UDL in 15 Minutes

With Mary Waldron and Michaela Clancy

Episode 99 - The transcript with audio descriptions

[The UDL in 15 Minutes logo, a circle around the words UDL (in blue), in (in yellow) and 15 min (in red) followed by the AESD Inclusionary Practice Project logo followed up by images of Mary Waldron, a white woman with shoulder length brown hair and Michaela Clancy, a white woman with shoulder length red hair pulled back]

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 Mary Waldron, who is the Director of Inclusionary Practices and the Inclusionary Practices Coordinator with the Puget Sound Educational Service District, and Michaela Clancy, Director of Special Education at the Clover Park School District. Today, Mary and Michaela are going to share their unique multidisciplinary approach to inclusion, UDL, and building leadership capacity.

Hi Mary and Michaela, how are you?

MARY:

I'm great, Loui. Thanks so much for having us on your podcast today.

MICHAELA:

We're great. Thank you so much. We're just excited to be here, Loui.

LOUI:

Oh, thank you so much. Thank you! So, could you both tell us about your teaching background and connection to UDL and say your name before you start talking so people can orient themselves to your voice?

MICHAELA:

So I started as an elementary school teacher, and that was right as we were seeing so much autism in our area. And I really was passionate about modifying at that time. Then became a special educator and a school psychologist. And as a school psychologist, the neurology of learning and how we really learn, and how we can help our students access their education became a real area of interest. I would say that probably fueled all of my additional education. And then, through my school psychology work, I became an administrator because really what we're talking about is systems, and I was so interested in doing student by student by student. But what drove me to become an administrator was really about impacting the system, like the environment for the student, in a different way. And I've been doing that across now three districts. Started in a district close by and then was in a very large district in our state, and now have been here in Clover Park for six years.

LOUI:

Excellent. Thank you, and Mary?

MARY:

Thank you. So, I have been at the ESD for about eight years now. But I come from the Early Learning world, specifically the pre-K to third-grade world. And you know, that's a place that's really grounded in neuroscience from the Child Development Perspective, as well as thinking about the whole child. So, when I was introduced to UDL around 2018, through a professional learning session that Katie Novak did at our ESD, it really felt like something that resonated with me, and when the opportunity came up to

support our schools and districts in our region through the Inclusionary Practices Project, I was so excited to do that, and I'm so excited to do that. So, this work has been incredibly rewarding to partner with our school district and school building partners.

LOUI:
Alright, thanks. So Michaela, could you also share some demographic information about Clover Park School District? [An image of Washington state with a close up on King County and Kitsap county]

MICHAELA
Sure. So, we're southwest of Seattle and Tacoma. Very close to Tacoma. We're currently about 13,000 students. I like to say we have everything that you would have in any district. We're the "every district" of Washington State. We are a very highly diverse majority of our students of color. And we've had about 70% free and reduced lunch. Unique to our district is six of our elementary schools are on one of the largest military bases in the US, called Joint Base Lewis-McChord. And that means 33% of our students have families who are active-duty members of the military right now. And that means that we also have a higher percentage of students with IEPs. It's about 15%. The average in our state hovers around 13%. So, it means that that's where that everything comes from. We have a range of things that our students bring to us that we need to serve, and it feels larger often than the 13,000 students.

LOUI:
Wow. Thank you. So let's just dive in and talk about UDL at Clover Park. So, when Clover Park got started with UDL, it wasn't labeled that way it wasn't talked about that way. So, how was UDL introduced? [A timeline showing the authors and their books on equity]

MICHAELA:
So and I'm giggling a bit because it was very important for us not to say UDL. In fact, we discussed it. As we started this, year two of this, we moved into the COVID response,

but we didn't want our educators to feel like we were adding one more thing to what we were already doing because it wasn't. It was the how of what we were already discussing and why and that was really a response to our equity work. The very first year of this project, we were moving forward with a new district equity policy. We did quite a bit of stakeholder review with our community, and it was really important for us to address equity specifically. And our response to that was quite a bit of equity professional development, mindset, our multi-tiered system of support district-wide, but again, our staff needed to feel like we weren't adding yet another thing to their plates, especially as COVID started during all of that. This was really that how that okay, this is our mindset work and our equity work and all means all of our students. But this also needed to be relevant responses. So, when I look back at the year one graphics that we were using in some of our presentations, you'll see the multiple means of engagement, the multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression. You won't see UDL, and it just sort of makes me laugh, but we needed them to know that this is not something else. This is the same thing we've been doing in our MTSS implementation. And it absolutely had to just be relevant and responsive to those educators. So that's why and that shifted through now we're in year four of our implementation.

LOUI:
All right, excellent. So during that process, when did you start to specify that it was UDL? [Two hands grasping one another to represent the multi-departmental MTSS and defining those departments as teaching and learning, special education, college and career readiness, and equity, diversity and inclusion.]

MARY:
So we really started focusing on UDL last year, the 21-22 school year. And that was really the point at which we started moving beyond these ideas of, okay, what is inclusion? Why does it matter? Like Michaela was saying, the connection to equity. How does it improve outcomes for students? And really shifted to focusing more on UDL specifically, so introducing the framework and taking a dive into that. With some of the

different professional learning groups we'll talk about, we really started digging into the basics of backward planning through a UDL lens. So really moving along that continuum from theory into practice.

LOUI:

All right, got it. And then I understand that you guys provide professional learning and coaching through lots of different channels. So what do those channels look like, and how is that information getting teachers?

MARY:

So this is the part where I really want to brag for Clover Park about the work that they've done because they have really thought about all of the ways to disperse this information and build that leadership capacity at all levels. You know, often we start with professional learning directly to teachers, and we skip the principal level, but that is a really important level when we're talking about how teachers are going to get real-time support and the role that principals play at that lead learner in a building. So Clover Park uses lots of different strategies. There's a universal level which happens once a month professional learning through a train-the-trainer model. We have a monthly specialized committee that we that I facilitate that focuses on instructional coaches and building leadership, and that's where we get into a lot of some really specific UDL strategies and really into the nuts and bolts. And then there's also support for secondary principals who meet monthly, and then I get some time with them a few times a year to focus on that implementation piece. So how is implementation going in your building? How is the planning going? What are you focusing on? And also providing additional learning where they need it. And then they're building-level support. So we've gotten requests, and this is where some of the buildings are part of the inclusionary practices project because they're asking for additional specific support for their building. And then there's also a district leadership team that I, along with one of my colleagues, support.

LOUI:

Lovely. So then, what's going on, specifically in the district at your leadership team

level? [A slide with A Tale of Two Departments listing out the roles of the Teaching and Learning Department and the Special Education Department.]

MICHAELA:
We knew that we could not approach this, it's almost like backward design for total systems changes and improvement for our team, and so we have and Mary just describe all of those different strands. I like to think of it as tiering our different supports. And we've layered those as we go. The challenge with that, just for example, our universal tier, everyone in our late start Wednesdays, which we are incredibly lucky to have everyone district-wide we come together, and it has been inclusionary practices and MTSS and our universal design strategies where everyone gets it, but the follow up to that lands in our different departments, or then in our special education district committee that Mary just described, which is actually teams now of educators. The inclusionary practices teams, that includes not just a special educator, but a general educator from all the teams. That was one of the requirements to join the special education district committee that is moving that work. But you can hear all of the different layers and strands. My best visual for that as the accordion of all of the different layers that have to come together and then they go out. So, we are in danger regularly at the district-level leadership team of creating additional silos or continuing in our silos. This work requires so much coordination and so much alignment, and it's so important. So when Mary, as a coach, and one of her colleagues suggested that we come together as just the district leadership team level, it was to make sure that we are absolutely aligned, that we found the avenues to commit because we're all running so fast, just like our building leaders. But we need communication and collaboration to make sure we weren't creating additional silos or that we were duplicating work. That we were aligned in our areas of practice and saying the same things, the different trainings because there's so many, and you know, that we were moving forward in a strategic way that then came out to our educators, our leaders. And there's so many different departments involved teaching and learning, career, and technical education. It's exciting early learning now, but it requires lots of collaboration. So that's what we're

doing at the district leadership level, and in the midst of that work, we should have a coordinated plan to move us into year five, which starts next year.

LOUI:
Excellent. So now that your leaders have embraced the inclusionary practices project, and you have the I love the analogy of the accordion, and you're expanding and contracting and seeing across all of those potential silos. What does that part look like of the leaders working with one another? [A slide laying out the focus on the district for 2022 – 2023 with MTSS and the Five Essential Questions both flowing into a Venn Diagram with Engagement, Representation and Action & Expression labeled as Equitable Access and Inclusionary Practices.]

MARY:
Well, I think one of the things that Michaela and I have both noticed is that building leaders have a better understanding of the process of implementation for both UDL and MTSS because, as Michaela has talked about in Clover Park, UDL and MTSS are really intertwined. They're linked together. You can't do one without the other. So we're seeing more specific targeted asks for support from leaders, which signals to me that they have that deeper understanding, and they also have a real understanding of how the work is going in their building. So, they might ask for support with a specific team, especially at the secondary level, or they might ask for content on a specific topic. We saw that specifically with the secondary administrators who asked for some additional professional learning that they felt like they needed and, again, that right at the beginning, you don't know what you don't know. But I think what we're seeing is a shift in leadership understanding so they can be much more strategic and thinking about the supports they need for their staff which is such an important part of implementation.

MICHAELA:
And Mary, I'm just gonna weigh in here again, Michaela again. In terms of what they're asking for, and then who they're asking for, coaching and support has changed. Originally, we sort of, especially at the secondary teams where this started, that was our

first building, was a middle school, we really saw that they were asking for things like co-teaching or additional supports at the special education level. And now, I'm just going to use one of our high schools, for example; this year, we had requests for our entire ninth grade, grade level team to come together during their grade level PLCs and really learn together because we realized we're not dealing with universal core. We need our general education teachers to understand this implementation. So, the request just have changed, and it shows where we are in our understanding, as Mary just described so well.

LOUI:
Excellent. So, now that you're starting to see the traction, and you're starting to see some changes, right, so what are those changes? And what kind of data are you collecting to see those changes? [A bar graph showing the percentage of students in each group. Non-migrant is the largest group at 100%. The smallest group is homeless at 2.1%]

MICHAELA:
So I have to give you our least restrictive environment data for our students with IEP, which I will tell you I have resisted over time because I'm just like everyone that is just geography to you know, their location does not change their learning, but they do have to be there to benefit from the learning. So, I will give it to you, and it is a great celebration. So, you know, across 13,000 students, over 2000, it's about 2300 right now, of our students with IEPs. We've gone from about 46% are in 80% or more of their day in general education to 53%. And that was our stretch goal for this year. We want it to be over 50%. And I know for some districts, that sounds very low, but we hovered lower than that the first year of COVID. So, it's a great celebration. It's not enough, though. We asked our administrators to help us look at data with their teams about actual staff practice change because we're not going to see the outcome data. We're looking at other outcome data. We're looking at who's enrolled in which classes, especially at the secondary level. We're looking at how much pull-out versus in-class support we're giving at the elementary level. But the thing I'm really interested in, what I really want to

see this year that I think will drive where we go next year, is that self-assessment data from the educators and the teams. And their perception data, and then we also take a staff and a student perception survey at the end of the year, and we do some universal screeners. I want to see those data as well.

LOUI:
Mmmhmm.

MICHAELA:
And then, I want feedback from our leaders. What are you seeing as change in your teams when you're doing those instructional walk-throughs? What are you seeing because that's where we're going to make the change.

LOUI:
Ya. I love that you're using competency-based data. I mean, you have to do the LRE part like you said, but understanding that this is, it's growth, right? You're looking at your growth data, and I love that, so I just had to put that in there. [Two logos from Clover Park. One is concentric circles with MTSS in the center and a honeycomb with 10 initiatives listed around the center which states opportunity, access, success, and engagement.]

MICHAELA:
It's not easy.

MARY:
It's not, and I think this is one of the places that Clover Park is leading the work in our region, is looking at how do you measure at a systems level those shifts in adult practice because, like Michaela said, we tend to kind of live in the LRE data, which is important and plays a role. Absolutely. But if we're really talking about shifting outcomes for students, what that actually means is shifting adult practices, and that's a very difficult thing to measure. So, I just want to applaud Clover Park because I feel like this

effort to really understand what is changing about adult practices is one of the key places that they are really leading this work.

LOUI:

Ya. So, if you're willing to share any of those tools, I know people would be thrilled to see them. If you can't, you can't, but if you are able to and would like to, then I know people would love to see them. So, I understand the project started in certain buildings, and it's expanded. So, what did that process look like? And then, what are the plans for the future? [A page from the Clover Park School District website focused on social emotional learning followed by video captures of www.theudlapproach.com and the UDL in 15 Minutes logo]

MICHAELA:

Yes, it was one middle school. I actually got a call from our state support team when our state started taking on inclusionary practices because we had one building in particular that had significant challenges, and you know, we live in the LRE data in that kind of way, and it frustrates me because it can't be the whole story, but that was the reason. And so, what we found as we went through that very, this would be two years before we started, so that summer, it was some time ago now. And we looked at that LRE data with that building team and then looked at the other things we looked at and who was enrolled, where we looked at some of their academic and social-emotional data. And we realized if we're going to take this on, it can't just be one building. So, we decided to take it on across our secondaries, and we had a foundation several years ago around co-teaching. We did quite a bit of district-wide before my time trading around differentiation, which, okay, that's not what we're looking for, but it was at least a foundation of understanding of what we're trying to move. So, we went secondary-wide, and now in the last few years, we've gone across all of our secondary schools and then ramped up our implementation of MTSS in our elementaries. So now, next year, we are in that scale-up process, which everyone knows is also so hard. So often, you see some of this work in pockets of excellence in districts, a few buildings or people specific, building administrators specific. We are truly trying to make this just the way we do

business in Clover Park, our institutional expectation. So, side by side with our MTSS implementation, but we're scaling up district-wide. And that means we have decided to move all of this into specific language in our district improvement plan. And we're in development this year. It's the end of a five-year cycle of our district improvement plan. So the new one starts next August, and it will have this as an expectation. And one of the major ways we're measuring progress district-wide and that includes increasing that continuum of collaborative teaching, implementation, and secondary. And I say that very specifically because, as I said, we had a foundation of co-teaching, but that's the tier the top of the tier, so moving that expectation to be UDL in the general education classroom as tier one has been a big part of the work.

LOUI:
Excellent, excellent. Well, I really appreciate this conversation. We have definitely filled our 15 minutes, I think, but I think it's great. People are gonna love hearing just those just the stories of success and growth, but also well the analogy of the accordion and how you are taking this across an entire district. How you've grown that and how you're monitoring it. So, it's just great. So, thank you both so, so much for this.

MICHAELA:
Oh, thank you. It's just it's a pleasure. I just want to say thank you to Mary as well. Having excellent coaching and feedback is not just for our educators, and if it weren't for Mary and her team, we would not be in this place. So, Mary, just thank you so much. Thank you to the Puget Sound ESD, and thank you to our state for providing those supports, but the really good coaching is for all of us, and it's appreciated.

MARY:
Thank you so much. Michaela, it is such a joy to work with Clover Park. The work is really hard, and it's also really impactful. So, this has been just some of the best work of my professional career. Loui, we're so grateful to have the opportunity to share this work with your listeners today, and just want to thank you for inviting us.

LOUI:

Absolutely. You're both very, very 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 https://theudlapproach.com/podcasts/. 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.