UDL in 15 Minutes with Rebecca Chappell
Episode 21
Transcript with audio descriptions

[Podcast host, Loui Lord Nelson]

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's 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 that she made for instruction, and the impact that it had on her learners. This is the second podcast we've had together and I'm so excited to talk with Rebecca again. How are you?

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

LOUI: I'm great. Thank you. So, we got to hear about you as a second-year teacher and about your school during the first podcast. So, let's just move into those little changes that you've made during this UDL journey. [Rebecca Chappell]

REBECCAL Sure. So, as I said previously, our UDL team at school had looked at our sort of area of need in terms of meeting these guidelines. What we saw was that we're really strong in representation but wanted to build our engagement for our students and also provide more opportunities for action and expression. So for me, what that translated to was just making an effort to offer my students more opportunities for choice in how they were going to access their learning and represent their knowledge and some choice and how they were going to set their own goals and plan for meeting those.

LOUI: Nice. So, here's a question. As a special education teacher, which is what I was when I was in the K 12 environment, our role is looking for those options. We're constantly doing that, so what did the framework do, how did it make you make your decisions differently, or did it broaden your decision making, how did it affect you?

REBECCA: Well, it definitely presented some challenges. You know, a lot of the goals in terms of special education are determined by a team and trying to incorporate more

choice in meeting those goals when they're tied to an IEP definitely presents a challenge.

LOUI: Uh-huh.

REBECCA: So, one of the tools that I use to assess written expression is the AIMSweb writing curriculum-based measure. So, it's a three-minute writing probe that looks at written production and correct writing sequence and spelling. And the way that that is rolled out, the standardization for that, is the students are given a sentence starter, they have one minute to plan, and then three minutes to write. [The UDL Guidelines]

So what I had done previously, and I think a lot of allowing student choice I think for, for me and maybe other educators gets held up when you're thinking about time constraints, especially with, you know, a 30 minute intervention or a 15 minute intervention that that time to touch base with students on a caseload. So, thinking about how I was going to do that in my interventions in the Learning Lab, I looked at the AIMSweb writing probe. And instead of me determining the sentence starter and putting it on the board and choosing that for them I put the work, so I have three different handouts that have all the writing prompts listed. [The classroom white board with the writing prompts listed as well as 5 steps students take to complete the task.]

And I just put them up and gave the students the opportunity to grab a whiteboard or to take a piece of paper, however they wanted to record the probe of their choice. So they were choosing the writing prompt that was most interesting to them, which I think allows them an opportunity to be more engaged with this progress monitoring tool that we use pretty frequently. I think it can get a little bit boring for them when we do that so frequently.

LOUI: Right.

REBECCA: So, they went up to the board and they chose the prompt that they were most engaged with, and the one that they were most interested in. And brought that back to their table. And they still walk through the process of one minute to plan and three minutes to write, but it gave them an opportunity to have more choice in that and allow them to be more engaged with the content. My seventh graders, as a group were definitely more willing to try it and some of my eighth graders who I've had for two years

now we're a little bit confused with the change and you know asking things like, "why are we doing it this way now?"

LOUI: Right?

REBECCA: They've gotten used to, they've gotten so used to it, which was really interesting thing for me to reflect on that, you know, these small changes just changing who's going to pick the prompt. It's a little change on my end but for a student that's had that be a certain way for so long can take a little bit longer to get used to that shift.

LOUI: Yeah.

REBECCA: Yeah, um…

LOUI: I'm just going to interject here something that is talked about a lot in the field is the fidelity of an instrument. And what I'm excited about is that you didn't alter the fidelity because you stayed with the prompts. The prompts are the same.

REBECCA: Yeah.

LOUI: It's just that the students now had a choice of which prompt they wanted to address. So, you're linking into that engagement piece and you did not disrupt that assessment. Now, there might be somebody out there that wants to argue with me about that and they are welcome to have [laughter] welcome to have a conversation because we can learn from one another.

REBECCA: Right!

LOUI: But this is, it's a rubbing point for a lot of people when they're thinking about Universal Design for Learning and they're thinking about these assessments… [A screen capture of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading, Fidelity in Assessment and Intervention: Issues of Assessment, Conceptualization, Measurement, and Analysis.]

REBECCA: Yeah…

LOUI: …that have been used in such a standardized way for so long, and understandably, and then you brought in this other dimension of the eighth graders, for example, who just the shift wasn't as easy. And for some reason, I think we have this, like, global thought as educators of "Oh kids just change so easy. We're the ones that are stuck!" And you're really articulating beautifully that we need to support our students in change because they're affected by it too and they can just get as staid in their

movements and their thinking patterns and the way they do assessments too! It's amazing! [laughter] So, sorry to interrupt, but I just say that.

REBECCA: No, I definitely agree. The other piece of this for me, just, again, it kind of all comes back to that time, the question of time or the dilemma of time really, which is originally doing these assessments and these interventions and utilizing that information to drive the goals. I was the one that was collecting all of the data, you know, so what it looked like for the students was they come into the classroom, there's this thing on the board, they have to do this assessment and then they don't really know what happens with that. [The principle of Action & Expression] So, thinking about the UDL guidelines and promoting, you know, expert learner characteristics in terms of action and expression and strategic and goal directed learners, which is what I think we all want to see for our students.

LOUI: Yes.

REBECCA: I took the opportunity to talk with the students about why we do this assessment and what I use that information for and then turned over, you know, relinquished a little bit of authority there and allowed them to have a role in monitoring their own progress. [An image of the brain with the affective networks highlighted] The AIMSweb, writing probe calls for recording data in terms of production, so total words written and then correct writing sequence and then spelling. And so I gave my students charts and allowed them to monitor their own progress, just in terms of their written production. So, after they have chosen a prompt that they're interested in, they take the minute to think, they do their three minutes. They got used to now taking out their charts and recording, "How many words did you write?" They took control of that so they're logging their progress and then they can see the fluctuations in their written production. For some of my students that allows us to have a conversation about their emotional regulation or self-regulation like when you come in and you're not ready to learn how does that maybe impact your success and your written production? How does that affect the total words written? What can you do as the student coming in, if you know you're not ready to learn, what can you do for a few minutes to get ready to participate in this to meet your goals? And sharing that information with them, whether that's I set a goal for you to reach 64 words or whatever the goal might be. When students see what

the goal is, I have one student in particular who is so motivated by reaching his goal, and when you share that with them like this is what you're trying to get to, especially with the student I see, they come ready and they're more engaged and they're ready to be there and, and it also allows for conversation around like it's okay to not meet the goal sometimes, you know, so we're not always going to hit it and that's okay, too. [The principle of Engagement] But it's nice to see them take pride in, in the work that they're doing and start to recognize their own patterns.

LOUI: Yeah. So, you've brought in that access level that recruiting interest because now they, they see relevance in this assessment that I'm sure for years past they've been like, "Okay I just gotta think for a minute, write for three minutes."

REBECCA: Right!

LOUI: Oh my gosh. And it's become more authentic for them because they have this self-connection to it. This personal connection of wanting to achieve and so that connects directly to executive functioning so their capacity to monitor their progress. You opened that door for them. [The principle of Action & Expression] They now have that capacity. They're keeping track of that. Sure, you are too, but they own those data, and then like you said, you've also wrapped in self-regulation. That's just three of the guidelines that are in the whole thing! I mean there's all this other stuff that's in there but it's a wonderful connection between those three, and I'll go back because self-regulation, like you said, it's, they think about in the beginning, how do I feel today, am I feeling good about this assessment process, or does the road feel a little bumpy for me? And, yeah, and you've been giving them skills to how to maybe calm themselves down and get themselves ready. And again, I'm going to say it's just this incredible example to help people understand how they can take a process that is highly standardized, and you're not really messing with it in the sense that they're choosing their own prompt. It's the same prompt. They would have those anyway.

REBECCA: Yeah.

LOUI: There's nothing about the assessment measurement of "Surprise!" That's not what they're measuring! What they're measuring, like you said, is their total words written, that production piece, and their spelling! They're not measuring "surprise", so that is…

REBECCA: Right!

LOUI:…not a part of the fidelity. So, the students don't have to have that high anxiety in the sense that you've lowered that, too. Oh, it's beautiful. [The principle of Engagement] It's beautiful.

REBECCA: It's a great experience. And I think just reflecting on it for me was just to see how just two small changes in how I approach that has really impacted how the students engage with it. [Rebecca Chappell] And I think it's been a success in the classroom. So that's always nice to see. And again, like you said, it doesn't change the fidelity of, of the assessment and it's still something I can utilize, and writing those goals and keeping track of that progress monitoring. For right now this is what seems to work, but it's just, I was just really surprised, and I think relieved, to see that little change. And just thinking about these guidelines and what I want my students to leave my classroom being able to do is not just be able to produce a bunch of words in a certain amount of time and half correct writing sequence and spelling. I also want them to have the skills that are that are a part of those expert learner characteristics. [The UDL Guidelines]

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. You're empowering them to start looking at any kind of assessment that they're going to have for the rest of their life, and to take those steps forward to be self-determined, and an advocate for themselves and say, "Help me understand the goal of this assessment. Help me understand what I'm trying to achieve. And what's a way that I can monitor this so that I can own my own achievement." Now they might, they're not going to say it and those words. That's what you're giving to them, and especially when we think about students who are going to be assessed a lot these are students who have disabilities, they are going to be in the assessment world for a while.

REBECCA: Right.

LOUI: And it's so empowering. I just want to thank you so much for giving them that level of empowerment.

REBECCA: Oh, thanks!

LOUI: You're welcome. Okay, so we have come to the end again of our time together. This is so perfect! I really thank you, Rebecca. This has been another wonderful story to share.

REBECCA: Yeah, thank you so much for the opportunity. [A video clip demonstrating the navigation of theUDLappraoch.com/media followed by a navigation clip of theUDLapproach.com/contact followed by podcast host, Loui Lord Nelson]

LOUI: Oh, you're welcome. So, for those listening to this podcast you'll find supplemental materials like image montage with closed captioning, that montage audio descriptions, a transcript and an associated blog at my website, www.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 www.theUDLapproach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.