UDL in 15 minutes
Laura Christie – Transcript with Audio Descriptions

[Podcast host Loui Lord Nelson followed by Laura Christie]

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 Laura Christie, who's an English language Arts teacher at Sand Creek Intermediate Fishers, Indiana. Today, Laura is going to share how she used UDL-driven strategies to improve the reading and writing of her students. Hi Laura, how are you?

LAURA: I'm doing great!

LOUI: Great! It's so great to talk to you! Thank you so much for being here. Can you tell me a little bit about Sand Creek Intermediate? {A screen shot of the Sand Creek Intermediate homepage]

LAURA: Sure. So, Sand Creek Intermediate is a part of Hamilton Southeastern, and we are in Fishers, Indiana, which is a suburban school district outside of Indianapolis. We have about 1,000 students, little bit under, and we teach fifth and sixth grade, so just the two grade levels and our building.

LOUI: Okay. And how long ago did Hamilton Southeastern make that decision? How long has it been like that, you know?

LAURA: We were, I think, that the first intermediate building was built in 98', and then they extend it to have a second building which was Sand Creek Intermediate. And then from there, they've kind of adjusted their strategy, so there are two other buildings that have fifth and sixth grade but they are partnered with a junior high. [A screen shot of the Hamilton Southeastern demographic data] Our district is in a large growing system, and just trying to keep up with all the growth. They tried to minimize the number of buildings on those second two that came after with a different philosophy.

LOUI: Ah…okay, okay. So, we are going to be talking about your English Language Arts classroom eventually, but I know that you just finished a really excellent principalship program at Butler University and how do you think that's affected the way you teach and the way you think about learning? [The Butler University EPPSP homepage]

LAURA: Well, I just finished Butler EPPSP in December, and I picked that program primarily because it was exploratory and hands on. You attend class, you know, Tuesday and Thursday nights and it was a wide variety of different people. So, we had people in our cohort that were private school teachers, charter school, and public, and then a wide range. So you had some preschool all the way through high school. You know, the elementary, middle school and just the different perspectives. And listening to that whole picture of what goes on when a student starts school and goes all the way through, broadening your perspective of, you know, what does it take to educate a student? And then I think in looking at that, it really has extended my ability to think just about what our schools can do a better job of in serving all students and meeting all of their needs. And then when you have been in that classroom view of "I want my classroom to serve all learners," and then you start to shift into the admin view, you really start to see it as a whole school and even potentially, what does it look like to make an entire district meet the needs of all of its learners? [Students demonstrating the different ways information is represented to them]

LOUI: Yeah, nice, nice! Well, I'm sure we're going to get into that conversation with UDL when we talk about this next part, but you were telling me that you have two blocks that you've worked with to improve their reading and writing and one is an inclusion block, and then one is a high ability block. And so, (a) talk about those, but then also, I'm just wondering, are you using the same strategies with them? Are you using different strategies? How is that working?

LAURA: Well, it has been a really fun journey for me. I came in to ed with the background of special education and elementary education. And over time, you know, when you do a nice job, I think, with students you, you also get tagged to do high ability. So, in my inclusion block, I have quite a few students with autism, and then a learning disability or different 504 situations. And when you're working alongside of meeting needs, you try a lot of different strategies. [A student kneeling with a tablet in front a classroom poster guiding how to do deep reading] And then, when you're working with high ability, there are some similarities and strategies that I've used over the years, but I think since I've started UDL, I've realized that some of the technology things where we're talking about tools that we have as a 21st century learner with, with a one-to-one

device, why can't my high ability students also tap into those tools? And what would it be like if they did? So, things like teaching them voice to text annotation. Why would I just assume that that would only be something somebody with a resource need might benefit from? So that was sort of where my interest was piqued. What would this do? And then also, when you look at some of the neuroscience research that has come out where when we listen to text or reread text we get the same "light up" process in our brains. It really made me realize that it wouldn't matter if my advanced students also tapped into the audio side of our resources for like social studies, for example. [A handmade poster with guidance on how to respond to text] So that was kind of what just got me started.

LOUI: Nice. So, when you were starting with that, did you have conversations with other teachers? With your administration? Did you have anybody asking questions or did you just kind of keep going with it and just kind of saw how it was working with the students?

LAURA: So, we're kind of in a unique situation. I probably am the only teacher in my building that's formally working on UDL. Our teaching and learning team at the district level this year decided to offer cohorts of professional development where you could pick from this catalog of ideas. And most of them were related to math or reading and writing workshop, but I noticed that UDL was available. And it was being led by our district intervention specialist, Laura Rinderknecht, and I immediately knew that that was where I was headed. I liked the idea of having a yearlong group to be able to problem solve, dig in, and talk about things. [A screenshot of the CAST LearningDesigned Credentials page] And our cohort has had the opportunity to also go through CAST and get the first level-one micro credential as a part of our professional development. So, that group has been instrumental for me to be able to talk about what I'm trying, and we have been able to dialogue ways to use the Microsoft resources like Immersive Reader and different options or apps that might also be helpful, but the makeup of the group is about 10 resource or speech teachers, and three regular classroom teachers, and I happened to be the only one of the group that also has some high ability students.

LOUI: Wow. So, you were able to bounce ideas and think through things with some of your colleagues is what it sounds like.

LAURA: Yes,

LOUI: That's fabulous! That just helps so much, I think, not only with information sharing but confidence building.

LAURA: Oh great! I mean it's a great group, to be able to dialogue and with it being kind of heavy on the side of, you know, interventions and resource, you do get into the weeds a little bit on making it seem like UDL is only for students with IEPs, but clearly it's not. And so, just keeping that voice going that these strategies can be used for all learners because we're really working on improving the learning environment for everybody instead of just looking at one student's needs. And I think so many times in education, we've just looked at that isolated IEP rather than troubleshooting a bigger picture, [The UDL Guidelines] which is what has made me so excited about UDL because it is that broader scheme that we have access to with the guidelines.

LOUI: Yeah. So, do you have a more specific lesson or a unit that you did that would kind of exemplify your use of these different pieces of technology or any of them?

LAURA: So, one of the things that I really wanted to focus on was representation options. [A video capture of Laura's representation survey] So, I started with surveying the students about what they felt they would want. Do they learn best if they have a video? Do they learn best if they have audio support? Do they want audio support on vocabulary words that are unknown? And do they prefer reading on a digital platform or do they want to read in the traditional textbook or do they need both? Do they want on their desk the iPad and also the paper version of their textbook, and what would that look like? And I asked them if they would be willing to try out different strategies to find a just right fit. So, we spent time, mostly with our social studies curriculum because it happens to have a textbook variation along with the interactive digital text. So, I was just allowing them to explore. And I did that with both groups. [The principle of representation] So, my inclusion block had the same lesson of, you know, these are your tools. These are your access points. Try what you would like. And then after each time they tried, we would talk it out. We would just reflect what worked. What did you notice? What surprised you? What was distracting? We really just had a nice dialogue about the different options and did they feel that something was more effective for them.

LOUI: Nice. And so, then you did the same thing, sounds like, with the high ability

students. The tools, the access points, then talking out what really worked for them. [A screen shot of the Hamilton Southeastern Canvas page]

LAURA: Absolutely. And then, alongside it, we use Canvas and Canvas, in the fall, around the exact same time we added Immersive Reader to your pages so they could tap into directions now with Immersive Reader on Canvas, so it was just kind of all coming together at the same time. And I have noticed that it's pretty equal. Both classes, if you look at the number of students who are tapping into the audio, it's fairly equal in both classrooms. They both are liking that feature. And then it's sort of trickle down into what I was selecting for resources outside of the textbook. We have access to online databases through the Public Library, and one of the best ones is TrueFlix Scholastic [A screen shot of the TrueFlix Scholastic homepage] because they take a video, so, if you have a nonfiction topic, there's always a video that is about two minutes that the students can use to engage the text, and then they can make the decision on that digital text if they want it read to them or not. And then if they get beyond the text, there is a link for outside sources that they can use that are all reputable, you're not going to have to worry that they're going someplace on the internet that's going to not be an appropriate source. So that just kind of shapes what you're deciding to use and what might be most effective for everybody.

LOUI: I was thinking and reflecting on the high ability students because there's a, I think, it's a myth, that the high ability students are going to lean toward using the different supports because they just want to do the things that they've always done or maybe they just they want to read the text versus using the digital supports, but I think it's a myth, and it's sounding like it is a myth, at least in your experience.

LAURA: I really feel like it is a myth. [Students demonstrating the different ways information is represented to them]

I think they found more engagement with the audio support.

LOUI: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

LAURA: It's kept them focused and on task, and we're still doing a lot of the other reading strategies that I've always done where we are reflecting, and having great conversation, and students are creating their own inquiry questions based upon what they've read, what else do they want to learn and extending, all of those great response

strategies that you teach where you're teaching students to find text evidence, but they seem to know where to go better after they have read and heard the text in both situations. So, if we think about a learner that takes the input best by the auditory. That's anyone that could be anybody. The advanced or resource doesn't determine that that's your best input.

LOUI: Right. It's just so interesting. And then, you collected some data, so talk about that! [A video capture of the feedback survey]

LAURA: Right, so I gave them the entry form. And then we zoomed in just on the strategies that they liked, and overall it's about 50/50, some will say that they prefer to read it without the audio support, and the others will say that they, they like to have the audio support as they are reading so both groups that was very balanced, which goes along with the idea that we just want to offer that choice. [An example of sketch notes by Tom Hanicack]

LOUI: Fabulous. You also had some information and a story about notetaking. Can you share that?

LAURA: Yeah, so absolutely! When you teach the different representation options whether you want to take it and just the text or digital, I was also exploring how to help students find the best note taking strategy for them. So, we started with the traditional where you use a subheading and then you put bullet points for that section of your main ideas or key information. Then I taught them how to sketch note. So, we went through different sketch noting strategies, and then some of my students wanted to work on just writing a summary paragraph from what they had read. So, after we went through the different strategies, I allowed them to choose the one that they felt most connected to. We had done some reflecting like a one to four, which one helped them be able to explain it to someone else, and that's the strategy I want you to try when you read this particular passage today, and we just kept going back to the strategy that was working best for them, and it's all about choice.

LOUI: Absolutely. I think another part of that that's so intriguing to me is that when we have our students try those different choices that sometimes they land on one that maybe they didn't prefer it because they thought it was harder, but then in the end it helped them more. And so, through this reflection process, I'm betting, they still went

back and they were like, "Okay. Well it seemed kind of hard now, but I still seeing better outcomes." Did you hear about that from any or your students? [Students demonstrating the different ways information is represented to them]

LAURA: Definitely! I think some of them were actually a little bit against sketch noting, which you would think they would want to do more of, but they thought that it had to look a particular way, so they were thinking of it more along the lines of art. But when you took away the fact that it could look, because it was for you, however it needed to because it was just designed for you to make that visual picture in your mind to be able to remember the information, many of them decided that that was great, but they also started to make it their own. So many were sketch noting and they were also using bullet points, so you were just seeing this wide variety of a blend. And that was awesome because they were attaching to a certain strategy.

LOUI: Right. Well, I really appreciate having this conversation with you. This has been fabulous! I think you've given some great input on how we can use these strategies across all of our different students and the fact that you have these two different blocks, you're doing these same things, and then you collected these data to let you know that the students are… they're choosing and using and excelling in both of these blocks that just so interesting so thank you so much for sharing that.

LAURA: You're welcome! [video clips of the website theudlapproach.com followed by podcast host Loui Lord Nelson]

LOUI: 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, 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 and revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.