

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Katie Moder

LOUI: Hi everyone. This episode is part of a series with educators from the Fond du Lac School District in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. I've interviewed educators across administration, building coaches, and the classroom to help you gain some insights on the roles educators have when a district is implementing UDL. Enjoy!

[Music interlude]

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 Katie Moder, who's the director of Pupil Services in the Fond du Lac School District in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Today, Katie is going to talk about the system's level changes that they made to bring UDL into their district. Hi Katie, how are you?

KATIE: I'm great thank you. Thanks for inviting me in today. I appreciate it.

LOUI: Oh, you're very welcome. It's so great to talk to you. So first off, could you tell us about your education and teaching background?

KATIE: Absolutely. This is my 26th year in education. I was a special education teacher for 15 years at an elementary school, and after those 15 years I became a special education instructional coach for four years, and I worked with staff members from our itty-bitties all through age 21, and then I moved into a principal role at Chegwin Elementary School here in Fond du Lac, and was in that role for three years, and then this is starting my fourth year as Director of Pupil Services in the district. So, it's been a long haul and I love it. My own children went through Fond du Lac School District, too, so that's pretty great.

LOUI: Oh, that is cool! It's nice to have that connection! I was lucky enough to be in the district where my dad taught, and as a kid that's equally as wonderful. Well, sometimes [laughter].

KATIE: [Laughter] I think my son, in high school, hid that a little bit but that's okay.

LOUI: So Fond du Lac began thinking about UDL, some years ago. So, talk about how your district came to see UDL as a system wide framework.

KATIE: Sure. So UDL was brought to the Fond du Lac School District back in 2016 through a special education UDL grant, and we spent some time in one of our middle schools working on it in it. There were four or five teachers that really grabbed on to the UDL framework and started to use it. The next year, we added on in an elementary school. Continued coaching those four teachers in the middle school, and then in 2018 19 is really when we started to look at it more systematically, and we look at what we call it is a sprinkling where we kind of introduce UDL to the building and they learn a little bit about it kind of a taste of it, and then the next year is full implementation in that building, which means staff professional development coaching, individual coaching some data collection. And then after that year, it moves into coaching support in check ins into the fourth year of monthly check ins, so we found when we just taught or spent time with a small group and left, it left unless the educator was really just really embedded in all that they did so we were thinking we have to do things in a more systematic level. We also made some errors in choosing how do we pick what school is next. So finally, Fond du Lac has approximately 7000 students. Nine elementaries, three middles, a charter school, and a high school. So, we determined that it would work best for us if we created some type of a readiness rubric because what we thought was ready, wasn't necessarily ready. So, we created a four-point rubric that had to do with principals' support, teacher support, teacher retention, and other building initiatives. And we use that four-point scale to really see is, is the whole building ready to roll with this or not? And we found principal's support was one of the number one most important piece when we determined how to move forward with UDL in a building.

LOUI: Yeah. KATIE: So, we did some work there and then we also have a social emotional learning, five-year plan. And so, some of the work with UDL, we determined it couldn't just be on its own, it had to be already embedded in other work that we did so it wasn't another thing. So, we put it into our social emotional learning plan. We focused on CASEL's three signature practices. So SEL has three signature practices, practices the welcoming ritual, engagement, and then optimistic closing and so we thought what a

great place for UDL to live is in that engagement of the three signature practices, so again it's not, it's not something else, it's involved, it's embedded in what we do.

LOUI: Nice, nice. So then in that idea of weaving it into something that was already happening, how did you help teachers actually make that concrete connection? So like you said, you chose the engagement part of the three system, practices, and then UDL has the engagement representation and action expression so right?

KATIE: Right.

LOUI: How did you help teachers kind of parse apart the two engagements but then also see how the whole thing was connected?

KATIE: Mm hmm. That's a really good question, and it comes back to what we're doing as a district. Like what we did prior, what we're doing now, and what we're doing in the future. So, like I'd said earlier, we did some sprinkling and we did some doing some work with a handful of teachers, and now as we're trying to do it more systematically, we have a social emotional learning advisory team that is made up with teachers and teachers that support students in a number of different areas. For example, those who are multi linguistic students who access special ed services, things like that, as well as parents. And so, we have a very visible five years social emotional learning plan that is shared with the community as well as within our system. And so UDL fit within that, so they saw that this is work we're already doing. And so, to focus on it a little bit more. That being said, since that time, last year we started Integrated, Comprehensive Systems of Equity with Dr. Elise Frattura, and Dr. Colleen Capper, and it really looks at four different cornerstones, ICS. And the first cornerstone is all about looking at marginalization in where we're coming from. And then, it focuses on co-plan to co-learn teams, and then it comes to engagement and how do we really teach. And in UDL is part of their plan. You know, I know that UDL started out under special education, at least in the state of Wisconsin, but we know Universal Design for Learning is good for all, every student. So, although it started off in the pupil service department, we're actually moving it into the teaching and learning area so that all staff will be accessing it in the future.

LOUI: Awesome, awesome. Then I'm also curious that you talked about the coaching and the different supports, but you also included data collection. So, are you doing data

collection at the local and the system's level? How are you doing that? What does it look like?

KATIE: Great, great question. So, we have a coaching team that's made up of Pupil Service staff. Teaching and Learning staff and School Psychologists, and one thing we did is we wanted all of these educators that are in buildings to know some pieces of the whole system work. So even our School Psychologists learn more about UDL, our Teaching and Learning, as well as our Special Education crew. So that's one way how we knew that any of our coaches or any of those who support teachers understand the philosophy behind it, and are able to share support or get support for teachers that want it so that's one area of the coaching. In buildings, we really have very specific coaching when it comes to those who have already been trained in the area of UDL. As far as assessment goes, we use eduClimber to look at our data. We look at our data in schools on a regular basis. We follow a PLC structure and so our collaborative teams look at data, and we disaggregate data and look at what does that data look like for all students. So, students that are accessing different services, our black and brown students, how are all of our students learning? So, we look at that at a school level on a regular basis and then we look at it at a systems level as well. One of the things we created is like a fidelity check for our schools that are really engrossed in our UDL work. Earlier I had shared that, you know, we did some professional development and then we stepped out and it really was up to the teacher if it continued, now those schools that have been trained in UDL, we're using a fidelity check with them to say these are the key pieces of UDL. Where is your school at using those pieces and what coaching do you need? And so now schools that have already been doing the work, their principals along with their teams will be just reflecting on what, what are we doing well? What have we kind of lost touch with? And what do we want to do better? And then that's how our professional development and coaching follows up with those buildings.

LOUI: Lovely. So, with the data and the disaggregation, are you trying to go so far down into it to be able to say this is how UDL is shifting our instruction and our environment design? Are you looking at it through the lens of your Integrated, Comprehensive Systems of Equity? Do they have some sort of a data, look-for system that you use? I'm

just curious to see how you're interpreting the data in alignment with the framework.

How are you doing that?

KATIE: You know, I think it comes back to engagement. And are our students becoming readers?

LOUI: Mm-hmm

KATIE: Are they proficient? If not, why not. And we're finding universally it's sometimes... so I'm gonna move over to a little bit of RTI or multi-level systems of support. And we're coming back to instead of putting on selective and intensive interventions, do we have 80 or more percent of our students engaging at the universal level? We should have at least 80% of our students being successful. And they're not being successful because we're not engaging them into the work which is UDL. So really looking at how do we measure if UDL is working? Are our, all of our students, no matter what letters are behind their name, engaged in their learning and are they achieving. That's if UDL is working.

LOUI: Got it. Got it. Okay, wonderful. So, we have time for me to ask you one more question, and that one is about how you support your staff who are implementing this throughout the district because I know you have different levels of this going on, so talk through that.

KATIE: Sure. So, first of all, we support it because it's in the work that we do, so it's not another thing it's in what we do. And then the other piece I would say is professional development is key. The answer is always yes. So, can I get this book on this? Yes. Can we do a book study? Yes. Can we attend this conference? Yes. So, the answer is yes, and it's yes by growing our leaders. So, you're going to be meeting with some of the key leaders in this work Shannon Schultz and Terese Weiler, and they really are leaders, I would say, in the state of Wisconsin in the work that they're doing. And so, they ask, and I say yes, and then they bring it back, and then they share it with our teams and complete book studies, and then it's, growing your own. Once you have that key, and when you see the videos and you see the work that's going on, more and more just want it. So, one of my favorite things is when we have a book study, and then after the book study, I get all these emails from other teachers saying, "Hey, colleagues said this about this book. Can I be a part of that? Can I get a book?" And the answer is, yes.

So that's one of my favorite things, and it's also fun because now, some of our educators who are teachers within our classrooms are saying, "I love that book study. I want to bring it to this small group of my colleagues. Can I do that? And the answer is yes. And so, then we move forward and it becomes grass roots because they're excited about the work.

LOUI: That's wonderful. Okay this has been a fabulous conversation! I really appreciate it. It's just been so clear and concise laying out the, the systems thinking that has gone on there in Fond du Lac so I appreciate it. Thank you so much.

KATIE: You're welcome. I'm glad I could share.

LOUI: Absolutely. 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. 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.