UDL in 15 Minutes
Cassie Stevens and Lori Scott
The transcript with audio descriptions

LOUI
[The UDL in 15 Minutes logo, a circle around the words UDL (in blue), in (in yellow), 15 min (in red) followed by a slide reading, AESD Inclusionary Practices Project. Supporting school leaders to develop and implement sustainable systems, structures, and practices that support all students with meaningful access and engagement in inclusive learning environments.]

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 the Association of Educational Service District's (AESD) Inclusionary Practices Project. Where 9 Coordinators', one in each region of the state work closely with 140 school leadership teams to implement UDL and improve and increase inclusionary practice. Today I'm talking with Cassie Stevens and Lori Scott, both of whom are Inclusionary Practice Project Leads. Cassie and Lori are going to kick off this series by sharing the purpose, design, and current outcomes of their project and how UDL has become the key to building stronger inclusive practices across the state of Washington. Hi Cassie and Lori, how are you?

CASSIE
Good morning, Loui! We're great!

LORI
We're great, Loui! Thanks for having us!

LOUI
Oh, you're so welcome! So, I'd love for each of you to introduce yourselves by sharing a bit of your educational background and why you latched on to UDL.

CASSIE
[An image of Cassie, a smiling white woman wearing a white scoop neck shirt, a black sweater, and gold earrings. Her brown hair is pulled back from her face.]
Oh my gosh, that is a great question. So, I was a middle school teacher for 13 years and toward the end of my teaching experience, I began to coach in the building that I was working in and helped implement a literacy curriculum. Helping new-to-the-profession teachers and also veteran teachers improve their practice. And then I ended up taking a job at the ESD which landed me in this position where I am now the inclusionary practices coordinator and project lead. I had a little bit of experience with UDL as a middle school teacher, but have become very familiar with UDL through this project, and I always say if there were one basket to put all of my eggs in it would definitely be Universal Design for Learning.

LOUI
That's a great visual.

CASSIE
Thank you!

LOUI
And Lori, what about you?

LORI
[An image of Lori a white woman with long brown hair and bangs. She is wearing a sleeveless black V-neck top.
Well, gosh, I was a lifetime special educator. I was a special education director of a medium sized school district in the state of Washington for about 17 years. And then I moved to the ESD and had a different role and started to have this bigger view of special education and how exclusive that system was. And kind of had to do that, oh my gosh, I was part of a really crummy system that probably hurt kids more than it helped kids and had to go through forgiving myself. And so that whole Maya Angelou quote about do the best that you can and when you know better do better.

LOUI
Yeah.

LORI
And so that was kind of my quest. And I ended up at a CAST conference in Boston, where you actually presented and were part of my inspiration to UDL, as well as Katie Novak and Shelley Moore were there. All these great people. And I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is what we need to do!" And working at an ESD we get lots of opportunities to do great things. And this inclusionary practices project landed on my plate, and it became kind of my passion work. And so that's how I hooked on to it and then we started this crazy inclusionary practices project journey and became UDL experts in the middle of a pandemic.

LOUI
That's an awesome background story. So, I have to share with the listeners that I got to know Cassie and Lori, and the rest or most of the inclusionary practice team, oh gosh, a few months ago. And at the end, I was like I have to interview you guys because the passion of this group is resounding! It's just wonderful! It just illuminates the room when you walk in. So, I'm excited to talk to you. Thank you. [A slide reading, AESD Inclusionary Practices Project. Supporting school leaders to develop and implement sustainable systems, structures, and practices that support all students with meaningful access and engagement in inclusive learning environments.] So, like I said, this is the beginning of a series on the inclusionary practice coordinators who are working with UDL in 15 minutes, and I'm so appreciative. And your team wrote a proposal to address a pretty damaging statistic. And so, can you talk about that statistic and the project that you proposed?

LORI

I'll grab that. Are you okay with that Cassie?

CASSIE:
Go for it! Yes!

LORI
[An outline of the State of Washington with the words, Washington's Schools are #44 in inclusive education. We can do better.]

Yeah, so Washington State was ranked number 44 out of 50 states as far as how inclusive we were in educating our students with disabilities. And gosh, that doesn't feel very good. And so, our legislature, Cassie, you probably know this number better than I do. funded a really large project about how to change this in the state of Washington. Like $38 million, Cassie?

CASSIE
Yeah. $37 million over four years and nine different organizations supporting every level of the education system.

LORI
And so Educational Service Districts help support schools. We're an extension of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, which oversees all public education in the state. And so, we're called the Association of Educational Service Districts, AESD. And we put together a proposal, our proposal was one of nine and our focus was building leaders because we think that without building leaders, nothing changes. And so, we created an original application. We had a very traditional proposal where we were going to bring building leaders and their teams together for convenings, and we were going to teach them this stuff, and then send them on their merry way. And we were going to pay for their travel and their food to come to these great events, the standard delivery events. And then a pandemic came along that changed everything.

LOUI
Yeah. So, from what I understand you guys did some really significant shifting that kept that project afloat. And then you also brought contextual knowledge about Washington to the project redesign, so talk about those things.

CASSIE
[The State of Washington with 140 colored dots across it to represent the building leadership teams. The words, "seeking 140 building leadership teams" is also on the slide.]
Yeah, I'd be happy to share a little bit more about that. And Lori, I'll invite you to chime in. So COVID really changed the project in the way that we had committed in our proposal, which was accepted, to serve 140 building leadership teams across the state. So that's about 15-16 teams per coordinator per region, if that makes sense. And we worried we thought, oh my gosh, in the midst of March of 2020, and a global pandemic, and kids not even being in school, like in brick-and-mortar buildings right now. How are

people going to sign on for this project? And we knew, like it had to be a choice, right? Like leadership teams and principals had to want to make these changes in order for this to work. So, we got quite creative in our service model. And we did that through Universal Design for Learning. We kept thinking about let's name all of these barriers, what are ways we can overcome these barriers? How can we have flexible means and keep our firm goals for this project? And honor that when you talk about small rural schools or large urban schools that the needs are so very different, the staffing, the structures, all of those things. So, as we redesigned this project, we thought we have to meet schools where they're at, we have to think about cognitive science and what that tells us about strong relationships with people, minimizing all threats, and making the work super relevant. So how does this connect to your building priorities? How can we help you understand that this is going to help you improve student outcomes and achieve the things that you've been wanting to achieve? And UDL provides that way of organizing all of those best practices into one so it doesn't feel like one more thing on the plate. So, we started offering asynchronous training. We said we'll come to you. We told building leaders we would draft their agendas and help facilitate their leadership team meetings and just anything that we could take off the plate because many leaders were so busy with contact tracing, with trying to figure out all these protocols, and how they were going to continue to move some of the logistics forward in their buildings. So, in that way, we didn't anticipate serving our school teams in that way. But it became this really beautiful model of UDL and it was working. It allowed people to move forward.

LOUI:
[A slide reading, "OSPI Inclusionary Practices Project. $37 million over 4 years – 2019 – 2023 (June). Washington State ranked among the lowest for LRE – 44th out of 50 based on the amount of time students with disabilities spend in general education settings. Focus on professional development, coaching and mentoring for inclusionary practices"]

The design of that, it was just a beautiful, true support. So even your example of drafting the agendas for the leadership meetings, looking at what was on the plate, and that had to be done, but was getting shoved off because of like you said, protocols for COVID. And I just love that you guys used the framework to think about lowering the barriers and so then that gave you the inspiration to say yes, these are the things that we wanted to do. And I also think that it's important to note that there's a certain level of relationship building that you definitely referenced there, Cassie, but I think that it seems that those relationships needed to be even stronger than maybe just the casual, "Hey! Hi! We're coming in from your local education service district to help you, right?" So how did you guys choose or reach out or were a lot of these connections based on leaders with whom you already had connections?

LORI
You know, I think it was about existing relationships and building on those and then just some of those we advertised here's what we are, you're gonna learn UDL by experiencing UDL and kind of surprised by who wanted to come along with us. I think it was just in relationships, new relationships, a little bit of everything. But one of our big surprises was the fact that teams joined us and hung with us and persevered with us

through the pandemic, in spite of everything else that was going on in their lives professionally, which was that inspiration and feedback that we used to know that we were really onto something different. That it was the right thing that schools wanted and needed to be doing right now.

CASSIE
Yeah, if I can add on to that many of our school teams who joined us already, were wondering how they could improve inclusion, how Universal Design for Learning might change outcomes. We heard a lot about leaders saying teachers are struggling with the increasingly diverse learners in front of them, and they don't feel like they have the skill set and they don't know what to do. And so, we're looking for something that's going to support it. So many of our teams came to us kind of already thinking in that way or even already partway into that inclusion work or inclusive practice work. And so, I think that was super helpful. And then for other teams, it just made sense. So, as you are kind of in the midst of a pandemic, and thinking about what really matters and what really is important and makes sense. Everything about this project was like yes, this works for all learners. This is really about improving tier one. It's about increasing the capacity of teachers so that they have the same approach to teaching and learning. That means that we can better collaborate and co-teach, co-plan together. All of these things started Yeah, yeah, kind of clicking into place, if that makes sense.

LOUI
So now we'll get to nuts and bolts because we know that every project has to be measured. And so, I'm curious what tools you used and did you have to improvise and those outcome data, what have they been saying?

LORI
[A slide stating, "Inclusionary practices project goals: More time in general education classrooms, more effective teacher instruction, increased student engagement, increased state support]
We knew we had measurement in mind when we designed the project, and the state had provided an LRE, Least Restrictive Environment self-assessment tool that we could use, and that was available to some of the schools. I guess it'd be available to all schools in the state, but some schools had to use it. But we looked at the tool and it was like, oh, it's not a great fit. And so, we had this great idea. Well, we're gonna make this better because we're brilliant. We thought we were anyway. And what we came to was that there's not one tool that fits all schools, and all districts, in all contexts. And so with UDL in mind, we created a toolkit that buildings could choose the way they wanted to measure their progress on becoming a more inclusive school.

CASSIE
So, we gave them a variety of needs assessments. And we also said if you have one that you're already using that's working for you. Let's use that. So we wanted to honor what people had in place. We found that many schools did not have an identified needs assessment. And so that became an important part. You know, it's not the rating. It's the discussion. [A table showing the impact the project has had on Least Restrictive

Environment. Overall, there are 11% more students since 2019 participating in inclusive environments between 80%-100% of the day]

LOUI:
Yeah, absolutely. So, what about the outcomes? What was there?

CASSIE:

That's so exciting. So, we know that least restrictive environment data is not the end. It's the beginning, right? So, students with disabilities need to be in the room, but it goes far beyond just being in the room. However, we are excited to say that through our project, we have seen an 11% increase in LRE one data, which doubles the rate of change that we're seeing across the state. So, for teams that weren't engaged with us. We have also had over 10,000 educators and about 10,000 hours' worth of professional learning. So, half of that is for our school teams, but the other half is people reaching out and are ESD to say, "Hey, will you collaborate and lead this professional learning with me?" because it makes a lot of sense for us to pair or teachers or leaders saying, you know, I can't commit to full project engagement, but can you lead something for my staff, so we're just seeing in Washington State such a growing demand and need for inclusive education and professional learning. And in the ways that leaders are starting to think about how this can shift their systems to have better outcomes. [A green bar with the data of number of teams, hours served, and hours of PD given that Cassie just shared]

LOUI
Oh, that's excellent. That's absolutely excellent. So, like every project, funding comes to an end. And I understand that there's hope that there could be some link to this. So, I say that our plan is that we make sure that the whole package of these podcasts get to the people that need to hear this and they'll be like, "Oh, yeah, we need to keep these people going!"

CASSIE
Oh, me too.

LOUI
That's my mastermind plan here.

CASSIE

And I'm excited as you shared at the beginning when you start to talk to each coordinator about the work in the region. The stories of our school teams are so inspiring. It's just incredible to listen to leaders talk about this work.

LORI
I love it.

LOUI

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Oh my gosh, Cassie, and Lori, thank you so much for taking time to be on the podcast and share and get us all started with this series and for sharing your background and bringing your joy, and intelligence, and expertise and everything to this project. It's just so exciting. Thank you so much.

CASSIE:
Thank you. Yeah, we're so excited to be here.

LORI:
Thank you, Loui.

LOUI:
[Website captures of www.theudlapproach.com followed by the UDL in 15 Minutes podcast logo]
You're welcome. 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/media. 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.