UDL in 15 Minutes

with Selena Andrade Gonzalez

Transcript with Audio Descriptions

[The words UDL in 15 Minutes inside a circle as a logo followed by a headshot of Selena Andrade Gonzalez]

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 Selena Andrade Gonzalez, a Resource Specialist at Loma Vista Elementary School in Salinas, California. Today, Selena is going to share how she and her colleagues have used UDL and inclusion in the classroom setting and how they are now learning to adapt that to a distance learning model. Hi Selena! How are you?

SELENA: I'm good, thank you. How are you?

LOUI: I'm great. Thank you so much. So, can you share a bit about Loma Vista Elementary School? [The entrance to Loma Vista Elementary School]

SELENA: Yeah, for sure. So, Loma Vista Elementary is a small school, relatively small. We have about 500 students. We teach K through six, and we're located in the northeastern part of Salinas. Salinas, in general, it's just a very big ag community, very heavy ag part of the state. And so many of our families that I serve at Loma are working in agriculture either in the fields or in the packing plants. About 60 to 70% of our students or so are English language learners at our school site and those are mainly from Spanish speaking homes. We do have a lot of families who also speak indigenous languages from countries in Latin America like (example of languages). We have languages from various other countries as well, but the majority of the students that we work with are coming from Spanish speaking homes. I would definitely say that the part of the city that Loma is located in, there's a lot of need, for sure. We… about 90% of our students are considered to be from low income households, but there's a lot of heart in our city. I think just in our city and Salinas in general. Residents of Salinas are very proud of our city and I'm not originally from this area I'm from the Central Valley in California. I'm really proud to be part of the community and you'll notice that when talking to our families and our students, yes we're in an area of high need, but the people in our community are very proud to be here.

LOUI: That's wonderful. [A photo taken of workers in a California strawberry field] That sounds like there's a good connection between the school and families.

SELENA: Absolutely, yeah. We think that, especially during this distance learning time where our students aren't able to come to school our district, and most of the districts in this area have been able to continue to provide free meals, whether it's breakfast and lunches, there's been a lot of parent outreach as well to make sure that our families if there's anything that they need that we can try to help provide that to them. There are times where we're not able to cover everything, and if we could cover everything and make sure everyone had all the resources they need we would absolutely do that, but I definitely see that we're trying our best to make sure that that does happen. [Students in a glassed in walkway walking toward the camera]

LOUI: Oh, that's fabulous. So tell us about your teaching background and how you actually got to Salinas, then.

SELENA: So, I originally came to this area for college really I was studying at the Cal State Monterey Bay, actually in creative writing and social action. A lot of my classes were service-learning type classes, the thing that university really prides themselves on the community involvement, it was really great experience. But a few years into studying creative writing, which is still a passion of mine for sure. I ended up getting a job as a para-educator in a high school setting. And that was a para-educator for special education programs, and I worked in that position for three years. For a little less than a year I worked in what they call an ED program. I prefer the term mental health needs, but that program is for students with identified or diagnosed mental health needs. And then for about two years after that I switched over and was supporting RSP program so resource specialized programs or special day classes for mild to moderate settings. And I'm now on my fifth year of teaching elementary resource specialist program so K through six at Loma.

LOUI: Nice. So then within that position, are you only working with students with disabilities or are you working in the general education environment, how does that work? {A sign reading, Salinas City Elementary School District with mountains in the background and birds flying overhead]

SELENA: So the program that I teach at Loma, it's mainly a pull out program where I'm pulling students from the general education classroom into the special education setting to work in small groups, but we recently kind of started a transition, where I was then starting to push more into general education to be able to help support teachers in that setting, help support students ,and what it really allowed me to do was expand my reach of instead of just serving students with disabilities in a special education setting, being able to support them and other students in general education and kind of get to more of a inclusive type setting for not only my students but for all, all learners across the school settings.

LOUI: Nice. I'm probably jumping the gun here. I know you were learning about UDL and you've definitely had this deep interest in it, so were your colleagues also learning about it and did that help with the push-in or what was kind of the order of operation there? [Three students sitting at a table working with math manipulatives]

SELENA: So it was definitely something that I initiated, pushing into classes, but I am really lucky that I work with many teachers who are very open to new ideas and I think that new ideas can kind of be scary sometimes, but I work with some really wonderful teachers who were open and honest and we really discuss what's going to work best and what time would be best for me to push-in. What are the boundaries of having two teachers in the classroom, which sometimes that can create some sort of tension so we were able to discuss that, but then beyond that being able to really show them here's what UDL is, and some people already had some kind of a background and some are some were more familiar with what I believe is called Universal Access, UA which I think was a little bit more popular maybe before I was getting my credential. And so, kind of explaining the basics of UDL and how that's gonna outreach more to all of your classes and it's really a foundation to build education on not just a special education teacher going in implementing UDL for students with disabilities.

LOUI: Yeah. So, when did you guys start? Was the push it just kind of right before the COVID stuff or had you been doing this for about a year and a half or what was going on?

SELENA: So unfortunately, this year was our first year of really being able to implement push in time and my dream program is to eventually be able to completely push-in have

a very limited amount of pullout services for special education, and to really have our para-educators and our special education teachers, whether it's working in an RSP setting or in a specialty day class setting, supporting students of all levels of ability in the general education settings. I think that being able to utilize our ED specialists in general education, while still serving students IEP minutes or special education minutes, really allows access for all students and that's, that's what universal design really is, it's access for all students. So unfortunately, this was our first year of really being able to implement that push in process. There was a couple of different rotations we had. We were starting at mainly with math with fifth and sixth grade and then expanding out. We had some students who had transferred over from a co-taught classroom where it was co taught all day with a special education teacher in a general education teacher, but who transferred into kind of an offshoot of our RSP program what we call the Learning Center, last year. So they also received some push in time and that was more for not just behavior monitoring but to make, make sure students were able to properly transition from a very structured setting of a co-taught classroom, and what was essentially a co-taught SDC general education classroom to a full-on general education classroom with some push in and pull out support from a special education teacher.

LOUI: Yeah. So then, I know that you were helping the, like you said, the general educators learn more about UDL, and in concert with this idea of push-in, so, did you start with any specific parts of the guidelines any specific principle. Where did you start those conversations? [The CAST UDL graphic organizer]

SELENA: So I think the first conversation I had about universal design for learning was one, trying to make sure that we've recognized that it was not just me coming into the classroom implementing accommodations for students with disabilities, but we wanted to make sure that we thought of UDL as a foundation for our instruction, as well as a foundation for our environment. And I think that's something that gets left out in UDL sometimes, is that it's not just the instructional piece. There's a lot that goes into the environment and making sure the environment is universal for all students or that idea of everyone having access. So, what I mean by that when we talk about the instruction is if a student of mine in general education had a accommodation that meant that they required a graphic organizer for reading comprehension or for writing and this was a

documented accommodation in their IEP, I would just kind of discuss with their teacher, why not provide that support for everyone and we can make a large poster, have a lesson of making the large poster of a graphic organizer and discussing how to use it and put it on the wall, or we can spend time as a class at the start of the year planning a graphic organizer folder or notebook so that all students have access to that support. When we think about the environment, I wanted to make sure that if I have a student with maybe flexible seating as an accommodation that, let's kind of see what kind of flexible seating we can make available for all students. Are there standing desks involved? Are there wobble seats? Is there a large table in the back that's still very much in view of a teacher? Are there, so is there a large table at the back for like a private office area where students need to maybe work alone? And these are kind of the accommodations that you would see in an IEP. But really, these are supports that can benefit all learners. I did work with the teacher once where we focused on instead of a whole group instruction math lesson for 30 students, we split the class into three 30-minute groups, so three groups of 10. Maybe each station was about 30 minutes where we had some students working on fluency, and in that fluency group we had visuals we had manipulatives, foundational skills, and we really use language in this. So number talks, skip count products and practices, clapping along with those skip counts as well. So, but we got some movement in there. We also had association of students where they were being taught content by the general education teachers, and our general education teachers are generally much more well versed in the standards, and then I don't have K through six standards memorized in California, so, they would be teaching the content level with students, and that's more of a paper to pencil task, rather than that vocal and visuals and manipulatives, and then our third station of students was working independently, using a computer program that aligned with our curriculum, and we would rotate these groups during a 90 minute math block. And what this really allowed us to do was to meet each student where they were and embed those supports like number talks and manipulatives and maybe that direct instruction of small group instruction with the teacher paper to pencil tasks into the lesson so that everyone had access to it.

LOUI: Nice. So, it sounds like you are giving a lot of guidance and suggestions of ways

to, like you said, create an environment and lessons that were fully accessible to all students and not just stopping with accommodations for specific students. So, the general educators may not necessarily be at the point where they're looking at the framework and saying, oh so under Engagement, I want to work on sustaining effort and persistence or under Representation, I want to work on comprehension, but rather at this point you're bringing them, the idea, through suggestions and through different teaching modalities and strategies that they can use and then helping them just get comfortable with this aspect of choice and breadth of options, is that correct? [A screen show of how Selena provides instructions in English and Spanis]

SELENA: Right. And I think that, trying to make sure that the teachers had support in this as well was really important to me and like I said earlier, new ways to adapt your instruction can sometimes be scary so I was lucky that I worked with teachers who was super open to that and very interested. But, yes, making sure that we can provide that support so that UDL is something that is not only easily accessible for all students but easier for teachers to then build a routine and embed these supports into their classroom and instruction already so that it's something they carry on and is sustainable for years to come.

LOUI: Nice. So, we are so close to the end of our 15 minutes! It just goes so surprisingly quickly, but you had mentioned that when things moved on line, one of the things that you talked about was helping students adapt to learning in their home environment and then some of those strategies that you use. So if you could, in like the next minute and a half, just talk through how you help students adapt to that learning and home environment, and then also, kinda like your use the hand gestures the signing, the bi-lingual messages. Those things.

SELENA: Yeah, absolutely. Wvery year at the beginning of the year, we spend a lot of time making sure our kids know the routines and the procedures and the behavioral expectations, [A screen shot with Selena demonstrating each of the signs] and that's just kind of very, a very common way to start our school years. And so what I did when we went on distance learning because they're not in the classroom with you, and in the RSP setting I'm really lucky that I get to know my students for years on end and so they're very used to my classroom but now, all the classrooms are new, everything is

different. So I did spend a lot of time at the beginning of the year working with the students on what it means to be a learner at home. So many of my students are living in multifamily homes or are in a single room that's maybe rented and shared with their entire family. And many of our students are considered homeless or just in a setting where they don't always have access to maybe their own desk or their own room where it's quiet. So we really discussed and learned what it means to be learner at home. I had an entire slideshow breaking down what the most important things to have available during distance learning, we talked about being able to find a quiet place with the fewest distractions possible. We, we looked at pictures of student students who had set up little desks or study stations at home and the importance of headphones it it's maybe noisy where you are. Some of our students are maybe the oldest sibling and taking care of things and whatnot. And so we really focus on how to create that environment at home. And then when we are in that environment at home, of course you're going to need to reteach those expectations, and part of the way that I do that is using sign and hand gestures to kind of bring students back to attention. I have six main signs that I use in my classroom and these are things that we have maybe used in the general education setting or in the special education setting in face to face before, but I'm kind of transferring them over now and then there are some we need to add in. So, one of our main signs we use is the ASL sign for focus, and that is a way of me being able to make sure all eyes are on me, we were sitting up straight and we talked about what that looks like. Whole body listening when your focus is on the teacher, sitting up straight and making sure that we're not, I call it lazy potato, lazy potato all over the place, and that we're showing whole body listening at that time so we've focused in ASL. We have a verbal and physical gesture, that I say show me how you wait. And that's when students kind of perk back up, they cross their little hands in front of themselves and that's when they know, "Oh! It's time for the teacher's instruction. She's about to give directions." We have, let me see your eyes, and that's when I have either too many cameras off, or I see the cameras on but maybe my little kiddo has their eyes anywhere else before they're supposed to. So that's a physical gesture where I put two fingers and tap them beneath my eye. And I say the words, "Let me see your eyes!" So I try to make sure that all of these gestures and signs, have a physical gesture or an ASL sign and a verbal

prompt. We have mute and unmute where mute was just holding my finger up to my mouth in the shushing gesture, but I don't say "Shush." I don't find that to be appropriate. And then, as well as unmute when I would hold my hand up to my ears so the students know I am listening for them. We had "Verbalize or repeat", and I use the ASL sign for Say when you take your fingers and you tap beneath your lower lip twice on your chin. And that's the ASL sign for Say or verbalize, and I use that when I need students to repeat after me, and when I need to signal to students to use their words. So most of the time if I'm going to ask the student to verbalize something which repeats to me, I tap beneath my bottom lip with the ASL sign for Say to remind them that they need to be using their words. And then our last sign that we use and we're very much still working on are the three R's our classroom rules and our school rules are what we call the three R's: Respectful, Responsible and Ready to learn. So we actually took some time at the beginning of the year to learn how to sign our classroom rules and in using, actually it's ASL signs. And the reason we really want to bring verbal and physical gestures and trying to teach those classroom expectations for that same reason that you would try to bring sign language when trying to teach sight words or when you want to bring Multisensory Learning when teaching reading is because when we turn learning into an experience, that really helps them internalize that learning. [A school photo labeled, Selena Gonzales, Loma Elementary K-6th Resource Specialist]

LOUI: Great. Well these are wonderful examples and I thank you so much. We have definitely hit our 15 minutes and it was just, just fabulous, Selena. Thank you so much. You, you are exactly right as I'm hearing you give those examples with the signing, you're taking those students from the areas under Perception and giving them those mixed alternatives, of hearing the auditory and then also seeing visual but then also guiding them through Language and Symbols and so they're learning not only the language of the verbalization but the language of the symbols and it's wonderful. It was a great example of taking them down through representation so they can become more resourceful and knowledgeable within the activities themselves, but thank you so, so much this was a great conversation.

SELENA: Thank you for having me. I'm very glad and I'm so happy that I was able to do this with you. [Screen captures of www.theudlapproach.com followed by the logo for

UDL in 15 Minutes]

LOUI: Oh, 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/podcasts. Finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 minutes, you can contact me through www.the.UDLapproach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.