UDL in 15 Minutes with Lizzie Davis
Transcript with Audio Descriptions

[Podcast host Loui Lord Nelson followed by Lizzie Davis]

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 Lizzie Davis, who's a learning support teacher at The King's School Tudor House in Moss Vale, New South Wales, Australia. Today, Lizzie is going to share how she and her colleagues used UDL to investigate the barriers they anticipated as they moved to online teaching. Hi Lizzie, how are you?

LIZZIE: Hi Loui! I'm Fantastic, thank you!

LOUI: It's so great to talk to you. So, first off, please tell us about your teaching background.

LIZZIE: Sure. I started teaching a little over 20 years ago. I've taught internationally and locally in government systems, and the Catholic education system, and now, in independent schools. I had a little break from teaching some years ago to study another area of great interest of mine which was architecture. And that's relevant to my UDL journey because it was during this course that I learned about universal design, and how designing for equity makes the built environment accessible for all people. So years later, just a few years ago, when I came across the UDL (Universal Design for Learning), it made perfect sense what the goal, and the value of what it stands for in terms of equity was all about. So I have very much have embraced it in my teaching.

[The Center for Universal Design at NC State University homepage]

LOUI: I think that's such a great story because the CAST history, of course, is that they themselves, David Rose and, Anne Meyer and that whole group, when they were looking to identify and name what they were doing, and then they found out about Ron Mace and his work with Universal Design they were like, you know this, this is it. And then that's what led them to name it Universal Design for Learning. And I just think it's

so cool that that was your experience out in the field!

LIZZIE: Yes, yes. Very much so! A strong synchronicity there! [An aerial view of The King's School at Tudor House campus]

LOUI: Absolutely! So, can you share some information about The King's School, Tudor House in Moss Vale?

LIZZIE: Sure. It's a really beautiful school. Small in terms of student population, but huge in terms of our beautiful setting. [A map showing where Moss Vale is in relation to Sydney] It's on 165 acres on the outskirts of our little town which is about an hour and a half south of Sydney. We're a pre-kindergarten to year six school, and quite unique because we're one of only a small number of primary, which would be your elementary, boarding schools in Australia. [The King's School at Tudor House homepage] So, that school has a really strong focus on a well-rounded education. So, in addition to the academic pursuits we've got lots of specialist lessons like woodwork, outdoor education, art, music, competitive bike program, STEAM programs, etc. And we're an International Baccalaureate Candidate School for the primary years program as well.

LOUI: Wonderful. So, about how many students are there?

LIZZIE: Around 160 at our campus. Our school is part of The King's School, which has two campuses in Sydney, a senior school and Preparatory School in Parramatta, Sydney as well. And that's about all I think probably close to 2000 students across the whole entire school. [Children sitting on logs around a campfire]

LOUI: And then, at your school you're the Learning Support teacher. Are you the one Learning Support teacher and then you work with all the students with disabilities across the 160?

LIZZIE: That's right, yes exactly. And a small team of teachers' aides to support our learning support team as well.

LOUI: Okay, and so then do you meet with all of the general ed teachers? Do you do any kind of co-teaching, or is it more of support and then students come to you?

LIZZIE: This a real combination, Loui, using a three-tier intervention system. So we try to get lots happening at the broad level which is where our focus on UDL came in. And so, working with class teachers at that level, and also we collaborate together for what

we call our individual plans. And then I also run some small groups, and we do do some one to one support work as well.

LOUI: All right. Perfect, thank you for giving us all that context, that's great! So, I've got a big question to kick this off. So, your enthusiasm for UDL is, it's really clear, but you also share that the staff of The King's School Tudor House, they've also embraced UDL. And what do you think smoothed the way for that acceptance and the appreciation for the framework? [The Kings School Tudor House website page for prospectus requests]

LIZZIE: That's a great question because I think whenever something big gets introduced into a school, there can be a lot of resistance from people who think, "Oh, he comes another layer of work and we're already working, working very, very hard!" So, I think part of it is that our staff have an openness to learning - very much committed to continuous improvement. I also think that because we're an International Baccalaureate Candidate School, we already had a culture of professional learning to support us to move towards our authorization for the PYP. And it was actually at a PYP course on inclusion, that I attended that I came across UDL. Because unlike where you live, in Australia UDL doesn't enjoy the widespread implementation in schools. It's a bit different in universities, but in schools that it does elsewhere. [CAST's research paper, "UDL and Inclusive Practices in IB Schools Worldwide"]

LOUI: Yeah, International Baccalaureate, I don't know that a lot of people realize, but they want people to implement UDL. They want that combination to occur. And so they have that within their materials…

LIZZIE: Yeah…

LOUI:…and it's, it's, yeah it's a lovely marriage!

LIZZIE: Yes…

LOUI:… it really is and it helps to emphasize to people that this quality, rigorous education is bolstered and supported and is intertwined with Universal Design for Learning.

LIZZIE: Yes, it does. And so, I think, because the staff are so open to our professional learning in that area that a lot just became a part of this bigger picture that we had. [The King's School Tudor House homepage followed by the UDL Guidelines graphic organizer].

LOUI: That's lovely. That really is. So, when you knew as a school that you were going to move into an online environment and that you needed to think about those barriers that your learners would face what were some of the barriers that you all talked about and how did you communicate those to one another in a way that impacted your planning? Meaning, was it just in face to face meetings? Did you have time to prepare for that, or did you just kind of have to do things on the fly?

LIZZIE: Yeah, great question. We did move very, very quickly. We had one day, where we could foresee what may happen. So, we had one designated day where we were told, okay, no face to face teaching in the way that we normally would. You'll be with your passes, but it's to practice online learning. And really it was a day about sorting out login issues and very, very basic things. There was no great actual learning that day in terms of our knowledge and skills, but a huge learning curve in terms of getting ourselves ready for online learning. So that's how quickly it was implemented. And in terms of the question when you asked about thinking about the barriers to learning that our students would face, I think when we're in the school environment in the classroom, although the students bring so much variability in their learning, they're also by being in the classroom, I think it cuts out a lot of other variability that could occur. For example, all the students have the same access to devices to concrete materials to all the learning options that are available. Whereas, as soon as we realized that we were moving to online learning, there are a whole lot of barriers that being out of the school grounds raised, especially when considering that in the boarding school we have students who live rurally, so reliable internet is a factor. We have students who come from international backgrounds and so either they were heading home to be back in their home country or are staying with guardians locally. And so that kind of raised concerns about, you know, those areas of engagement in the UDL framework. How do we optimize relevance and authenticity for them? How do we maintain a sense of collaboration and community? And also, how do we just get people to access their devices when you know some families have four or five children who would all need them? So that was the sort of barrier that we were facing. And I think by having a UDL mindset, we were able to think, "Okay, what are some of these barriers and how can we prepare and plan for those?"

LOUI: Nice. Can you give us some examples of how you did prepare, plan for, and then, now that you're into it, how are you supporting those learners in that way?

LIZZIE: Hmm. Definitely considering the engagement part, it's been a really strong focus on communication and that sense of community. So we've found a balance or are still working on getting that balance between having people having to log in at a certain time which might, you know be affected by time zones or by internet access, but where people can see each other face to face, you know via Zoom or Google Hangouts and things like that, so they can see their teachers and see that that smile and see their passion and interest for the students that the teachers have and so the students can see each other and have some time for that socialization as well. [Students programming using tablets to move robotic balls on a surface] So that is one way. In terms of accessibility to devices, we took an inventory of people. People were able to put in requests to access certain devices if they didn't have enough at home. So that was one way we managed that. We have had to adjust some of our learning, I think, at the start we felt that we could replicate a school day at home, and of course it's so much of a different situation online. And so we learned very quickly that greater flexibility is required in terms of the rate of timing and speed of doing activities, and we had to adjust, I guess, in terms of how the students for their action and expression, how they could make it authentic for their environment. So I guess we've morphed a little into more open ended activities that can be achieved in any of the students' environments where they are. [A screen shot of a learning management page for Kindergarten followed by a map of Australia pointing out where Moss Vale is]

LOUI: Nice. I love the conversation about the authenticity and helping the students find that in the environment where they are.

LIZZIE: One of our children is in Hong Kong in a high-rise apartment. Others are out in, you know, outback Australia on, on vast expanses of land, so for them to be able to share, you know their experiences of this time as well, I think it's been really important for all aspects, you know, in terms of the UDL framework and thinking how we can engage those students, and how they can act and express their learning.

LOUI: Yeah. So right here at the end, could you talk about how UDL is influencing the steps that your staff are taking to move back into the face to face environment because

it sounds like you all are going to move there a little earlier in the calendar than we are here in at least where I am in the US. [A student jumping a bicycle over a hill with other students standing behind]

LIZZIE: Yes, I definitely think so. Our government is keen for schools to be open and functioning very quickly. So, we're in the planning stages of implementing that incrementally over the next few weeks. So, it's actually the start of that term right now. So, we had professional learning meetings today to kick off the term and the conversation was very much around understanding that these students have had very diverse experiences, and it's been a very challenging time, as it has for students, everywhere. And so very much the focus for our initial first half of the term really is looking at that engagement aspect, and really, really focusing in on reestablishing ourselves as a community, welcoming students back. In the framework, looking at sustaining effort and persistence so really looking at that collaboration and community aspects before we move on to any major learning. We're also recognizing that it's going to be a really mixed bag. There'll be some parents who choose to keep their students at home, which of course we support as well, as well as having students who need to come back to school, so very much planning for multiple modes of teaching for the first half of the term, some online work with certain staff, and then maintaining some face to face, teaching as well.

LOUI: Wonderful. Yeah, to be in the boarding school setting and like you said some students coming back some students not, and depending on parent desire and their, their home schedules, Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

LIZZIE: Yes, definitely.

LOUI: Well, I really appreciate this. Thank you so much, Lizzie. You've given us a great story of how you all are using UDL and thinking about the design of the education through UDL and then love those stories that you shared about how you came into Universal Design for Learning. I really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

LIZZIE: It's a pleasure. Thank you, Loui.[A black and white photo of Lizzie Davis followed by screen captures of theudlapproach.com, followed by podcast host Loui Lord Nelson]

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