

## **Jarod McGuffey**

### **UDL in 15 Minutes transcript**

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 Jarod McGuffey, who is a 21st Century teacher in the Fraser Public Schools.

Today, Jarod is going to share how he's taken the UDL mindset beyond the classroom to help others understand what educators do every day. Hi, Jarod. It's wonderful to talk to you!

JAROD: And it's wonderful to talk to you too. Loui. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

LOUI: Absolutely! Okay. So, before we get going with this exciting topic, can you tell us a bit about your background and your journey with UDL?

JAROD: Sure! Absolutely! I I've always been fascinated with human behaviors, what makes us tick, why we do the things that we do. So, I majored in psychology in my young age thinking I was going to go down that path. And of course, like most people, I graduated and found a job in sales, worked my way through an MBA and then transitioned into some corporate management. And I'm sharing this experience because it's going to play out as we have this conversation. So, in mid-level management, everything's going great. I ended up finding my wife. My wife is a wonderful teacher, and truly an inspiration to me. And I couldn't help but notice how she would come home and absolutely love her job and everything was great. And she loved every aspect about the profession and I was young enough to make a choice, or maybe I should say, life

created an opportunity for me, but I ended up transitioning from the private sector, the corporate world, and into education. So, I went to school, Oakland University, to get my Master's in elementary education and then followed that with an Education Specialist. So, I found my first job. I was teaching in Detroit, middle school math, 6/7 and eighth grade math and then I found myself shortly after in Fraser. And in Fraser, I continued I was in the classroom, teaching both sixth and fifth grade math till the opportunity come where it was a 21st Century position. And the 21st Century role would not be familiar to many districts, but what it is, it's essentially a hybrid between a classroom teacher who teaches specials, and then also instructional/UDL coach. And within recent years, Fraser Public Schools as a district embedded UDL in their strategic plan. And because they did this, that has, in essence, become a focus for us as 21<sup>st</sup> Century coaches to work with the adults, the teachers, and we still get to work with the students as well. It's been an absolute blast to kind of dive into UDL and we skipped the whole dipping our toes, and we just dove right in, right? And what I noticed was everything we did, whether you pull up the guidelines and whether you're evaluating your lessons, your assessments, your learning experiences, the way you're setting up your furniture, it really started to have an impact on the way we begin to think. And me as particularly the way I interacted with people, the way I had developed relationships, and the more comfortable I became with UDL guidelines, the framework, the mindsets, the more I began to shift my thinking and applied that thinking beyond the classroom as you mentioned. So, I found myself listening to teachers in the in the staff lounge. I found myself listening to teachers, but not just listening with what to say but listening with the intent of understanding. Really diving in deeper trying to broaden my framework. And

you know what I heard? It was the perspective of the profession. What I heard was their struggles, their challenges, their good days, their bad days, what brings them joy and what seems to be the impossible, right? Classroom practitioners, I think everyone is agreed right now, we have the job that seems near impossible. All the hats that we wear and there was a lot of frustration and some of the surveys that were coming out were suggesting that educators felt undervalued and they felt that their voice just wasn't heard. So that left me with the question of, "Okay. Well, how to be heard. Let's see. What might we do to motivate their voice and share it? How might we become resourceful and knowledgeable to be heard by those making decisions? And how might our teachers become strategic and goal oriented and flipping the narrative of today's educational systems?"

LOUI: Nice. Well, first of all, I'm going to say that the 21st Century position sounds like a dream. Working both with students and then with your colleagues. I just think that's a beautiful match and awesome. And then the other thing that I loved hearing was that concept of listening to understand. It's a humanistic thing. It's so wonderful that when any of us give that gift to anyone else, whether it's to our students or our colleagues or our spouses or our anyone with whom we have a relationship, it everything's a lot better, right? So, okay. It's evident that you have this really deep connection to the framework because even how you were describing everything at the end, you were using the expert learner traits to explain how you were wanting to help teachers. So, you've brought UDL into the life of another area of your life. And that all started with a fellowship. Right? So, let's start there.

JAROD: Sure. So, this through my Head Specialist, I was in class and talking with some of the other teachers and we're trying to solve the world's problems, right? And I had a nice shoulder tap from one of my professors and she suggested that I apply for this Fellowship through what Oakland University's Galileo Institute of Teacher Leadership was offering. And they offer this every couple years, so I took that risk and challenge, and during this fellowship. I was charged with reengaging 1,500, approximately, alumni from the Galio Teacher Leadership Academy. So, these are teachers who've been, whether they were teachers for five years or teachers for 30 years, and a lot of different walks and a lot of different levels. And through this academy, at this time, we've had over 1,000 people graduate from a two-year cohort of teacher leadership. So, the question is what are we doing now? You know, they're they we spent two years and I was part of the 15/17 Court. It was an incredible credible growth opportunity. But now the question is, alright, we went through the teacher leadership, we're building capacity, we're trying to make a difference in our school level, and at the district level, but the question is, how do we engage these 1,000+ teachers, and how do we engage them to broaden that to go to the state level perhaps, to have a larger impact? So, there was this idea of Trusted Voices. And what this would be is a nonpartisan, purely grassroots teacher leadership advocacy group. There was a study that we were looking at and suggested that the community trusted the voice of their child's teacher most. The super, absolutely. The principal even more so. But when it came to the one on the frontline, that classroom practitioner, that teacher that the child knew by name, that was the trusted voice. So, we coined that phrase, and now we refer to our teacher leaders as a Trusted Voice. And the idea is to have every district, to have this trusted voice which

she would have the responsibility of connecting stakeholders, connecting with the community, and also just being a sounding board to their local policy. Would you be interested in hearing the mission and goal?

LOUI: Absolutely!

JAROD: So, the mission statement, I should say, is to collaboratively reframe the agenda for public education as a nonpartisan advocacy group of educators, we are focused on building collaborative partnerships among teachers, administrators, and policymakers to ensure every Michigan learner receives the highest quality of education. The goal is to support our superintendents through the collaborative advocacy and serve our policymakers, offering feedback and how education policy shapes Michigan schools, as well as the teaching profession. And as I as I continue, I'm going to start to bring in that UDL framework, but ultimately at the end of the goal, our vision is to empower a trusted voice in every public school district in Michigan. And just for our audience who might be listening, if they're interested in priorities, some of the current priorities include providing high quality teaching and learning for all kids with attention to equity, support teacher retention and recruitment; connect with district county regional efforts including cabinet level leaders, principals in conversation. So, you can start to hear the whole idea of inclusiveness, you know, bringing everybody and equitable outcomes. Some of the other priorities: teacher evaluation and support for the professional development; mental health, wellness and supporting social emotional learning; and, promoting optimal conditions for learning; appropriate student testing. The big one right now is the retainment and recruitment of teachers trying to get ahead of the talked about teacher shortage, and see what we can do. Now if we take a look at

that framework, if I kind of just take a step back and reintroduce the UDL framework and how it's really helped me go beyond the classroom practitioner lens and really into this state level problem solving, I mean, we use frameworks for all sorts of things, whether it's evaluating poverty or organizations or leadership. So, taking the same framework and applying it towards building this sustainable organization. If we if we look at Universal, the word universal in UDL, I would like to focus on the language, because it's so important that the language that we speak, and that policymakers speak is understood. And maybe we close the gap a little bit on that. Policymakers and educators are more on the same page than the narrative would suggest. We speak differently. Teachers look through a lens focus, focused on 30 students with faces names, interest, personal stories. Policymakers look through a much broader lens with 10s of 1000s of students and responsibility to ensure that each educational dollar is spent in the best interests of the students and taxpayers. And I think there's a there's a misconception that policymakers and teachers are completely on different pages, and Trusted Voices, we're taking this framework and where we're trying to design a training and learning opportunities that's used to delineate the differences between the classroom practitioners and those making policy. Which brings us to the statement, "Access to the policy table should be inclusive and universal." But just because you're invited to the policy table doesn't mean you're going to be heard. So, we look at the "L" the L for learning and we're focusing on...we need to equip and empower our teacher leaders if they're going to be trusted voices. Not only do we need them to help speak and think like policymakers, but let's give them the substance that they're there. They're searching for something that when they're invited, they can bring to the table. And the

“D” for design is about is it's not just about getting the access to the policy table and not just about having that personal a story or a data or etc. that you're bringing, but how do we design this pathway where it's sustainable? [Be]cause what we know with Michigan legislature is, and more specifically with term limits, is that you'll have a legislator come in in two years he or she might possibly be out. So, as you're trying to develop these relationships with the policymakers, how do we develop this systematically? How do we make this sustainable so as legislators come and they go when they switch roles whether it's House Senate, vice versa, how might we create this sustainable so in the long run, teachers continuously have that voice at the policy table?

LOUI: Nice, I think one of the biggest takeaways that I had while listening was that shared experience by policymakers and educators are reminding us all that we are all human, but just even specifically looking and thinking about education. Everybody cares about it. Everybody does that's why it's such a hot topic, right? And you all are finding a way to share the experiences that educators are having with policymakers to help inform them so that then the policy reflects and builds on the quality, the good stuff that's going on. And we can bring in more, like you were talking about that focus on equity and bringing in hears the voice of the teacher and emulates that. So that's just awesome. So, I'm looking at our time, and we are really fast coming up on the 15 minutes, but before we would exit out of this, I'm positive that others across the nation and possibly even another democratic communities would be so curious as to maybe any steps that you would have to help other people get started on this or we'll have your contact information in the photo montage, but you can also express that here, but

anything you would want to pass forward to others who are saying, “Oh my gosh! I don't live in Michigan. This is an awesome idea!”

JAROD: Absolutely! First off, check out the website [www.trustedvoicesed.com](http://www.trustedvoicesed.com), that's trusted voices ed dot com and just think about connecting with your policymakers and just know, policymakers are very interested in hearing the voice of education. They may be experts in policy, and if you're an educator, it's completely okay if you're not an expert on policy. You do not need to be. That's their job, right? Our job is to just be a voice and to support and to serve and to offer some feedback. You as an educator know how policy plays out with real students with an actual classroom settings. You guys have a voice, you guys have a story. It needs to be heard. Just know that they're waiting to hear from you. So, reach out to your local contacts. Reach out to your local legislators. And also make sure to partner with your superintendents. We want to make sure that the voice and as we advocate, it's shared. It's vetted. And moving forward, we have that positive and supportive impact on behalf of the profession.

LOUI: That's awesome. Well Jarod, thank you so much. I just love that this talked about the application of UDL mindset to something outside of the classroom, but that it's so directly is connected. Taking it and helping others understand it, so I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me today.

JAROD: Thank you so much, Loui! Been a pleasure.

LOUI: : 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/podcasts](http://www.theudlapproach.com/podcasts). Finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 Minutes,

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