

Diana-Grace Morris, Bonni Ramage, and Catherine Wong
UDL in 15 Minutes - 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 Diana-Grace Morris from Te Awa Kairangi Cluster 29 in Wainuiomata, New Zealand, and Bonni Ramage and Catherine Wong from Konini Primary School, also in Wainuiomata, New Zealand. Today these professionals are going to share how UDL help teachers support the needs of specific students, and how those teachers opened that support to all of their learners. Hello to all of you! How are you?

DIANA-GRACE: Good morning! Mōrena!

CATHERINE: Mōrena!

BONNI: Good morning.

LOUI: It's wonderful to talk to all of you. Catherine and Bonni, could you share a bit about Konini Primary School?

Catherine: Yeah. So up on the neck of New Zealand on the bottom of the North Island. We're in the capital city of Wellington. We're about half an hour drive to our beautiful school and we sit in the most gorgeous valley with lovely bush so it's a lovely setting to come to school every day. And we're a small school and about 180 students. And we teach students from year one to year six, and then they go to intermediate at another school and then they go off to college for their senior years.

Bonni: Yeah, so our schools are quite multicultural. We have a large group of Māori and Pacifica students at our school, so then something we really value is the diversity that we have here. And probably one of the things that's been quite important to us over the past couple of years is that we've been really developing our school curriculum based on the work of Valerie Hannon. So thinking about what it means for our students to thrive in a transforming world. And so, our curriculum is really localized based on our students, their needs, and the needs of our community.

LOUI: Wonderful. And Diana-Grace, could you share a little bit about Te Awa Kairangi Cluster 29?

DIANA-GRACE: Sure, I am a resource teacher for learning and behavior, known here in Aotearoa, New Zealand as an RTLB. And I'm a member of a team of 20 educators and we are invited into schools to support schools with either one-to-one referrals with children, or whole staff, or whatever the need is for that school. And we're invited in to support and guide what is required. And we're called Te Awa Kairangi because we connect to those schools in the Hutt Valley area along the awa, which is the main river that leads out into our harbor.

LOUI: Oh, that's wonderful. That's a neat explanation. Thank you. So, as I said before, you're in New Zealand and people from over 56 countries listen to UDL in 15 minutes now, so that means a lot of variability and how we deliver our education. So, what are a couple of things you want to highlight about education in New Zealand?

CATHERINE: Okay, so our curriculum as from level one to level eight so from that primary right through to the end of the secondary education. And the main vision is that we have students who are confident, connected, and actively involved lifelong learners. And so, sitting alongside that, we have key competencies where they focus on managing themselves, relating to others, their thinking skills, and also our values of respect, integrity, and our leading areas as well as focusing on our cultural diversity, inclusion and community engagement.

BONNI: Another really important thing in our curriculum, is that there's a big focus on teaching as inquiry. So, there's a nice re-quote that talks about a centering teaching strategy works differently in different contexts, for different students. Effective pedagogy requires that teachers inquire into the impact of their teaching on their students, and that's certainly a focus that we have in our school.

LOUI: Fabulous.

CATHERINE: Yeah, I think that what I would add and what I've noticed in my role is that a number of schools around New Zealand are starting to have conversations around the UN Sustainability Development Goals, and how those connect with the local curriculum, so that they are a lot more visible. And one other second thing is conversations around what does it actually mean to de-colonize our curriculum and the way we see school and education in Aotearoa, New Zealand and it involves engaging more with the indigenous-specific frameworks around Māori and specific students.

LOUI: That's brilliant. I think it's interesting for everyone to hear how all around the world we're looking for ways to make our curriculum and our instruction inclusive of all of our learners. So, it's just fabulous to hear these different examples. Thank you for sharing that. We talked earlier and you shared a story about a student who was not speaking in class, and this kept him from participating fully, but his teacher saw that barrier was not in the learner and she chose to offer him some support. So, could you share that story.

CATHERINE: So, it's Catherine talking here. In the junior school we had a number of students who were reluctant talkers and so our focus on UDL was how we can reduce the barriers for those students and support them and the writing. And so this classroom teacher looked at the framework and decided that with the Representation for Language and Symbols to create a writing prompt that had like the who, the why, the where, and the how, and she got engaged with the family to find out all the key people in his life and the places that he likes to go to. So, she got all the people, the tools, and the places and the things that he's interested in to this lovely support card so that the child could flip through and independently begin to write a story because in the past, he would just sit there and draw. And because of this barrier of not wanting to communicate, couldn't get his ideas down.

LOUI: Right. What I love hearing is that involved in this was that inclusion of the parents and checking in with them. And I think when we focus on Recruiting Interest, sometimes educators don't always think outside of the classroom, they don't think beyond that student, so I think it was just brilliant that you all turned to the parents and were able to pull some ideas from them. That's really exciting! So, where did it go from there?

CATHERINE: So, the class teacher realized this was great for this student, but then when you think about the diversity in the class, that she identified other students that this tool would be useful to. And so, she, you know, she's got about three or four kids in the class who's using the same tool. So, you know, it went from one person but then went wider.

LOUI: And that is such a wonderful example of how we might differentiate, actually, for one student, but then what UDL helps us do is remember that we need to provide opportunities and options to all of our learners and help them grow in that decision making, and that these other students said hey, that's actually a good resource for me

to use, and for the teacher to acknowledge that the resource wasn't limiting those students at all and in fact it was helping them grow, and that's just, that's really exciting to hear. And I know you guys have even another story about another student so can you share that one, too?

BONNI: Hi, Bonni. I'll talk about this so I co-teach in the year four to six senior class with another teacher who is beginning teacher so this is her first-year teaching in the classroom. And what she was noticing, she was working with a group of readers who were quite high functioning readers, so reading above the expected level for the age group, and she was noticing that there was a student in that group who seemed really disengaged in her learning, and not really joining in or participating in the guided reading sessions. And so, she decided to sit down and have a conversation with her about what she was finding challenging or what she wasn't enjoying just to get some student voice about maybe what her barriers were and how we could support her and her learning, and she decided that she wanted a little bit more extension. So, she was really keen to be moving on and reading some novels. So something we use in New Zealand are school journals, and these are sort of short articles and stories or poems that link quite nicely to the topics and context we're learning about in the classroom. And because she'd been reading these for a while, she felt like actually doing a novel study would be more engaging for her. So, my co-teacher took this on board, and she actually put out a message on Facebook, we have a New Zealand teachers page, so she asked other educators for some advice about novels that would be at that level that these students were reading it, that would cover some of the topics of context that we're learning about in the classroom. And once she received these, she put them together for the students and said see if these are some suggestions about the topics that we're learning about. Have a look find out some information about these books. Do a bit of reflection and decide what is it that you think will be most engaging for the group. So together those students worked together about these books and found out what they thought would be most engaging for them to read about, and from there they've planned a novel study, and I've been doing a novel study of those, too. So, we've noticed a real shift in the way the student is thinking about their learning and engaging in the reading there. And we've also noticed that this has actually shifted her engagement across

curriculum areas. So I think really having that voice and that ownership in her learning has made a big difference to how she feels about herself as a learner.

LOUI: To have this example is so exciting to me because it's an example of extension, like that's the word you used Bonni, and understanding that this learner was disengaged because she just wasn't feeling challenged. I think a lot of times people narrow UDL to thinking about supporting learners who maybe need extra support and scaffolding and they think of that in a different way. And this one, it's the flip, and I'm hoping that people take to this because you've given such a wonderful, wonderful example of how, when we interview that student, and find out, oh this is why she's disengaged and, oh we need to provide her with some extension, with some more challenge, and then she took that on, and then to have other students blossom with this, that it's just so wonderful to hear you guys must really love where you're working, and it sounds like UDL is spreading really nicely among your staff. Is that true?

BONNI: Yeah, this is Bonni. I think so. Like the story that Catherine talked about with the student within the classroom she co-teaches in, there is something you know that writing framework is something that we've actually applied to a couple of students in our classroom as well, so I think what's really nice is we make time and we get to share our stories and share what we're trying and think about how, not only will it work in our classroom but how do we apply it to other classrooms as well and who might be the learners that might be affected from the different things that we're trying.

CATHERINE: It's Catherine here. I just want to say Diana-Grace did something at one of our P.L.D. sessions about making students shine. And that's something that stuck with me, you know, for students who find learning challenging. You know, what are we doing to make sure that they're feeling positive and good about themselves and their learning and how they see themselves as a learner, so that's something that's, you know, resonates really strongly with me.

DIANA-GRACE: And it's Diana-Grace here, that when working with the staff and we're talking about just doing one small thing, one small thing in the area of engagement, one small thing in terms of representation or action expression. It's just one little thing that you can try in the classroom. So that this is one little thing you don't need to be doing

this really big thing and get beside the laminator and the photocopier and make this amazing resource. It just might be something small.

LOUI: Yeah, so you're really making UDL feel accessible to everyone.

DIANA-GRACE: Totally. Totally. Because I think, from my experience, and just the absolute joy and delight of working in Konini school, is that everyone is committed to inclusion. Everyone is committed to equity. It's just how does that play out and how does that look for us when you walk into a classroom and how we approach teaching and learning.

BONNI: Yeah, it's Bonni here. And I think one of the things that I really liked when we started looking at the UDL framework was, you know, we talked about it, that it's just effective pedagogy, you know, and it's just variability is the norm, so it's predictable and we can plan for it, and make sure that we're thinking about what it looks like in our classroom. And so, I think for me that was a shift because what I found was often when I was planning, I was thinking about the outcomes and the tasks. And so this has put a real lens on my planning for me about how I can add in those different areas like the Engagement and the Action and Expression to make sure that the learning is accessible for everybody so I'm not just thinking about the outcome but I'm actually thinking about the opportunities that I give my students to reach those different outcomes. And I think that's quite exciting.

DIANA-GRACE: Diana-Grace here. One of the things that we talked about was that we also have that variability within our staff, and that the way we will all approach things will be different. And I think that, it was just a really positive message for everybody to hear. That we weren't going to approach Universal Design for Learning in the same way. And it wasn't just what you know about UDL, but the sense you make of it in this time and at this moment.

LOUI: Absolutely. Well, we have definitely reached our 15 minutes and it always goes so quickly, but I want to thank each of you, Bonni, and Catherine and Diana-Grace, for participating. We are talking across oceans! I'm here in the eastern time zone of the United States and you're there in New Zealand and the wonders of technology brought us together. Thank you so, so much.

ALL: Thank you! You're welcome! [overtalking]

very much.

CATHERINE: Ka kite ano

DIANA-GRACE: Thank you very much, Loui.

LOUI: So for those 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 www.theUDLapproach.com/media. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 minutes, 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.