

UDL in 15 Minutes with
Ann Renker and Victoria Kalscheuer
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 family photo of Victoria, a white woman with long brown curly hair posing with her husband and daughter in front of the Epcot sphere at Disney]

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 Districts Inclusionary Practices Project where nine coordinators, one in each region of the state, worked closely with 140 school leadership teams to implement UDL and improve and increase inclusionary practice. Today I'm talking with Ann Renker, who is inclusionary practice coordinator for ESD 114 on Kitsap and Olympic Peninsula of Washington State and Victoria Kalscheuer the principal at Blue Heron Middle School in Port Townsend, Washington. Ann and Victoria are going to talk about how staff celebrate authentic learning in their building. Hi, Ann and Victoria, how are you?

VICTORIA:

Hello, thank you so much for having us. We're just thrilled to be here.

ANN:

Hello. Thank you so much. And I echo everything Tori said.

LOUI:

So, can each of you share a bit about your education background and how you came to UDL?

VICTORIA:

Sure, this is Tori. I started my educational career as a general ed teacher. So, I had a Bachelor's in Science. I quickly learned that I was possibly meant to be a special ed teacher and went back for my masters and primarily focused on cognitive disabilities, and the things that were needed to create access. And so, at that point, was when I really started figuring out that there were things that we could do to support access for students, and then since then have gone back for my Master's in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis and became a principal and special ed director. But UDL has been a passion of mine for quite a long time.

LOUI:

Awesome, thank you. And Ann?

[An image of Ann, a white woman with long brown straight hair posing with a State Representative and another professional at the State House]

ANN:

Well, my path is a little bit untraditional, I think. So, actually my first career was as an anthropologist and a linguist. My doctorate is in anthropology with a concentration in linguistics. And I began to work in the public school system when I was living on, well I still live on the Makah reservation in Neah Bay, Washington, and they were looking for an ESL teacher. So, I shifted over to working specifically with native students who needed English supports. And then that then proceeded from being an ESL teacher to a building principal, and then to a district assistant superintendent and then working on the state and regional level. The connection for me really came because the cognitive science about human universals in terms of how the brain works, has been a part of linguistics for a very, very long time. And I noticed in my work in Neah Bay, that it was all about cultural responsiveness and being contextually appropriate for the community. So UDL was a natural fit on both of those.

LOUI:

Man, you guys are a power duo! This is awesome! So Tori, could you tell us a little bit about Blue Heron Middle Schools? What are your demographics, that kind of stuff?

[A classroom with alternative seating, fidget band on the legs of the chair, softer lighting, caddies with supplies and anchor charts]

VICTORIA:

Sure, well, Blue Heron is in a port community and very artistic area in our Peninsula. And we are really touted to be a Victorian place. So you know, we have a lot of that cultural background and in terms of that. For our building, then we really try to bring that port connection or the maritime connection in and connect in terms of arts as well. For our enrollment we have somewhere between 250 and 275 students typically in our building. We have a six through eighth grade building. And so with that enrollment we usually have between 75 and 100 students in each grade level. This year, our free and reduced lunch has kind of dropped. So we are under 50%, which is a little unusual for us, but we're thinking that coming back from COVID not everybody's turning it in because we had been removed for so long. We are thankfully at a 12% rate for students who need special education were identified. We have about 3% of our population receiving English learner or multilingual services depending on what state you're in and how you're using that language right now. Regarding race and ethnicity, we have noticed that some of our populations are not wanting to share their identity and we are assuming right now that some of it is related to past fears of some things that have gone on historically, especially for our American Indian population in this area. So right now we know that we have 80% of our student body that are identifying as white. And then beyond that, we have multiple races and cultural backgrounds.

LOUI:

Lovely, that's really a good point. The demographics are always the numbers maybe don't always reflect. And for a variety of reasons. And I think it speaks to why we need to shift educational practices so they benefit all kids no matter what because we may not get all those numbers. But we still need to serve all those kids. So moving forward, why did you and your staff decide to participate in this project and what were your goals coming in?

[Faculty gathered around chart paper to discuss the Tier 1 supports they've listed.]

VICTORIA:

Well, that one is a little tricky for me to answer. This work started before I came to this building. So, I started last year at the beginning of the year as the principal here. And the work started with quite a few principals before me. And I believe it was 2019 that this building was approved for a grant and really it was to support the shift to a more proactive system of support in our building. Instead of that reactive mindset and systemic practice. And so the principal before me did a lot of the pre-work to support our shift.

LOUI:

Nice, nice, nice, nice. So are there goals that you are all working within then with this project?

[Chart paper input that shows how teachers are progressing in their thinking about Tier 1 supports]

VICTORIA:

Yeah, our primary goal at the building is really in terms of all areas, all academic areas, all of the things that MTSS and PBIS encompass, are impacted by our work in UDL. So, while we've been trying to keep it small, that scope becomes so big that at the beginning of this year, Ann and I realized, oops, it had become too big for our teachers. There were too many words and acronyms and all sorts of things that were feeling frustrating to them and feeling like they weren't doing the work. When Ann and I could clearly say yes, you are on the track of helping us use universal supports to shift our model. So for example, last year, which was the first year back with students full time in our building, our RTI model was absolutely flipped. Almost 80% of our students in our building needed support beyond tier one. And it was so overwhelming for everybody. And so we have done a tremendous amount of work in this last year to shift that and we have truly, even though we still have frustrating moments in time, flipped that back. And this year, we truly have the pyramid of the smallest number of students receiving those tier two and tier three pieces.

LOUI:

That's an excellent flip and in a relatively short amount of time. So that speaks to the support you all are offering and the well, support in maybe through professional development, which I know happens but then I think that speaks to interpersonal support. So, bravo! That's awesome! Ann, I'm curious about the kind of leadership support that you brought into the school and into the community at Blue Heron Middle School?

[Teachers and paraprofessionals gather around a computer and chart paper to list the kinds of supports that are used in classrooms]

ANN:

Well, Loui, I think this is where it's very interesting because we need to remember that UDL was for adult learners too, it's not just for younger humans that are learning things. So, and this is where my anthropological perspective, I think it's really important. So

what I do is I individualize for every building that I work with. And so when I began to work with Tori, we established right away that it would be helpful if she and I had a meeting every week to be able to debrief what has happened, what's going forward, and that weekly meeting became an anchor for us to be able to work organically evolve, what the staff needed, because we were constantly going back to our staff data and feedback and growing and adapting with them as it came to their professional learning instead of Tori and I coming up with a lesson plan for beginning of the year and then sticking with it. So making sure that we can always listen to their voices. That's another piece about UDL that I think is really important. Making sure everybody feels seen and heard. Making sure that people have choice embedded, and I really feel like Victoria's excellent leadership of anchoring her building leadership team to all of the substantial decisions about professional learning. And the next steps in the professional learning practice has also been critical in this amazing flip that Blue Heron has been able to see.

LOUI:

Awesome, awesome. I totally agree with you. Hearing the voices of those who are involved. That's a huge resonance within UDL. So I'm curious, what were those data that you collected from staff? What did they look like? Are these exit tickets from professional development? How is that data collected?

[Chart paper from September 2022 with universal supports and needed interventions and another chart paper dated January of 2023 asking what is in place, what needs to be in place, what tier 2 and tier 3 supports are needed, what they will add through UDL].

VICTORIA:

Great question. Early this year, Ann and I utilized basically a gallery wall but we used to have the grade level in the beginning. And we asked them a question of what universal supports are you ready to provide this year? And you know, we had them listed the grade level on their chart paper, all the things that they were ready to provide. And then they started listing in the next part of the activity, what types of tier two and tier three interventions they needed. And they continued, actually, when Ann and I were reviewing the data, listing almost all universal supports. And so what it told us is, they hadn't truly understood the breadth of what universal supports can be. And with that understood their own competence in what they were doing, because many of the things that they even listed in the tier two and tier three need they already had. Or we had some sort of component and people who may not have realized it yet. And so we actually brought that activity back out this week. But as we brought them back together this week, it was amazing. And I will be looking at the data a little deeper later today. But it was amazing to hear the conversations that they had. The last time I was really in and out of those groups really listening to understand because of where they were at. This time, I could stay in the middle of all the groups and listen for more of afar, to hear the themes that were going on around the room. The energy was different, their competence has shifted. They were able to easily come up with things that they were doing. It was wonderful. Ann, do you have anything you want to share?

ANN:

And I think here we go with UDL is for adults, too. So, Tori and I use multiple modalities and she just described the really important piece of collecting data that happens during the work time in our professional learning sessions. But we also utilize surveys digitally so that way we can say everybody has an opportunity to also participate anonymously if that's their comfort level. And then our inclusionary practices project also has a couple of built in surveys for school teams. For example, the least restrictive environment data, and then data around classroom observations. So we make use of as many different sources of data. But the important piece is making sure the staff doesn't feel like all they do is report data. So we try to keep some of those collection opportunities embedded in work. So we can also model for them that that's a great shift to classroom practice as well.

[The seven team members of the universal supports group followed by video captures of www.theudlapproach.com website followed by the UDL in 15 Minutes logo]

LOUI:

Well, yeah, absolutely. You just went where I was thinking, which is we know that it's so powerful when those who have provided the data points to us that they hear back from the person, the people who have organized the professional development to say, we heard you and this is what we heard. And so that's why we're bringing this back to you. Yeah, it leads to such great empowerment and ownership. Which is beautiful, so beautiful. Oh, well we definitely have reached up to 15 minutes. It always goes so fast. But I really thank you Ann and Victoria for bringing this story here and it helps tell the story of this whole project, this whole inclusionary practices project that people are gonna be so excited to learn about. So thank you, thank you for being here.

ANN:

Thank you for the opportunity.

VICTORIA:

Thank you so much.

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 UDLapproach.com/media. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 minutes, you can contact me through the UDLapproach.com And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.