

## UDL in 15 Minutes

With Janelle Bersch, Emily Wilgus, and Heidi Schroeder

### 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 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 Janelle Bersch, the implementation coach from the North Central Educational Service District, and Emily Wilgus, the preschool education program coordinator, along with Heidi Schroeder, the preschool instructional coach from Castlerock Early Childhood Learning Center. Janelle, Emily, and Heidi are going to talk about how UDL and this project have helped them grow their Inclusive Early education model. And this is the second interview with these guests.

So, Janelle, we're going to jump to you but really quickly, let me remind our listeners that first, you guys introduced yourselves, and it's incredible brain trust. So, anybody who didn't listen to the first part of this podcast, you need to go back and listen to that. Because Emily, Heidi, and Janelle are beyond belief. They bring so much to this, which is awesome. Heidi gave a great piece about where Castle Rock was and why they wanted to get involved. But a big part of that, the heart of that, was moving from a system that runs smoothly to finding value in the students and saying you know what, we want those hiccups. We want to have those little bursts in the moment because that's where true learning happens. And Heidi did a great job of pointing to Emily as such a key leader in this, and that's the reason why that system was allowed to shift because you don't have somebody saying it's supposed to be smooth sailing all the time. But instead, we're supposed to have these bumps, the ins, and outs, and that's great. And Emily really gave us a picture of how they are working so hard and connecting with families and getting not only their buy-in but their perspective and knowing their values. And figuring out how to connect better. So now we are going to hear from Janelle, and she's going to share in what ways inclusion has improved as a result of this project.

JANELLE:

Thank you. So the work that we've been doing with Wenatchee School District really

spearheaded a paradigm shift throughout their early learning program that had started way beyond before I became involved with the work through the pyramid model and the specific grants from OSPI. The Castle Rock program really has a value of inclusion, and that's spread to other programs throughout the Wenatchee School District, including Transitional Kindergarten, our community partners such as Headstart, ECAP, and even our private child cares and private preschools. It continues to grow and spread. The goal really for us as a team is to bring UDL to all the different settings in early learning. And Wenatchee School District has a pretty significant early learning system that includes lots of different partners. The really cool thing is that Wenatchee is becoming the place to talk about. In my work in the region, other districts are saying hey, what's going on in Wenatchee? And I say, hey, they're doing great work there. You should see, you should come talk to them and vice versa. Wenatchee is reaching out to other folks in the districts in the region as well, learning from each other. So inclusion is spreading throughout our region. And that's really our goal, too, is to spread the effectiveness of inclusion. How valuable it is. How joyful it is for all students to be involved in the classroom community, because we all feel that every child definitely does have a place in the classroom community.

LOUI:

You know, as part of these interviews, and I've been learning more and more about the different regions, but I'm hearing more about how this is my sense that there seems to be a stronger connection across the region of the schools who are participating in this project that maybe there's more communication, there's more sharing, is that true? Is that something that you guys are seeing also?

JANELLE

I think districts really want to know what's working and where the successes are, and they want to celebrate those successes. So I think in different venues, there have been some connections made about what's happening, who's doing the inclusive practice. Tell us your story. Tell us what, how you got there. So yes, I agree with you. I think there is some increased communication, especially when there's a lot to celebrate.

LOUI:

Beautiful. It's just wonderful. So, Heidi, I understand you have a couple of stories about students and how you've seen these outcomes come to life, and we really want to hear those.

HEIDI:

So I do. I have a story about a little guy that is on an IEP. And then I have a story about my granddaughter, who is not on an IEP. So at Castle Rock, we serve about 50% of our

population are students on IEPs, and the other 50% of our tuition-paying kiddos that come from our community. So that's how we get our inclusive environment. We have those typically developing peers that come in from the community, and then we have our students on IEPs. And so my granddaughter was able to be one of those students coming in from the community. So I see it firsthand with her. Well, and a lot of the other kids that come in with the communities, I see that as well. But I have that firsthand experience of spending a lot of time with this little gal and knowing how it's played out in her home life as well. So I want to start with our little guy that was on an IEP. He was two years old, and we got a call that he would be transitioning into our program when he turned three. I knew he was down at one of our more intensive ABA applied behavior analysis community partners, and I knew that they were working with him prior to him coming into the actual school district. So I called them up and I said, hey, can I come down and observe this student? I understand he's got some unexpected behaviors and they said, yep, he sure does come on down. So I came down, and I spent some time watching two and a half hours of non-stop screaming, tipping things over, running to get whatever he could get his hands on to destroy, and the people working with him really trying hard to figure out, okay, what are we going to be able to do? How are we going to be able to work with him, and they were making some headway. So I came back and visited a few more times before coming here because I wanted to be really ready for him. That was a 12-week program. So he started to decline with some of those unexpected behaviors. They started to decrease, and more expected behavior started to increase. And then he transitioned to us. As expected, he regressed a little bit, and we had more screaming, just loud, loud, that really ear-piercing screaming, and some more aggressive behaviors. Fast forward because we had here we were able to have him for three years when he turned three, four, and five, and fast forward to his last year here. You could not pick him out in the classroom. He was chatting with all of his friends in the classroom. He had so many friends in the classroom. He was a leader in that he was creating the stories. He was making up the scenarios. He was trying to decide, you know, the pole place scenario and how it should go with the other kids. Completely independent, putting coat and backpack using the bathroom, all of those things completely independently. And so before he left, we reevaluated him, and he did not qualify any longer in some of the areas. And he moved into a neighboring district and started school there. So probably about a month or so ago, I called my friend that's over there. And I said I just want to know how this little guy is doing. Can you give me any information or an update or how's he doing? And she's in a position in that district where she works with a lot of kids with behavioral challenges. So had there been anything, he would have come up on her radar, and she probably would have been working with him. And she said I don't know who you're talking about. And I was like, yay!

LOUI:  
Oh...

HEIDI:

And she said, give me a day, and I'll go to kind of take a peek around. So she said oh, I was she called me back, and she said I was in kindergarten the other day, and she goes he's never even been near me or my radar or anything. And she said my guess is he'll probably not need an IEP by the end of this year or maybe early next year. From a little guy that I was, oh my gosh, how are we going to help? How are we going to support him? To he's now off sailing and doing his thing, and he's part of the kindergarten classroom and moving into first grade with everybody else. Just doing his life.

LOUI:

That's wonderful. Yeah, and I'm sure there are people that are gonna say, Well, how did that happen? And I know it's such a big, multi-dimensional description. Still, I'm sure a lot of it is grounded in positive assumptions and expectations of, you know, you're here with your peers, and we're a community, and we're all working together, and here's some structures to help you do that.

HEIDI:

Yeah, exactly. A lot of consistency with routine, and then we use a lot of those peer-mediated strategies. So that's where my granddaughter comes in. And I talk about her because we teach our peers we don't just say, okay, here you go into this classroom, and there's some kids that might need some help, go help them. We teach our peers how to prompt. We teach our peers how to talk to other kids. We teach them how to gain attention from one another. We teach them how to make a share request and then to receive. So there's every intentionality behind what we're teaching. And all of our students are learning that, and then we're using our peers to, again, assist our students that have some more challenges to be able to go through the things of their day. If you need help with your backpack, you're going to turn and ask a friend. But the very cool part about that, and this is the part that just almost always brings tears to my eyes, is that in September, early October, our peers are doing the bulk of the helping, but by mid-October, our peers are now like, hey, you can help me, and they turned to those students that were more challenging or needed more support in the beginning, and they're turning and saying, okay, now it's your turn to help me. And they're getting the help back again from them. And so my granddaughter, I had the joy of being able to sub in her class a couple of times, and so I went in, and I was helping a little boy, I was said, Okay, I'll help you. And I'll be over here, and she walked up, and she said, Gigi, I got this. I can do this. You're in charge of the whole class. I'll help him. And she's just like,

okay, Gigi, I got this. And she just took care of it and did the whole thing. And so I watch her now in kindergarten. There is only a sense that everybody belongs here. There is only yeah, that's how some people do things, and I do him this way. And that's a-okay. And there's always that structure that she has learned to rely on. Now she could walk up to anybody and say, hey, do you need help with that, or do I need help with this? You seem to be good at it. And it's just not something that I was maybe necessarily thinking five-year-olds were going to just really glom on to, and they have completed. It's just been the coolest thing to watch.

LOUI:

That's so excellent. I have in my head that you guys are going to get several phone calls from preschools around the nation saying okay, tell us more about what you've been doing because these are incredible stories, and they're beautiful. But they're possible. They're possible everywhere. And I really appreciate you sharing what you've experienced and helping others see that this is possible. This is real. This is something that should be happening, and the joy that it is happening. So thank you, all three of you, for participating in these two different episodes within the larger set of episodes and to be able to tell Wenatchee's story, and specifically Castle Rock's early childhood learning centers story, in such a thorough way. I really appreciate it. Thank you all. 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 [theudlapproach.com/podcasts](http://theudlapproach.com/podcasts) And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 Minutes, contact me through [theudlapproach.com](http://theudlapproach.com) And thanks to everyone for your work and revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.