

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Betty Lou Rowe
The 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. This episode is part of a special series about UDL implementation at Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation in Columbus, Indiana. Today I'm talking with Betty Lou Roe, who's an educational consultant with the Indiana Resource Center for Autism at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. Betty Lou's going to share how she helps educators in Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation use UDL to design their learning environments and lessons so students with more significant disabilities can be included in the general education environment. Hi, Betty Lou, how are you?

BETTY LOU: I'm doing great, Loui. How are you?

LOUI: I'm great. Thank you so much. So, let's get started and hear a little bit about you. What's been your journey in education and UDL?

BETTY LOU: Sure, so I was a classroom teacher for 10 years. First teaching students with emotional disabilities, in Toledo for Toledo Public Schools, in Toledo, Ohio. And then I worked with students with autism spectrum disorder for Grosse Pointe Schools and Grosse Pointe, Michigan. From there, still with Grosse Pointe, I moved into more of a teacher consultant role where I supported autism programs, as well as classrooms where students on the spectrum are being fully included. I then moved to Indiana, and I became a coordinator for programs for students with significant disabilities at Indiana Public Schools. But now, I'm an educational consultant for the Indiana Resource Center for Autism, or IRCA, and the Center on Educational Lifelong Learning or CELL, that's located at Indiana University. So, I would say my journey started with UDL, honestly when I wanted to see changes in how students and self-contained programs were accessing curriculum and instruction and experiences, whether via general education,

or within the program itself. That we weren't just moving in enclaves or had that warehouse feeling that can happen with programming, and I really wanted to see change there. So, I searched out first information online, where we always go and found some different things. And then through PATINS of Indiana, because they also have a lot of resources there and I actually brought them into IPS to work with us a little bit with our programs, for kids that are in programs for more significant disabilities. And now I sprinkle in UDL wherever I can, no matter who I talk to here, where I go or what I'm doing. I try to really talk about Universal Design for Learning.

LOUI: That's lovely. So, can you share a little bit about IIDC, IRCA, CELL the project you're on just to give people a kind of a snapshot of this really significant organization in our state?

BETTY LOU: Sure, because we're all about acronyms right. We live in the world of the alphabet soup. So, IIDC, which stands for the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, they consider the state of Indiana, this is their University Center for Excellence and Disability. So, it's a UCED. You might see that word or that acronym, kind of floating around. UCED. And its home is at Indiana University Bloomington, so we're on campus. It sits as a part of Indiana University. And the work of IIDC crosses a lifespan so around services and community and research. There's all these different concepts that happen there at IIDC and it consists of seven centers. So that's how everything, when we talk about the lifespan, can move across all these centers. But it includes the Indiana Resource Center for Autism, or IRCA or IRCA, and the Center on Education Lifelong Learning or CELL. So those are two that fall into that IIDC umbrella. But my work with IRCA consists of being Project Manager for behavior consultants so I manage a couple 100 people on a listserv, I hold roundtables, webinars, I maintain resources, problem solve if people need to even get together one on one. So we do a lot of that really building capacity within our behavior consultants across the state. I'm also the research associate for Bring Change to Mind school mental health clubs that we assisted in creating across the state. And I also provide professional development in terms of coaching. Whatever support that schools need to help impact student success,

as well as developing that own skill set when working with kiddos. With CELL, in 2018, I began working on the ICTQ and the Indiana Center for Teacher Quality. It's a grant that was awarded to CELL and I was assigned to work with Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation at that point. And so specifically into that work with BCSC and UDL, I worked with preschool and the two middle schools as the focus was on transition from pre-K to kindergarten. And then middle school becomes like that hub of transition to and from, from elementary to high school. So, that was our focus at that time.

LOUI: Got it. So that helped take this really big task and at least focus it in, on what's going on. And then what I understand is you guys didn't start with a heavy emphasis necessarily on academics. It was a child-centered approach. And so, can you talk about that approach?

BETTY LOU: Sure. Yeah. So, we started at pre-K and middle school. For the middle school level, the UDL facilitator there, Laura Ousley, identified a cohort of teachers. That's kind of where we started with that group to sort of like, where are we there in these middle schools. And because there's two, there's two different sets of people. Kind of can be two different sets of mindsets about things. People are in two different spaces when you come to where they are, including students with more significant disabilities. And so, we decided to break it down by really having a little mini training. We kind of handpick the teachers that would help think about moving this forward. And their help was also in helping us think about what happens within that gen ed setting. For preschool, which is sometimes really undervalued, you know. Pre-K for me, that's where it starts, is preschool. There's so much foundation that happens there. And so, for them we started with professional development, and working with that administration and special education staff as well, but PD for all those who are in that preschool realm. And in all of those levels, there were observations and time in the building, kind of get the feel of what was happening within the building inside and outside the classrooms. So that was kind of part of that beginning, helping me see BCSC and where we are and where we needed to go, and who to bring along with that. In 2019, we added Smith Elementary, as they had a number of students with more significant disabilities that are

educated there, in that space, and transitioning on to the middle schools. And so, we wanted to include them on that focus as well. And we know that when it comes to our students with varying abilities, the IEP's are a huge part of that. But it's not who our kiddos are. An IEP at a glance doesn't really give us who they really are. Right? IEP's are important, I don't want to say they're not, they truly, truly are important, but our kids aren't paperwork. And we realize that relationships are key to making this shift, be successful. Going from just being kids in the building and even special ed staff in the building to really being a part of the community. And so, I worked with UDL facilitator, Kate Edgren, who also was the preschool person so she and I worked really closely together. And what was created was a snapshot of the kiddos that we were looking to transition into more inclusive environments. And it was a picture of the kid, the strengths, how they communicate their interests. That was what was first on that. It didn't have anything to do yet about their academics or what their challenges were, it was really about, let's see the kid first, "Who is this kid?" And we found that it was a great way to introduce those students to the teachers. Let's not focus on the deficit, the challenges that come with the kiddos, but first, know who I am. And then also included are those other pieces that we felt like in order for them to learn within that setting, here's what they were going to need. And then that leads into, hey, you have a lot of kids. UDL is not just about kids with IEPs, it's about all kids. And then we can help through professional development and lunch times where we were meeting with staff on how you could start seeing this for all your kids.

LOUI: I love the idea of a snapshot. I totally agree. I'm a former special education teacher too, and we know and understand why we need to have IEPs. They are like you said, really important, but the student can get lost in all of those words. And so I love this idea of the snapshot and can't wait to share kind of an image of that document with people where they want to look over on the YouTube version of this podcast, but moving forward with this conversation because we've got like four minutes left. So in the design that you and Kate and others at BCSC put together, you really focused on that design upfront, helping teachers understand and others understand. So how did you

involve the adults in this process? All those educators that had to be involved in this. How did you do that?

BETTY LOU: Yes, so BCSC has a very strong foundation of UDL. So, for many of the teachers, I will say not all of them but because I think that also in special education or teachers who have more program-based style of teaching, I don't always see where UDL within their own setting, right? But there is the foundation of UDL there. Where we started was with our special education teachers and TA's because they were going to be facilitating the change. It has to come through them. They have to be confident in the language and in the process and all the aspects of that. We need them to be there. And so we wanted to start with them. We needed them to see the importance of the shift because through conversations, I could tell they were worried about keeping students safe, meeting goals from the IEP, right? And those things become barriers. We want to say they're important to validate because I 100% understand that mindset, but then how do we move that barrier out of the way so we can get to the inclusion part. I started also spending time in their classroom so I could see what did that look like, what was happening in that special education classroom with how students were accessing pieces, what was happening there. And then modeling concepts and aspects and talking through lessons that they would have, and the content connectors that they were using. Like how do we all bring that together so that it's solid, and we're all on the same page for this. Because what was also going to happen was those staff members are going to facilitate, and those teachers are going to coach the general education staff on these pieces for not only once again for their students, but also just how that will look within the gen ed classroom as well. Ultimately, we recognize that everyone's mindset isn't there yet, Loui, you know, it's a hard shift. It's a hard movement. But we know we keep moving. And the more that we talk about it and the more that we, I think we also walk the talk about UDL and what it means for all kids that we're closer to getting there.

LOUI: Yeah, you know, we always have to remind ourselves that learning is all based on our background knowledge and our background experiences. And some colleagues have never had experiences of full inclusion. Some colleagues have never had any kind

of background knowledge of even learning about this and so it's true to UDL, we have to provide that space and those supports. That's exactly what you guys are doing. And there's always time involved, but we also know that we are here to serve the students and so I really applaud the work that you guys are doing and the support that you're putting in place to help just maintain that pressure on the accelerator. Not pulling up. I just say we're going to move forward. We're going to keep moving forward. But we're going to do it in a way that we hope supports all the adults because then it's going to benefit all the kids and I think that's what you guys have done, so I really appreciate this conversation. This has been brilliant, and I can't wait to hear more about where it's gonna go in the future. But thank you so much for giving your time for this podcast.

BETTY LOU: You bet! Thank you, Louis because your voice out there just motivates us to keep doing it. It's one thing to go to a professional development ourselves, right, Loui? But your snapshots of stuff are awesome. So I appreciate the work that you do as well because it keeps us motivated.

LOUI: Oh my gosh, thank you so much. Well, I have a great time doing it.

BETTY LOU: Yay! That makes it even better if we have fun doing it right?

LOUI: It does. Oh, awesome. 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, you can 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.