

UDL in 15 Minutes Transcript
With Megan Gross and Lisa Yamasaki

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.

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 Megan Gross, who's a teacher on special assignment at the Poway Unified School District in San Diego, California, and Lisa Yamasaki who's a special education inclusion teacher in the Davis Joint Unified School District in Davis, California. Megan and Lisa are going to share how they are using UDL to help others and themselves design lessons and online environments for students with disabilities. Hi Megan and Lisa, how are you both?

MEGAN: Hi Loui, it's great to be here with you today.

LISA: Thanks for including us.

LOUI: Oh, you're welcome, you're welcome. It's so great to talk to both of you. And so, thank you for coming on and. First, I want people to know that that you two, and a wonderful colleague Jenny Kurth, who is an associate professor at the University of Kansas (Rock Chalk Jayhawk), created a website called Distance Learning for Special Education and it focuses on open source materials that can be adapted to fit the needs of students with significant disabilities. And I will put that link on my website with this podcast, I'll also put the email address people can use to send in resources they're using. Is there anything else that either one of you want to add to that?

MEGAN: We're just so grateful to the disability community. It's been really exciting every day to open up our email for this project, and we have messages from people across the United States, in the UK, in Canada, sharing their ideas and tools that they've developed for their students and families, and then we've been able to upload those. So, it's just really cool and I feel like it gives hope and connection and a time when we're all feeling kind of stressed and disconnected.

LOUI: That's fabulous.

LISA: And it's been great to also have people from all around vet so many of the

resources and new open source tools, and so many of the technology tools that are out there, give a description and use for what they are. Because everybody's getting bombarded by so much information these days.

LOUI: Yeah, and I love the word you just used, Lisa. Vetting. So they're, they're, they're vetting this stuff. They're saying this is how it worked for me or this wasn't so great. That's so key because it, it saves so much time and like you both just said being bombarded by all these resources and then being able to negotiate through them and find, okay, this one is going to work for what I need it to do. That's brilliant. So Megan I'm going to start with you. Tell us a bit about Poway Unified and your teaching background.

MEGAN: So, I've been teaching in the Poway Unified School District for the past, almost seven years now, and we're a school district in San Diego County. It's a large suburban district. We have 36,000 students that we serve. And it's really exciting times right now to see teachers coming together and sharing resources and figuring out how do we do distance learning for families. And then prior to moving to San Diego, my family's originally from Northern California, and my first teaching position was in Davis California, where, Lisa works. And she was my first beginning teacher, mentor teacher. So, I feel so lucky to have incredible mentors. And Dr. Jennifer Kurth was my last mentor teacher for student teaching, so I got to share a classroom with her my first year. And there's literally nothing better than having an amazing mentor teacher share your classroom space and help you out day to day your first year of teaching.

LOUI: Okay, this is just incredible synergy. Oh, I'm so excited to have you guys both together. That's fabulous! So, Lisa, tell us a bit about Davis Joint Unified and then your teaching background.

LISA: I've been teaching in Davis Joint Unified School District for about 21 years. And Davis is a suburban city right outside of Sacramento. So, on the I-80 corridor between Sacramento and San Francisco. We're a university community, and we have elementary, junior high, and high school and at each of our sites we have an inclusive program for individuals with significant disabilities. So, I've been doing inclusion in our school district for that long. I started out as a para educator, and then became a teacher, so I've been working a lot with teachers, general education teachers, and special education teachers to rethink how we're going to do distance Learning. And I've been pulling all kinds of UDL ideas into most every conversation I have.

LOUI: So that's a great segue for us to say just, let's dive into that main question. So you both are supporting educators to effectively support students with disabilities and

with significant disabilities when teaching online. And then simultaneously, emphasizing UDL. That's like the, that's your entree in. So let's just start having that conversation because I know there are a lot of people that would love to just pick your brains about this.

LISA: In the beginning stages of what is distance learning, I really tried to make the connections with the general education teachers of how are we going to engage these families in this whole process, which we don't even know what it is because we're still in the process of building the ship. I really encouraged everybody, and myself included, to reach out and make connections. Reestablish our relationships with these families over the phone, over video calls, Zoom, WebEx, Google Hangouts, whatever platform that we were going to be using, because it's time to reestablish relationships with people and get them reconnected.

LOUI: Perfect, perfect. I love that as a first step. This is such a crucial time that we're experiencing and to say that that's the first thing you're encouraging people to do, it's perfect. I think it's absolutely perfect.

MEGAN: I also think, too, this is a great opportunity for UDL to shine. I've noticed as a working from home, teacher and now parent, trying to help my own children figure out what distance learning is and how they learn, and if I just tell my 10-year-old son, "You must do this writing. You must do this reading," we end up in this giant battle for most of the day. And instead, when we've provided some options of: let's do some reading time. What do you want that to look like? Do you want to read a graphic novel? Do you want to read using an app online? Do you want to listen to an audio book? And all of a sudden him having that choice as a 10 year old, when he's feeling like he doesn't have a lot of choices, has been really powerful and has really made a shift in our house, over the past week, of being able to do some sort of learning in a stressful environment.

LOUI: Yeah, it's adding flexibility into something that feels really constrained and really limiting to all the sudden find these spaces where we can have that flexibility and choice is really valuable. Now both of you have some resources that you're sending out and using and you've shared with me, and that we're going to also put on to the website for other people to see. Could you just talk a little bit about those resources that you shared?

MEGAN: Sure. So, what I've provided is kind of similar to what my son has been using. So we've been utilizing the idea of a choice menu or choice board system. And that's really kind of like a tic tac toe board or a bingo board, where a student gets to choose and have some flexibility in the academic tasks and activities that they're doing. And so,

for me, now that we're shifting this role of education that between home and school, I think our parents need some tools on how do we organize this. And so the choice board system I've put together a short little webinar for families that they could use in their home to set up this really dynamic UDL tool that's as easy as making a tic tac toe board to help families get through the day. As I know it's really challenging if people are working from home or are struggling to make ends meet, or if there's older siblings who are in charge right now trying to help out their younger siblings. So, that's a resource that we've been using in our house here. And then I've been recommending that teachers across our district, and families use at home to incorporate some of that flexibility and increase engagement in working from home for kids.

LISA: And I provided some more professional development. So when people are working with general education teachers, giving them the idea that when they're planning their distance learning curriculum and learning activities to remember all learners on both ends of the learning spectrum. And providing choice is one of the easiest ways to enter flexibility into the new learning platforms, and I've noticed that teachers are really getting on board with choice boards. So, thanks Megan for sending out that webinar with this podcast.

LOUI: Awesome [overtalking]

MEGAN: Absolutely. And I love, thinking about how the relationship part is so key, but it's also the relevance in the choice boards, right? Like, our learning environment has changed and so, really I think that that idea of how is the learning relevant to students is really important for teachers to consider right now. So, I think having those relationships and the relevance and the choice and flexibility I think could make for a really profound learning opportunity for students at home. And I think it opens up the door for us as educators in kind of shifting our relationships with families moving forward, so I think this is a really exciting time, even though it's incredibly stressful and we're making it as we go.

LOUI: You know, something else I've been thinking about a lot and have written about in recent blogs, is that having choice, we definitely want to do that and that's a key part, but unless we weave access into that choice, then we're still leaving students out. So how are you, either one of you, both of you, helping your teachers think through that accessibility piece now that we're moving into this online environment? What are some tips or tricks or, or resources that you're sending to them?

LISA: I've been connecting with all the teachers at my school individually, and just checking in to see where they're at, what their main goals, skills, ideas, units, what

they're thinking about just in general. Their scaffold of what they're planning on doing. And then talking with them and talking through well how do you envision this being presented to kids on your Google Classroom? And then providing ideas. Hey, you could do a video about that. You could send a audio file of you reading that. You could do a screencast of using that material for that. So giving them ideas of different ways of presenting or representing the material that they're delivering.

MEGAN: One of the science teachers I work with, she's supporting a family that has many children in the home and only one computer. And so, for her what she's done is she's combined. There's three siblings that are actually in her class and so they're working on assignments together that are printed. And so that way, they're not utilizing the technology in the house in the same way that I think we envision people using distance learning. So, they're really still providing access to the curriculum and getting that experience with collaborative work. But I think also we have to remind teachers that not everything can be on a Google classroom or whatever Learning Management System people are using. You know, I feel very fortunate, we live in a house with a lot of technology and supposedly great Wi Fi, but it doesn't always work. And I think can be really paralyzing to students and families when all of a sudden these best plans don't work. So, knowing that it's also okay to get a piece of paper and a pencil to share what you know and your ideas. Knowing that it's okay to do fractions while helping cook in the kitchen with your parents. I think having some more kind of flexibility in that regards too, in terms of access, is really important for us to remember.

LOUI: Absolutely. Well, as I knew we would, we have flown through our 15 minutes and I know I could keep talking to you, both and I probably we'll come back to, because it's just there's too much to mine here. You've given us so much, but I will say thank you so much to both of you. Thank you, Megan. Thank you, Lisa. People are going to be very excited to see your resources and I am excited to share them.

MEGAN: Thank you, Loui!

LISA: Thank you so much!

LOUI: You're so welcome. So, for those who are 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 which is 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.