about UDL in graduate school, right?

REBECCA: I did.

LOUI: And is there a difference in how you perceive UDL than when you were in school and how you perceive it now?

REBECCA: Oh, definitely. My exposure to UDL in my graduate work was through a course called Technology for Diverse Learners. And in that class, it was really focused on looking how we could be implementing technology in the classroom. But what was great about that class was it was the first time I had seen the guidelines, and just to start practicing and using those in terms of how I was going to incorporate technology and asking those questions. So that was my first introduction to it. Now, this year, our school is part of the CAST UDL Network in New Hampshire,

LOUI: Yeah!

REBECCA: …this is our second year with CAST and we assembled a team. So, we've gotten… for me personally, it's been a far more in depth look at the guidelines and the expert learning goals, and really talking about kind of getting into the pieces of UDL, like the access portion. And you know how to build on those guidelines and how to internalize that, or how to help the students internalize those qualities.

LOUI: Yeah. So in graduate school, you had kind of like the technology was the tool that was helping you learn about UDL, but it sounds like the CAST UDL Network experience is taking you in with a different approach that's helping you. It maybe broaden your understanding of the guidelines and the checkpoints, and just the framework in general.

REBBECA: It has. The other great thing that's come out of working with CAST has been the opportunity to participate in instructional rounds, which has allowed our team (which I think I'd like to talk a little bit about just our team as a group). We've got representation from different parts of our school. So, because we are a K to eight, our team has team teachers from the elementary school, so a third-grade teacher and a fifth-grade classroom teacher. We have representation from the specialist, our art teacher is a part of that, and as well as our administrator and special education coordinator. And in, in the last sort of instructional round that we had, a fourth-grade teacher came onto the team and the elementary school special education teacher has joined as well, which has been really great. So those instructional rounds, as part of what CAST is doing,

allows us on the team to go into observe each other's classrooms just for these brief 15 minute observations and just see how our school is implementing UDL already. And to talk about our own areas of need, which has been really beneficial this year. What came out of that for us, as our team looking at how we do school at Campton was that we really wanted to focus on examining how we're meeting that engagement piece that came up as a big area of need for us. And then seeing that we have a pretty solid approach to representation in our classrooms across the school. And then the bigger piece that we want to look at going forward is the action and expression and how we're going to move towards that in our classrooms.

LOUI: Nice.

REBECCA: So it's just been a really fantastic experience overall.

LOUI: That's great. So with the instructional rounds, is there a tool that you all are using when you're visiting one another's rooms? Or do you have a set of questions? How was that guided?

REBECCA: So our tool, I guess, would be sticky notes [laughter]

LOUI: That's awesome! [laughter]

REBECCA: That's we use. We go in with the guidelines, as a printout as well as the expert learning goals. And we sit for 15 minutes. And we go through and just make quick notes about what we see. And then come together in the instructional rounds when we meet with our CAST representative Susan Shapiro, and we look at those sticky notes and kind of set it up and we start to organize into, "Okay, where are we seeing engagement? Where are we seeing representation? Where are we seeing action and expression? And where are we seeing those expert learning goals happening in the classroom?" And, and that has really driven our ability to look at, "Oh, this is an area of need for this," or to identify our areas of strength.

LOUI: Nice. So you have the perfect partner in Susan Shapiro. She's awesome.

REBECCA: She is awesome.
, too, is awesome. She's so kind, and she's so knowledgeable, and just is she's just as like the living embodiment of lifelong learning. And then you used a term expert learning goals. And I'm not sure all the listeners will know that whole thing together. So, is it like you're taking the expert learner characteristics and considering those as goals?

REBECCA: Yes, I guess, in a way. [overtalking]

LOUI: Okay.

REBECCA: So we're looking at the characteristics of expert learners and just thinking about how when we're looking at the guidelines for engagement, and then looking sort

of on the flip side of that, we can see what that looks like teacher directed in the classroom. But what's really important to us going forward is looking at how is that translating into what our students are doing?

LOUI: Perfect. Oh, that's great. Well, I think you'll be able to give us a even better understanding if we dive into the examples that you said you wanted to share.

REBECCA: Sure.

LOUI: So you've got think two of them. So one of them is about a seventh grade language arts class, and the other is focused on your learning lab. So you can start wherever you'd like.

REBECCA: Sure. So this year, was the first year for me implementing a co-teaching model with the seventh grade language arts teacher. And that teacher and I have, you know, co-teaching in itself has its own challenges in terms of common planning time, which I think is the biggest one. And that team teacher and I, I think work really well together. And he's been really flexible with trying out new things in the classroom and just sort of making this team teaching work for us. So this year, that curriculum has a vocabulary component to it. And previously, what vocabulary looked like for the seventh grade was these terms were assigned, and then that teacher was utilizing crossword puzzles and paper handouts for practice and a written test and utilizing a tool which we have school wide called Quizlet, which is a great online resource for teachers to put in vocabulary terms and definitions. The great thing about Quizlet, too, is that students can also put terms in and create their own definitions or choose definitions that make the most sense to them. And they can supplement those terms and definitions with photos that help support their learning. It's got practice tools and games, and it has a test component. So this year, in our research writing curriculum, which is part of the seventh grade curriculum for LA, I found a series of vocabulary terms that coincided really nicely with the research that we were doing. We moved away from the curriculum vocabulary that we had on hand, and decided to look at vocabulary that we were going to be using as we were talking about this. So really, the purpose of the vocab for this unit became about just exposure. And really reinforcing some of the vocabulary around research writing things like MLA or primary source, things like that. And what I did with the classroom teacher was we moved away from these paper handouts and looked at utilizing Quizlet as the primary tool. And what we did in a week was on a Monday, would come in and as a whole class would look at those terms together. So what I would do prior to starting the classes, I would put all the terms into Quizlet, and then we would cast it through Google onto the screen in front of the classroom. And then the class would come together and we would go through and talk about the terms and we would come up with the definitions either what Quizlet provided or we would modify them so it made sense to us as a class. And students that didn't feel comfortable contributing to that part could contribute to finding a picture part. Then we would move to having the students practice independently using the practice tool on Quizlet. And then they could play a game and then we would take the assessment through Quizlet on Friday. And then that first week, what we saw was that students would kind of get that time to

practice Quizlet and they go right to the game, and then they would take the test. And that first test, the first time we tried it, scores were kind of all over the place. And so what we saw was that students were either not taking the opportunity to do the practice part and just moving to the game. And then the nice thing about that test on Quizlet is there's an option to set up the test the way you would want to be assessed. So I had encouraged students to select options, whether that was to be assessed with a multiple choice or writing in the definition, or making a match in connection. And what we saw was that students were practicing maybe with multiple choice and then testing themselves by writing in the definition. So it gave us the opportunity to meet one on one with students and talk about that, and encourage students to utilize the practice tool in a way that would be meaningful to them. So that was having conversations about if you want to practice with multiple choice, choose a, an outcome of that that's reasonable before you move on to the game. So say the first time you practice you score 40%. So practice again until you meet a goal. And a lot of those students set this goal of maybe 75%, or 80% in their practice before they move on to a game. And then we discussed with them that if you're practicing with multiple choice, doesn't it make sense to test yourself using written definitions? You haven't really learned it that way. And so students were starting to take on the responsibility of how they chose to practice. setting a reasonable goal for a practice score, and then assessing themselves in a way that made sense with how they have learned the terms. And what we saw going forward was as students started to implement that for themselves, was those vocabulary scores go up on the assessments. And I think what was most meaningful for me looking at all of that, in that process was that it gave us the opportunity to have like a study skills conversation with our students, which is an area of concern for us that students are lacking those skills, those basic study skills. And I think what was so great to see come out of it was with the students had to say their feedback about trying it this way. They were excited about doing it this way. And then some of those students, you know, were motivated to challenge themselves and try a practice that they've never tried before. They were trying the writing in a definition practice and the testing themselves that way, and seeing their own success and being able to monitor their own progress, which are goals within the guidelines in terms of engagement and action and expression, those executive functioning goals and being able to choose appropriate goals for themselves or set appropriate goals for themselves and start planning and developing a strategy for how you're going to practice and how you're going to study and how you're going to assess yourselves and just have a voice.

LOUI: Yeah, your example, it just it wraps all of the expert learner traits right in there. And you were, you know, you were using the terms even but you're been helping the students find their purpose with not only using the tool, but then the purpose of learning those pieces of language, those vocabulary terms. And when you were telling the story, I was thinking, "Oh my gosh, you guys turned authentic vocabulary versus this is the scripted vocabulary you have to learn." And so then they're motivated to keep going with it. And now they're learning how to be resourceful in their own learning of the vocabulary by using Quizlet in a way that aligns with UDL. And, of course, they're gaining knowledge. And then just like what you just said, they're becoming much more strategic

in their use of the tool and their learning process. And then they're so goal directed! This is just a great example.

REBECCA: Thanks!

LOUI: I love it. I love it. Oh my gosh. So we have managed to bump up against our time for UDL in 15 minutes. So what I'm going to ask is if we can do a separate recording, I can come back to you again for another podcast to talk about the Learning Lab because I have the feeling it's going to be just as rich of a story and people will want to hear that one too.

REBECCA: Yeah, absolutely.

LOUI: Oh, that would be so wonderful. I think for this one we'll need to just come to the end for this particular podcast. It's been a fabulous conversation. I really appreciate your willingness to talk about your entry into UDL and then sharing that rich, rich story. I know other people are going to benefit from that.

REBECCA: Thank you.

LOUI: For those listening to this podcast, you can find supplemental materials like an image montage with closed captioning, that montage audio descriptions, a transcript, and an associated blog at my website www.theudlapproach.com/media. 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 develop expert learners.