

Beth Fornauf

UDL in 15 Minutes – Transcript with Audio Descriptions

[Podcast host Loui Lord Nelson followed by guest Beth Fornauf]

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 Beth Fornauf who is a PhD candidate at the University of New Hampshire. Today, Beth is going to share how she and her colleagues turned the lens of UDL on the design of their courses as well as design of the entire Teacher Residency Program. Hi Beth! How are you?

BETH: I'm doing well thank you so much for having me.

LOUI: Oh, it's great to talk to you! And, you're writing your dissertation about UDL but you also came from the classroom, right? Could you tell us a bit about your teaching background?

BETH: Yes, yes. So, I began my teaching career as a middle school special education teacher, primarily supporting students in the general classroom. And then I also spent some time working as an elementary classroom teacher. The schools that I worked in had very inclusive aims as I did as a teacher and it was really great, but I also found this whole idea of inclusive education very overwhelming. I was trying to draw on a lot of things like differentiated instruction and I felt like I was sort of looking for something like UDL but I didn't have the knowledge or the language of it at the time. So, I'm was really excited to learn about it. [The website homepage for the PhD in Education program at UNH]

LOUI: Yeah, so did you learn about it when you got into your doctoral program then?

BETH: Yeah, I did yeah. In fact, it was kind of that frustration of, of being a classroom teacher and I think, as a school, I think we felt that my colleagues and I sort of wanting to be as inclusive as possible in our instruction and not really knowing how to get there or having the means to get there. So, when I decided to go back for my doctorate that's really what I wanted to pursue was, how could we make our teaching more inclusive without feeling like we were planning 10 different lessons every single day which was what differentiated instruction was starting to feel like to me. So that's what kind of compelled me to go back to school. And then while I was there, I learned more about

UDL. I had heard of it before but I really didn't have a clear understanding until probably about three years ago or so.

LOUI: Right, and now you've really taken hold of it! [laughter]

BETH: Yeah.

LOUI: So like I said in the introduction, you're going to share how UDL has changed the way you and your colleagues design and teach your courses but UDL has also impacted your teacher residency program and why don't you describe that program so everyone has that context before we really dive in.

BETH: Sure, sure. So, the program that I work for, is the University of New Hampshire's Teacher Residency for Rural Education Program, and we call it the TRRE program, T, R, R, E. [The website homepage for the Teacher Residency for Rural Education program] It's a grant funded program, so it's funded in part by the United States Department of Education Teacher Quality Partnership Grant, and our goal is to prepare elementary and secondary math and science teachers in and for rural high needs schools across the state of New Hampshire. And this is an area where there they've experienced a lot of teacher shortages and teacher turnover as is a trend, really worldwide, with rural schools. So, part of our work is not only to prepare teachers for these schools, but to get them to want to stay and keep teaching in these schools. And one of the team's goals when they wrote the grant was in doing this to help the students in the program, who we call teaching residents, to help them draw on principles of universal design for learning. So that's what initially sort of sparked our interest in TRRE in really engaging with UDL. [The Teacher Residency for Rural Education at UNH logo]

LOUI: Nice. So, the teacher residents, are they pre service teachers or are they in service teachers?

BETH: These are pre service teachers. So, this is the graduate level program. It's 15 months so students get their master's degree in 15 months. And, yes, so it's their first teacher certification. Many of them have some limited background in the classroom before, and then they, as part of the program, they do a community based internship in the summer to learn about the place where they'll be teaching and to learn about some of the community organizations that they can draw on to support and inform their work. And then they spent a full year residency in the classroom with a teaching mentor. And

in both of those settings is where we really encouraged them to be drawing on principles of UDL. [A population map of New Hampshire showing where rural schools are located]

LOUI: Wow, so they're in the setting where they will eventually teach or they're in a similar setting a similar setting?

BETH: A similar setting. So, we have schools who we partner with for the residency for that year-long teaching experience, and then our graduates, once they graduate, they commit to teaching in a rural New Hampshire school for three years following graduation. And there's any number of schools that they can choose to work and in some cases our graduates have gone on to teach at their residency placement, and in other cases they've, they've found other sites and across the state to work at as well.

LOUI: Okay, there's so many dimensions to talk about here but I am going to pull us back to the UDL conversation! [laughter] Because, I'm like, "I have 10 other questions about this, but we can maybe get to that one later."

BETH: Sure!

LOUI: So, I really, I do love this focus on the rural schools. Like you said, it's needed. And then within that project, of course, you've woven UDL. So, that's really fabulous and it helps us go into the meat of the conversation. Lots of us use that analogy of a lens when we're talking about UDL and you shared that you turned the lens on not only yourself but your course and the program, and you've had some pretty significant epiphanies, so why don't you share those? [A Power Point slide with a diagram representing UDL and TREE]

BETH: Yes! So, when we decided to really think about how we wanted to bring UDL to the program, we initially took some first sort of tentative steps. So, as a management team, there's about 10 of us who make up the management team of the TRRE program and we're responsible for course design, program management, many of us teach courses within the program. So, we began with a shared reading of UDL Theory and Practice. Several of us had our syllabi reviewed by specialists from CAST who were really able to kind of help us apply that UDL lens of the first phase of instruction, that first, you know, initial interface with our students, and think about what our assignments were, how we were organizing the syllabus, what our meetings were. And so that was

really helpful. We also did some initial trainings with the residents, just explaining what the UDL was to them. Teaching them a little bit about it. Introducing the guidelines to them. And these initial steps, this was with our first cohort of residents, was really, really great. It really resonated with the residents. And it was feeling really powerful to us as well. But it was also starting to feel really big and a little bit unwieldy when think about just the complexity of the program. [A Power Point slide with the heading, Why UDL?] And, the multiple dimensions of UDL itself. We really wanted to explore: how are we going to keep track of bringing this UDL lens to the program? And in some ways, hold ourselves accountable. But also, we wanted to draw on the feedback that we were getting from the residents. And some of that feedback was that they wanted to see us taking up UDL has instructors, more than we were doing.

LOUI: Nice.

BETH: So, that's what we thought, you know, we really do need to turn this lens on ourselves. We don't need to just teach about UDL, we need to embrace it ourselves and model some of these practices that come along with implementing this pedagogical framework. [Residents sitting in a circle of Adirondack chairs holding a discussion in the White Mountains outside a ski resort in the summer] So, I approached some of the team members and asked if anybody would be interested in conducting a self-study on our process of bringing UDL to the TRRE program. And, initially it started with four of us. Our team has now grown to six. And we've done a range of different activities over the past, it's been about a year and a half now that we've been doing self-study. And I think probably the most powerful and significant one has been conducting a barrier analysis. We all had limited experience with UDL coming to this. And we went to the literature, we were reading a lot about UDL in higher education and specifically in teacher education. And one piece that we read shared how a department had conducted this analysis of their operations and systems and written materials to determine where the barriers were. So we decided to do this with our syllabi. So, each of the team members looked at his or her own syllabus that they taught in the TRRE program and just tried to look, you know, and see what could be a barrier for some of my students here in the way I'm teaching this, in the options that I'm providing for a curriculum, for accessing content or representing content. And so, we wrote a little bit about that. We looked at our syllabi.

We wrote some memos. We came together as a group and had a discussion about this. [A resident working with early education children followed by the UDL guidelines] And one of our team members actually said, “What if we map these onto the guidelines and see where these barriers fall?” We used the guidelines almost as a tally system or a map, really. And we found that many of our barriers were in that first horizontal row of access, which is really problematic because if the residents weren't able to access the curriculum, this had pretty significant implications for them as teachers and for their future students. So, our next step was, by after identifying all of these barriers and our courses, was to figure out ways to minimize them. So, one barrier was that we were all incredibly text heavy in our assignments. We were asking residents to read and read some more and then read on top of that, almost every week...

LOUI: [laughter]

BETH: ...in preparation for all of the classes that they were taking, which, you know, many of us in higher education that's a modality that we're very comfortable with. So, it was hard to see that. But we eventually realized, you know, looking across the syllabus, just have word read kept showing up. So, we tried to change that a little bit. We started making options for students to explore websites, to engage with Ted Talks, we needed some audio resources available when it absolutely had to be a text. [A red, yellow, and blue clay representation of how the UDL framework provides access to all learners]. Another thing that was a consistent barrier was in our options for Action & Expression. We found that we were often, not surprisingly, asking students to write to demonstrate their knowledge. And, you know, when we sort of thought we were being very UDL by saying, “Oh, you could make a video instead, or you could do a PowerPoint, or you could create a PowToon,” we weren't providing enough scaffolding for those tasks, so those options were really, what we call them is non-options, right?

LOUI: Right!

BETH: So, we wanted to think about how can we make this more meaningful? How can we scaffold these choices so that residents actually take them up and then in taking them up, are compelled to use them in their own practice for their own future students? [A resident working with an elementary student to build a balsam wood model] So, it's been this really iterative ongoing process. Right now, we're actually in the process of

looking at our second round of syllabi and the changes that we've made from our first time teaching these courses with our first cohort of students. And now we're in our third cohort of students and so it's been really powerful just to see how, how so many of us have redesigned our courses in terms of goals, in terms of sources of knowledge and expertise, who were drawing on to be the privileged voices of content, and how those might be relevant for students, as well as the ways that students are accessing our resources.

LOUI: Right. Oh, there's so much in here! So, I love that you have your four-now-six in your team and that you all wanted to do this reflection on these barriers together, and you did that mapping to discover those barriers, but it sounds like in the process of doing that, that you challenged yourselves to have a quality understanding of the guidelines and the checkpoints. I've seen people do the mapping before, but they stay at a level where maybe they're just reading, essentially, the short sheet, the, the great graphic that CAST offers us,...

BETH: Yes!

LOUI: ...and they don't take time to go beyond what's written and so then there's like a misconception of what physical action means, or even getting into the depth of what it means to minimize distraction. [The UDL guidelines followed by a Power Point slide with the three-frame cartoon of three children trying to watch a baseball game. The first frame has the three children of different heights standing on same-sized boxes. One cannot see over the fence representing inequality in access. Frame 2 has the same children standing on different sized boxes and can all see the game representing access. Frame 3, the same children looking through a chain linked fence representing equity.]

BETH: Yes!

LOUI: You know what, what does that mean? And then, so obviously you all really dug into that and then also to look at say, "Ah! Access! Oh my gosh! The primary level! This is where we need to go!"

BETH: Right!

LOUI: And then beautiful landing on this fact that even though we provide options to our learners, and I don't care if it's kindergarten or all the way up through our graduate

schools, if we don't provide some modeling of what those options look like, then our learners are less likely to choose them. Exactly what you saw, and just a great way of articulating that for everyone to hear in a, a, maybe a different setting than they expect. Because sometimes, I guess, by the time our students get to graduate school we think, "Oh yeah, we'll just give them the option. Surely, they'll link on to this because they're adult learners. They'll just do this." But you found, no we need to give them some support! [Residents sitting in a circle of Adirondack chairs holding a discussion in the White Mountains outside a ski resort in the summer]

BETH: We really do! And especially, you know, a program like TRRE, many of our students we have are coming from completely different careers. So, these are not necessarily students who are coming right out of their bachelor's program, although we do have some of those. But we have people who worked very different fields. We have military veterans. We have such a variable student population in our program. And so everybody is bringing a tremendous amount of background knowledge in very different areas, but education is its own language and it has its own systems of technology and the ways that we take up curriculum and instruction, so it was really important for us to figure out, how can we draw on all of this expertise and all of this variability that's coming to us through our students, but also give them the tools that they need to be successful in the classroom. [Three students discussing science while one is looking through a microscope]

LOUI: Well, it's going to be so interesting in so many different ways to see the longevity of this and the outcomes that your students are able to experience, both in their own careers, but then also in what they offer to their learners having experienced an environment that's designed using UDL and now they feel probably more empowered. Just going to guess that but, man, this is going to be exciting to follow. This is so great!

BETH: Thank you. That's our hope and if the, the final component of the TRRE program is two years of induction support during the residents who become graduates during their first two years of teaching. And one of our team members is actually the Director of Induction Program, so she's just now getting out to see the graduates of TRRE as they're in the field and as they're, you know, working with things that they've learned and trying to take up UDL in their practice as teacher, so it is, it's really exciting. Like I

said, it's an ongoing process, you know. We realize we'll never necessarily be finished. But I think that's one of the neat things about it is that it keeps cycling back and trying to go deeper and trying to learn more. [Beth Fornauf followed by a video clip demonstrating theUDLapproach.com website, followed by podcast host, Loui Lord Nelson] So it's been really powerful.

LOUI: Well, I gotta say, from our short conversation here this sounds like an incredibly well-designed program, so kudos to all who are involved in creating and designing and continuing to update this. It's, it's beautiful. I love the induction part, that follow up.

BETH: Thank you.

LOUI: We just know it's so needed.

BETH: Yes!

LOUI: Oh! Well we have definitely reached our 15 minutes so I'm going to draw us to a close, but I thank you again and again, Beth, for coming on to UDL in 15 minutes and sharing your story.

BETH: Oh, thank you so much for having me. I really enjoyed it.

LOUI: You're very, very welcome. So, for those who are listening to this podcast, you can find supplemental materials like an image montage with closed caption that montage with audio descriptions, a transcript and associated blog at my website, which is the www.theUDLapproach.com/media. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL and 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.