

UDL in 15 Minutes
Transcript – Robin Dazzeo

[Podcast host Loui Lord Nelson followed by podcast guest Robin Dazzeo in a green striped dress]

LOUI: In response to how most educators are delivering instruction right now, I'm hosting a special series of UDL in 15 minutes episodes where I'll interview educators about their use of UDL to design online learning experiences. If you want to share your experiences, contact me via my website, www.theUDLapproach.com.

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 Robin Dazzeo, who's a dual-licensed high school English teacher at Mililani High School in Mililani, Hawaii. Today, Robin is going to share how she is shifting from using UDL to plan for face-to face-environments to using UDL to design online environments. Hi, Robin How are you?

ROBIN: I am doing well.

LOUI: Wonderful, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview because we have quite the time difference. I'm over on the East Coast and you're in lovely Hawaii.

I am, thank you Yes, I'm very excited to be here and it's a great way to start my Thursday morning. It's actually a holiday here in Hawaii. I'm excited to be able to have the time to be able to have this discussion.

LOUI: Oh, awesome. So, can you tell us a little bit about Mililani High School? [The homepage for Mililani High School]

ROBIN: So, Milani High School is a suburban High School, located on the island of Oahu. We are the third largest High School on the island. We have a student population of about 2,600 students right now. We do have students that are in military families, so it can be transient at times, and we have students that come from other areas of the island to access what we offer at Melanie High School. We have a large AP population, and a diverse student make up with Pacific Islanders, Native Hawaiians, and Caucasians, and African Americans, but primarily an Asian and Pacific Islander. [A map of the Hawaiian Islands]

LOUI: And you were telling me something really interesting about the schools in Hawaii, they're all connected. They're all one district, right? Can you explain that?

ROBIN: Sure. Well, that is something that is, I think, unique to Hawaii. We are one school system, composed of many districts, but still under the same school system. And we have one union that represents the entire state, which is odd in itself but certainly odd for a state that is made up of islands. There was not equity across any one island, just like there wouldn't be any across any one state, but it certainly changes the game when you're talking about some of our outer islands that are quite remote.

LOUI: Yeah, that is really interesting! And I think you're right. I think it is the only state that does that. And I think that's gonna have some implications for what we're going to talk about a little bit later, but first I want to ask you about your teaching background, Have you always been a high school teacher?

ROBIN: I have not, I actually come from Rhode Island. And so, I'm familiar with where you're at. And I owned a small wine tasting company, when we moved out to Hawaii, my own children had a difficult time adjusting to life here on the islands and so we homeschooled for a year. [The stone and granite sign saying Mililani High School Home of the Trojans] And the most of the people that we had met were substitute teachers, and homeschool moms, primarily moms. So, when my students went back to a public education, I decided I wanted to mix my New England with my Hawaiian lifestyle and I didn't want to have a fast-paced business life anymore, I really wanted to know that I could take the time to enjoy where we lived. I started sub teaching. I was asked to cover longer and longer assignments and I thought, "Well heck, if I'm gonna do this, I might as well go back and become a teacher!"

LOUI: Right. So, you teach 10th and 11th grade, but you have this dual license, so was that part of that plan too?

ROBIN: It was not so my bachelor's degree is in psychology and I went through the University of Hawaii, which offers a post-bac degree in special education. So, I had the unique opportunity to try on a career. I knew that high school was the setting that I wanted and I really, really enjoyed working with students with disabilities and finding out how I could help them access curriculum. So, I made the decision to get my post-bac certificate in special education teaching, it was a two-year program. And then they made it really attractive for me to continue on at UH, and get my master's in education with a focus in special education. [Robin posing with a graduating student who has layer of leis and a flower head piece] So, for four years I co-taught as a special education teacher, and this school year I was offered the opportunity to move into a general education co-taught setting where I was the general education teacher.

LOUI: Perfect. Well, then this is the awesome segue to start talking about this shift that you're that you're making. You haven't necessarily done a lot of the online, it sounds like from our previous conversations, but what steps are you taking? How are you starting this?

ROBIN: Our curriculum is a digital curriculum primarily, we do offer multiple modes of learning for the students in our classroom, but we do primarily use a digital curriculum in our face to face setting. So, the digital part is a little easier for me to grasp. It's the distance part that is creating the challenge. [Robin posing with her co-teacher]

LOUI: Interesting. So, talk more about that. How is that the, the challenge?

ROBIN: While I don't have a lot of experience teaching remotely, I do have a lot of recent experience as a student learning remotely. So, I'm reflecting back on what I found worked for me and what my professors offered me in terms of engagement and making sure I had access, and the like.

LOUI: Nice. So then what are some of the things that you're going to start with working with students remotely then.

ROBIN: Sure. Well, I feel like over the three quarters we've had with our students. I do feel like I've gotten to know them rather well, and I do have a good sense of what their access is and what their abilities are. We did get a little bit of a reprieve knowing what we might be coming back to so we were kind of able to assess where our students were being able to access an online curriculum from home, but I know that I need to be flexible and show compassion, which are things that we would do in the classroom anyway. But then also using familiar platforms like our Google Classroom. Being mindful that not every student has access and even if they do have access, perhaps they are sharing that access with a, with a younger sibling, perhaps their parents are an essential worker and they're actually taking care of a younger sibling. So just trying to think about all of those things that are going on in their day to day life that we may not know about. [Robin posing with five young students and all doing the hand tight symbol]

LOUI: Yeah. And are you all moving forward with the traditional format of assignments and grading and assessments or has that shifted with this new environment?

ROBIN: Well it seems to shift daily. But where we are today is not where we were Monday. We have been extended to an online curriculum through April 30 here in Hawaii. However, we are offering enrichment activities only that we cannot hold students responsible for either in participation or in grading. So that is nerve racking, but

I'm noticing that a lot of schools across the country are in that similar position. So, it's a real delicate balance of creating an engaging curriculum where the students want to participate. But then also being okay letting go of things like assessments, because well, it's not being graded. [The principle of engagement]

LOUI: Right. So, you're really going to be looking at that principle of engagement and how to truly recruit their interest. When I think back to this knowledge that you have of being flexible for them and building that compassion, and showing that compassion, and those points of authenticity, going down the guidelines right sustaining effort and persistence so putting things in place so that they're maybe doing some collaborative work? I don't know, is that the direction that you're thinking about going?

ROBIN: I am. And I think most importantly, my first, and I'm starting now even though we're not technically starting our digital curriculum until the seventh of April, my first start is checking in with my students. Well, and quite honestly, I missed them. I really miss them. You know, we all look forward to our breaks we need them as teachers. They need them as students, we need them as parents, but boy do I miss that daily face to face, even with my students that can sometimes, you know, make you reconsider your career choice. I just miss them. [Robin posing with two students and two colleagues in front of a Mililani High School logo] I set up a virtual half hour just a quick, let me try out this virtual platform, and only two students showed up, but it was two more than I was expecting and it was really fun. It was awkwardly fun, but we met online for a half hour and we just kind of showed each other our animals and talked about what it was like to be inside and things like that. So, I think just making sure they're doing okay and they know that we can still continue to build and foster relationships, even though we're not able to meet face to face. [The principle of engagement]

LOUI: Right. Yeah. I think the other thing that's come to mind for me, as you were just talking is, under self-regulation we talk about facilitating those personal coping skills and strategies, and of course we're focusing in on not just the academic, but also the social-emotional. And it sounds like you're going to be really focusing on the social-emotional part at first and building in some tips for your students to think about as they're moving along in daily life, as we all are, and what kind of coping mechanisms do they have? What strategies do they have for themselves to keep their own mindset positive? Is that things you're thinking about? [Robin posing with two of her students]

ROBIN: Absolutely. And I think that's why when we do start to offer this enrichment program, the first thing is to just check in and see where are they? And how are they doing, and how are they coping, and what do they need from us socially and emotionally before we talk about what can we offer them as enrichment?

LOUI: Yeah. So, we have just a little tiny bit of time left, but touch on how you thought about representation and action and expression within this time of enrichment and how you think about building those pieces in. [The UDL framework graphic organizer]

ROBIN: For me, Universal Design for Learning, just makes sense. So, the things that I'm considering is, how am I going to meet the needs of all my learners? How am I going to provide equitable access? And maybe most importantly, how am I going to engage their individual interests and requirements for learning when there are no requirements for learning? That they do not need to check in and they cannot be graded. So, some things that I'm thinking about doing is using Google Classroom which is a familiar platform for all of us. And making sure that I have a weekly agenda posted where I'm including my office hours, when I'm checking email, when I'll be on Zoom or WebEx. Making sure they have our remind code if they need it. I think it's really important for self-regulation to offer them the ability to have a daily attendance, so that there's some familiarity with the normal school process, but also for my knowledge to know who and how often, and maybe more importantly, who isn't attending so that maybe I can do some sort of reflection on that and reach out. So, I think I do that with a Google form. Students are very familiar with that it's quick and easy. And then have a weekly assignment where the assignments are presented on Monday and maybe due Friday, and offer my directions in both a written format but then maybe a prerecorded video for them as well. And make sure that I have links to everything that I want them to find rather than asking them to "research". I think that's one big difference. I want to have more structure with a digital platform that my face to face, because I'm not there to help the students, as they're exploring on their own. [A selfie of Robin in her yellow Mililani High School shirt sitting with her son following by video captures of theudlapproach.com, followed by podcast host, Loui Lord Nelson]

LOUI: Yeah, yeah, that was great. That was fabulous. This was wonderful. This was wonderful. Robin, I really appreciate you taking this time and really giving a concise description, but you gave us all a context of what you're all experiencing out there but then also how you are making this shift from that face to face into this purely digital environment, and your willingness to have the conversation because like you said you're newer to UDL, and this is all new, and it's up in the air but thank you for your risk taking and bravery and coming on to UDL in 15 Minutes with me.

ROBIN: Yes, thank you so much for having me on and for allowing me the opportunity to really use the UDL framework to think about how I can still provide accessibility and engagement for my students.

LOUI: Oh, you're so welcome, you're so welcome. 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. 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.