

UDL in 15 Minutes with Sue Hardin

The transcript with audio descriptions

[The UDL in 15 Minutes logo, a circle around the words UDL (in blue), in (in yellow), 15 min (in red) followed by a close-up photo of Sue Hardin, a white woman with short blond hair wearing black rimmed glasses holding her toddler grandchild who is white with curly blond hair]

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. This episode continues a special series about UDL implementation at Fraser Public Schools. Today, I'm talking with Sue Hardin, a creator, thinker and leader in the UDL community. Sue is going to talk about key steps and decisions that have been made in the Fraser Public Schools that have helped them create a system where UDL is embedded. Hi Sue! It's wonderful to talk with you!

SUE: Hi Loui. Thank you so much for having me. I can't tell you how excited I am to be here on UDL in 15 minutes. It's really special to me. I have been telling anyone who will listen about this podcast since the first episode. I keep telling them that's going to change the way they think about UDL and UDL implementation. UDL is such a metacognitive practice that you can't always see UDL. You have to sort of think UDL and I love having the opportunity to hear the voices inside educators' heads as they're explaining how they design learning to support variability for all their students.

LOUI: Oh my gosh, thank you so much!

SUE: Delighted to be here. I really am.

LOUI: Thank you! Well, can you share a bit about your background in education? [A stack of plastic hangers]

SUE: Sure. So, I was thinking back. You know, I've been in education for over 30 years now and it just amazing how time flies. But when I started, I worked in a vocational training program. So, we believe that every person could and should be a contributing member of their community. And our mission was to help every student find a way to do just that. And it's really where I started to hone my design skills, because my job was to create supports that allowed the students to complete their job assignments. So, I would meet with the student and the employer or their vocational training teacher and together we'd sit down and try to figure out what the student needed to get the job done. So, if the student had let's say, only the use of one hand and their job was maybe to hang clothes at Sears, my job was to design, we call them a jig, that would hold the hanger in place while the students attach the clothing. So initially, I made lots and lots of jigs for a variety of students with lots of different needs, but you know, eventually it became quite clear that we needed to do something different, that we had to think about this redesign at the process level at the procedure level, where we could have any student that came along then could be able to do that job. So, I guess that really was my introduction to the basic concepts that underlie UDL, right? Designing to variability to reduce barriers.

LOUI: That's a great analogy. I mean, it's not analogy, it's just it's your life story, but it's so perfect. [The homepage of Macomb Intermediate School District with teenage children seated around a globe and a white teacher standing and pointing to a specific spot on the globe]

SUE: Yeah, it really did fit so nicely, actually with my next job, too. So, from there I went to work at Macomb Intermediate School District as a assistive technology consultant, and honestly I ended up repeating the same experience again. So, I was hired to support AT leaders throughout the county as they were trying to get assistive technology to students. And they were trying to help students then, of course, participate in the classroom. But once again, I realized that we really needed to do this differently and find a way to address that variability across the classrooms across the schools and across the county.

LOUI: Nice. Nice. So then how did you get started with Fraser? What was that entry point?

SUE: Well, in 2005, at the Macomb Intermediate School District, we launched our UDL team. So, this was a cohort of colleagues who worked at the Intermediate School District, and we were trying to think to get UDL across the county. So, we wanted to have educators join us and learning about UDL. And we put together a cohort of volunteer educators from almost 17 of our 21 districts, and they were different grade levels in different content areas. And Fraser actually had some other educators join in that countywide UDL cohort over the years so we had that went on for about eight to 10 years. So, they already had some pockets of UDL knowledge in their schools. But our formal partnership with Fraser started in 2012 when they launched their one-to-one initiative. [Fraser Public Schools Homepage with a photo of a teacher holding a giant check from the Milken Family Foundation and surrounded by other adults and children in celebration] So, Carrie Wozniak, who was Fraser's current superintendent, at the time, she was the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, and she invited our UDL team in to

support teachers as they started to think about how they're going to integrate this technology into their classroom plans and their lessons and the classroom environment. Carrie knew that, you know, an iPad or MacBook was just a tool, and it wouldn't really have any impact on learning without some intentional and purposeful implementation. So, we came in and worked with educators to identify and use goal driven strategies that amplified that they're learning and provided flexible support for variability of all their learners. So, it was really a great way to introduce teachers to the principles of UDL while they were making good use of purposeful technology in their classrooms. [One page from the rubric created by Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation to guide conversations about one-to-one use as it related to UDL. The rubric can be found at www.theudlapproach.com with this podcast]

LOUI: Right. You know, I was involved when I was at BCSC, and we shifted to the one-to-one, and we too, were really purposeful about that. And they were, they were very interesting conversations, especially the at the beginning part, like we had kind of an exploration team that was looking at one-to-one, and we had been involved with UDL. And the same thing, we had pockets of people who understood it, but it was it was eye opening for everybody involved because it was a really concrete way to have that conversation about - UDL focuses on how we use our tools and our materials and methods. And so now we're focused on a tool, but how are we going to use it and I brought a level of richness to the conversation that I don't know had been there yet. I don't know if you had that same occurrence there with Fraser or with any of the other schools you were working with? [A slide showing Fraser's timeline toward their mission. It begins with UDL in 2012-2013 through the summer of 2015]

SUE: Actually, that's exactly how it happened. So, I think having the nature of connecting it to something they were going to do, right? This is something that's going to happen in my classroom and I need to get a handle on it. I think that was the impetus for really sitting down and looking at, you know, how can I make this purposeful and useful for me and for my students, and so we were able to weave the guidelines and the framework of UDL into those conversations in a way that made it tangible. It made it, "I could try it out. I could see the evidence of it." So, it took it from the abstraction of the guidelines and helped us really embedded in the work they're doing. And it really it made a huge difference.

LOUI: Yeah, and I also felt like it shifted the conversation from the "How long will it stay charged? Do I have close enough outlets? How are we going to make sure that the kids come with it charged?" (Which is kind of a responsibility thing which that of course takes us over to the guidelines) but anyway, the framework actually helped us shift the conversation into an instructional conversation rather like the hardware side of the deal. I just felt like UDL really helped enhance the conversation about the technology.

SUE: Yeah, I agree. You know, there are all those logistics about managing the technology and they're important, right? Because if it doesn't work, it doesn't matter. You know? It's not plugged in and there's no juice, it doesn't matter.

LOUI: Right.

SUE: But yes, it helped us to shift into start to think about, you know, how can the technology actually help us meet our goals? Now, you know, that sometimes took a little bit of persistence, you know, we'd had to kind of come back around at it. Because in the beginning, it was new and exciting, "Let's do this app! Let's use that app! Here's this

app!" You know? the whole app explosion. And people were really infatuated with the apps. So, once we made that shift to, "What are we going to do with it? What's our goal for it?" We saw a big change in their understanding of the power of technology, and also, you know, the needs of their students and the barriers you could use it to address.

[A second slide with a continued timeline from 2015/2016 to 2018/2019]

LOUI: Right, right. I really appreciate this conversation and we're gonna keep moving it forward, but we're always in the cycle of adopting new technology in schools. That's just where we are in the world. And I think people will really find value in what we've just talked about, because it's the Yes, using the UDL framework can help train that conversation, but then what you just said, we always have to keep cycling back to it because people start with what they're familiar with, right? And what they feel safe with. And sometimes people feel most safe with the app that looks really cool. Or just that, like you said, logistics of using the technology, that's a safe conversation, so that we have to scaffold our conversation about using the framework and how to make this an instructional tool. So, thank you so much for letting me dig into that a little bit more.

SUE: Oh, sure! And you know, it's really quite fun to see the light bulb go off, right? When they begin to see the tool as something that really is beneficial for students and for them. They don't head back. They don't go back to looking for that fun app. They want the good stuff that's going to work that's going to help them meet the goal.

LOUI: Right, right. Right, right. Let's just jump forward and you've done wonderful work with the Fraser Public Schools and helping them live within the UDL framework and explore different ways that they can come into this and how to expand on the cohort experiences. And in in that vein, you've also brought a tool to Fraser that's helped them

look more closely at their UDL work. So, start anywhere in there that you'd like but I'd love for you to share about the tool once you get to that point. [The Fraser Public Schools' strategic plan slide which lays out their four main areas of: teaching practices, learning partnerships, learning environment, and digital ecosystem]

SUE: Okay, great. Well, you know, what I wanted to mention is that a lot of this was driven by the Fraser administration. So, they had a vision, they really do where they were going to go. And I guess that makes sense, right? Because you can't go anywhere that's worthwhile or you want to get to someplace, you sort of have to have a clear vision to get there. And Fraser administration, they knew where they were headed. So, they've been doing some foundational work already. They were systematically building their learner centered practice with a one-to-one technology that we're just talking about. But also, they were bringing in their learning management system and getting very strategic about how they use that and they were finding their grading systems and their coaching services. They created what they called a learning ecosystem that set these high expectations for every student. And then on top of it, and probably just as important, provided the staff with the support they needed to make that happen. So, we had this real rich, strategic work happening at the administrative level. But you know, I think that that's only half the equation. The other part I think that is so important to successful implementation is to have support on the ground as well. So, we set out to do that by this cohort model of professional development, and we were very strategic and invited, any educator who wanted to join to come in sit alongside with their coaches and get this intense UDL exploration experience. So, we had volunteer teaching teams from K-6 middle school, high school, and we met over the course of two years to learn

about UDL, and then to help them put it into practice in their classrooms. And as we hoped, and you might guess, these were some of the most enthusiastic educators and they were leaders in their building. So, they drove right in. They became our UDL champions, and they, you know, began sharing their successes first with their colleagues but and then, you know, more staff meetings and at board meetings and, and really having their voices heard. And it really turned into this contagious effort. And they started recruiting their first followers, if you will. And that that's how the cohort model sort of blossomed from there. And I do think that there, you know, it's really key consideration for schools or districts out there who are thinking about UDL implementation that you need to have sort of this top-down bottom-up approach. It's not an either or, but it's more like a yes/and.

LOUI: Nice. Yes! Your expression of getting people kind of on board and the excitement begets excitement. It's wonderful!

SUE: Exactly!

LOUI: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah! So, we're close to an end but I'm just gonna let people know where this is going to be a little extra longer podcast. We're gonna go past the 15 minutes because Sue, I really want you to talk about the tool that you've brought that's helped them Fraser Public Schools. Think about this process even more deeply. [A slide about the UDL School Implementation and Certification Criteria areas. School culture and environment are circled by orange, Teaching and learning are circled by green. Leadership and management are circled by light blue. And, professional learning is circled by purple]

SUE: Okay. I sure will. So, yes, we're finishing up our first year with the final cohort and so we knew it was time to turn stuff over to Fraser to really give them some support or doing their own professional learning, but we also wanted to look at you know, the other parts of UDL implementation. These underpinnings in the school and the district make systems come alive, that support UDL implementation. So, we were able to use the criteria that was developed by CAST and the UDL-IRN that describes how the school culture and environment, school leadership and management, professional learning practices, as well as teaching and learning really had an impact on creating these equitable and inclusive learning spaces. The tool is called the UDL School Implementation and Certification Criteria, or the UDL-SICC. So, the goal of that tool is to give educators this roadmap for systemic and system wide UDL implementation that goes beyond just teaching and learning. So of course, that's the hallmark and center of our UDL conversations all the time. But there's so much more around that that allows educators to effectively implement UDL. So, without this look at the systems underneath, we can't reduce the barriers and build in those scaffolds to help teachers really implement effectively. [A slide with the purposes of the UDL-SICC that Sue just reviewed] When we when we did this, we brought it into Fraser, they had a chance to look at their school data and analyze data, and then use the UDL-SICC self-assessment to systematically move through the criteria and identify these areas of strength and areas that need improvement. And then their leadership teams grabbed on to that and they created the school wide goals that are part of their school improvement process now. And so, just like UDL these teams iteratively look at their data and find out if they're making progress. And look at what are the barriers that continue to exist and

taking those down as well. So, it's been a very effective process for them to look at what's happening in the school related to you know, their culture and environment, related to leadership and management, related to professional learning, and figuring out how they can move themselves forward in that implementation.

LOUI: Great. So where does this tool sit? [A slide describing the contents of the UDL-SICC as reviewed by Sue on the podcast]

SUE: Well, if listeners are interested, they can find the UDL SICC as well as the all the criteria as well as the guide that introduces it, the self-assessment, the readiness indicators for implementation, all of the implementation science-based tools connected to it on the learning designed website. So, I'd be happy to give you a link to that if that would be helpful.

LOUI: Yeah, and anybody who's interested in finding that link, it will be both on this podcast page at www.theUDLApproach.com/podcasts under Sue's name, Sue Hardin, and then the link will also be in the YouTube publication publications of this same podcast so I'll be there. [An image of Sue holding her grandson, a young boy with sandy blond hair, who is eating a marshmallow, and wearing a blue Hawaiian-type shirt] Okay, Sue. Well, we've managed to go over the 15 minutes, but I warned everybody about that because I used to be such an incredible conversation and I appreciate your promotion at the beginning of the podcast. I really appreciate it. This is definitely a passion project for me and everybody listening needs to know that Sue has really failed retirement several times. That she's just this incredible educator that keeps giving back and we all benefit from her so much. So Sue, thank you so much for staying within the

community, although we do want to give you your gracious time but gosh, you're so valuable. So, thank you so much for being a guest I really appreciate it.

SUE: And we thank you so much for having me. I really meant what I said and the good news is I am working toward retirement a little bit more now. So, I assume maybe...[laughter]

LOUI: Good for you! Good for you! [Two video captures of the UDL Approach dot com website followed by the UDL in 15 Minutes logo] All right, 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 the www.UDLApproach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.