

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Jenny Parker

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 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 Dr. Jenny Parker, the Regional Administrator for Special Programs and Professional Development with ESD 113. Jenny is going to share how one teacher found her way into UDL. Hi, Jenny. Welcome!

JENNY:

Hi, Loui. Thanks for having me.

LOUI:

Oh, you're welcome. And I hope it's okay that I just called you Jenny. Is that all right?

JENNY:

That's fine. Can I call you Loui?

LOUI:

[laughter] Yes, you sure can. So, can you share a bit about your background in education and how you came to know UDL?

JENNY:

Sure, I began teaching in the early 90s. It's been almost 30 years now. And the first time I heard about UDL was in the early 2000's when I was working as an adjunct faculty member at a local university and their special education department. And my colleagues were talking about this book called Teaching Each Child in the Digital Age. And it laid out the sort of tenets of UDL and talked about how we can provide access to the curriculum for all students, including students with disabilities, which was a focus of mine since I was working in special education.

LOUI:

Oh my gosh. That's the blast for the past book that all of us got started with. Well, those of us who've been doing this for a long time. So that's a foundational book for me to. [laughter]

JENNY:

And it wasn't just the book. I was also listening to my colleagues at the University at the time, with respect to assistive technology, and I listened to the director of our Assistive Technology Resource Center, who was talking about Universal Design for Learning as a way of planning, curriculum and planning instruction. That was really novel. And the

thing that appealed to me about it was that it was broad enough and flexible enough to really address the needs of each of the students in our classes, and I had not seen that before. So that was really exciting to me. And it was kind of daunting at the beginning, but really after having read it, and read the guidelines multiple times and following the long, what was happening in that sector. I got really excited about it, and I've followed it ever since.

LOUI:

That's really cool. So, you're really experienced with UDL, and you know, it can be challenging in the beginning, just like you said. So it's a big framework, no specific entry point, but you are working with a teacher who found her own entry point, and I'd love for you to share that story.

JENNY:

Sure. So, I've been working with a teacher who was a first grade teacher and she was having a hard time conceptualizing UDL for her classroom. And kind of putting it together making a plan. And it was funny, a coincidence was that I was going to be appearing on this podcast, and so I decided I was going to do a little bit of research. So, I played one of the UDL in 15 Minutes podcasts, and it was a podcast where you were interviewing a kindergarten teacher, and this kindergarten teacher was talking about her beginning experience, and saying that she decided to start very simply. She decided that she was just going to provide choice with one thing for her kindergarteners. And the choice that she provided was how students would respond to an assessment. And the choices that she provided were that students could respond digitally, or they could write on paper. And then she asked each student in turn, why they had selected the form of assessment that they had. And what she said in the podcast was she really learned so much about her students. Well, I had listened to this podcast about a week before I was working with this group of teachers. And this one teacher was having a difficult time. And so I sent her the link to the podcast, and she ended up really just doing the same thing that this kindergarten teacher had done and incorporating choice. One choice in her assessment strategies, and that really kind of did it for her. She felt more confident. And she said she learned so much about her students when she asked them that question.

LOUI:

So that teacher's story hinged on replication. She heard somebody else's story, she replicated it, and I think that's a wonderful entry point. So in what ways do you think the replication helped her and is this a model that you'd suggest to others?

JENNY:

Yeah, there are a couple of examples of replication that I could think of. One goes back to way back to my student teaching, and that was with a very experienced teacher. And at the time, I think developmentally, I had been studying in school and trying to put everything together. But there were some things that I just didn't have a grip on. I don't think I was ready for them. And so I remember being very purposeful in my student teaching about looking at what the teacher did well, and realizing that I didn't have a

better idea at that point, just copying to the best of my ability. How she handled herself, what she said, how she approached things. That gave me the opportunity to tweak it and make it into my own eventually. And that was something that I used later on when I was teaching future teachers. I was involved in a reading practicum and I also did student teacher supervision and things like that. And I would say to students, look, if you don't have a better idea, go ahead and do what I do. I will act it out for you. I will do some role playing and just do what I do and see if that works. If it doesn't work then you get to be the critic, you get to be the editor of that content. You can take it and make it into your own so that it makes sense for you. So I think that's the beauty of replication. It allows us to in practice, have an experience which we can then change our own practice to fit our own personality or our own needs, our own kind of situation and context.

LOUI:

Yeah, I know sometimes I think in the American educational system, we get hung up on replication, especially on the student's part, but even as educators, it's like we feel like we're cheating. And just as you're pointing out, it's not cheating, it's following a model you watched that you observed was really strong. And then inherently we bring our own piece to the replication but even when we're working with a colleague, we could make that explicit in the reflection process. So you did what you saw. But then, what did you add in that was your own, and I agree with you, I think it's a very valuable process. So it does sound like replication is something to add to the UDL facilitator toolbox. What are other tools or strategies that you find have a high impact when it comes to others learning about UDL?

JENNY:

That's a really good question. I think there are two things that kind of go hand in hand. The first thing would be collaboration. I think co-planning and co-teaching are amazing ways to accomplish great things in the classroom that meet the needs of all our many children. And I think the other thing, if you combine collaboration with the practice of watching one another teach, then you have a really powerful model that can change classroom practice on the part of teachers. So if we maybe record ourselves teaching, or if we watch somebody else teach or have somebody come and watch us teach, they really calibrate our understanding of what good instructional practice is. If we get together and talk about it. And I think that it's really important to have other people kind of triangulate understandings of what's going on in education, because there's so much. And I think that you can do a reasonable job on your own, but when it comes to really making strides, changing things up and being innovative, I think it's important to talk to other people and to get other people involved. And that's also one of the joys of this profession is that we get to do that as part of our practice.

LOUI:

Yeah, I absolutely agree. I am a huge proponent of recording oneself during delivery of instruction. And so I did it when I was in the classroom. I do it during professional development if I'm recorded or I will have someone recording me and going back and watching. And I don't know that there's anybody in the world that doesn't cringe a little

bit. At least when they watch themselves. But like you're saying, there's so much you can learn from watching your behaviors, how are you interacting, which students are you turning to more? Are you really sharing that collaborative space with your colleagues? All these different pieces. So are there protocols around the video aspect, watching oneself, and then reviewing the video?

JENNY:

So I'm really new to this project. So that hasn't been part of my practice here. Just thinking about effective practices that I've come across in the past. And going back to that sort of university experience, having students record themselves doing a short lesson, and then looking at the different components of the lesson, looking at the data that the lesson gives us. Are we making eye contact? Have we shared the objective? Are we being enthusiastic? That's an important piece because enthusiasm is infectious with kids. And so sometimes those things are brought to the front. You can't really hide from a recording, you know what I mean? And if you get over that initial cringe-worthiness of the whole thing, you can go on to make changes in your behavior. And if you're looking at it with somebody else, kind of takes away that horror.

LOUI:
Right.

JENNY:

You know, in a way it's like we're in this together. Everybody does it. If leaders tape themselves and show themselves teaching. If you know, teachers do that, then I think it can be a powerful tool.

LOUI:

Yeah, I think so too. I love the work of Jim Knight on instructional coaching. And within his work on instructional coaching, he leans heavily on video recording and so he even has materials and tools on recording the coaching relationship between the teacher and the coach. And so the coach is recording that and going back and looking at their own coaching styles and tools and how they interact with the teacher. So he's got a lot of wonderful tools that I pass around a lot to point people to his website.

JENNY:

I'll have to check that out. I think that side-by-side coaching, that sort of that same concept, isn't it? I did a lot of side-by-side teaching at the university level where I would jump into a lesson and demonstrate the power of increased pace or the power of positive reinforcement or things like that.

LOUI:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I agree with you. That in-the-moment prompting is so helpful. And so by watching ourselves in the coaching avenue, or context we can see how well we're doing that. This has been a great conversation, Jenny. I really appreciate it. Thank you. And I think it's gonna give people a lot of reflection points on how they bring new

practice into their environment and maybe feeling a little safer about just replication. Very simple replication. So thank you.

JENNY:

Well thank you for having me. It's been fun.

LOUI:

You're welcome. 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 in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.