UDL Research in 15 Minutes
With LaRon Scott

Loui: Hello and welcome to UDL research in 15 minutes where researchers share their findings about UDL implementation impact and their introspective investigations of the UDL framework. I'm Loui Lord Nelson UDL author and leader. Today I'm talking with LaRon Scott, who is an associate professor at the Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. And today, LaRon is going to talk about research, he and his colleagues reported in an article *titled Implementing a UDL framework, a study of current personnel preparation practices*. Hi LaRon How are you?

LaRon: Hi Loui ! I'm doing, I'm doing well.

LOUI: Wonderful.

LaRon: Considering all of the recent events in our country, I'm hanging in there, so thanks for..

Loui: Oh, thanks so much for being here. I really appreciate it. Can you share a little bit about your education background.

LaRon: Sure! Before I began my career in higher education, I served as a case manager for adults with intellectual disability, and later spent time and several k-12 educational roles as an instructional assistant, special education classroom teacher, and department chair for five years where my focus was mostly on Secondary Transition education. I also spent a few months as a transition coordinator in my school, local school district. I've now been at Virginia Commonwealth University, go Rams, since 2010 and, and, as a professor in the Department of Counseling and Special Education.

Loui: Very nice. I didn't realize that we had that much in common. I was in the classroom first, but then after I came back to Indiana from my doing my doctoral work in KU then I was in the adult post-secondary setting and supporting individuals with disabilities, adults in that, in that arena. More specifically families, but we have a lot of parallels. I didn't realize that.

LaRon: So, I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Loui: I know, I know it's a really, I feel like it gives us an invaluable view, like this breadth of view of the field, that I'm not sure everybody else, they get. Yeah.

LaRon: Absolutely.

Loui: Um, so, this article, it represents just a sliver of your work so can you also share a little bit about your other research projects and stuff that interests you?

LaRon: Sure. My research agenda really is to focus broadly on the preparation of special education teachers, underscored by two research constructs. One is addressing the recruitment and retention of culturally diverse special education teachers, both looking at race and gender and teacher preparation programs, and in-service special education teacher programs. You know we have such a challenge in this country with diversifying the teacher education pipeline and special education really is not, unfortunately, not immune to, to this need. And my second research sort of construct is addressing secondary special education teacher preparation, including the use of evidence based and research-based practices like those that will be implemented and infused in UDL and Universal Design for transition types of frameworks.

Loui: Nice. Well, I'm hoping that through our conversation and by helping other people understand your other interest areas that you'll get a few more hits on reads on your work because it's really, it's valuable and, yeah, boy, we need a lot of advancement. We do, we do.

LaRon: Well, I apologize to anyone that has to read, read my work [laughter] Hopefully, it's okay.

Loui: Well, we'll go back to this study! Let's focus on this! For this one, you and your colleagues were investigating the extent that special education prep programs were incorporating the UDL framework into their courses. What tools, resources and activities they were incorporating to help prepare pre-service teachers in utilizing the framework and then the extent to which they were identifying strategies to link academic and transition instruction to approved post-secondary outcomes for youth with intellectual disabilities. So, a nice thick paper. But before we dig deep into what you guys found Can you talk about the process that you use to select your study participants I thought that was really interesting and then the tools that you used for your measurement?

LaRon: And as you shared, ultimately what we were looking for is for program faculty who could evaluate their curriculum. So, for this case, their core syllabus, to tell us to what degree they were integrating universal design for learning and Universal Design for transition sort of content, content base activity. And so, our initial survey questions were developed based on based on the Innovation Configuration matrices from for universal design for learning that came out at the CEDAR center. And the authors they are chose the innovation curriculum configuration to adapt and into a survey. Well, we chose to adapted for survey due to its focus on assisting teacher preparation professionals and identifying and describing major components of universal design for learning practices within their respective programs. This survey that we developed, analyzed two particular dimensions of UDL. The central components of UDL and the implementation for which programs were requiring a pre-service teacher to implement UDL.

Loui: So, can I ask a quick question? When it came to the essential components, were those the ones that, or did you all define those are those the ones that are identified by the UDL IRN which is coordinated with CAST.

LaRon: Yes, a great question. So, those central components were already defined for us. And so, you know, thinking about the UDL guidelines were major focus areas for us as we developed the survey and those were some of the constructs that we used in helping folks to understand what those essential components were for, or they hopefully will be incorporated into their programs.

Loui: Nice. And then. So from there, then obviously you guys work through your study, and it's always challenging to get participants… [laughter]

LaRon: On yeah, tell me about it!

Loui: …for a variety of reasons, but you still had some significant findings even though the number of participants was, was relatively low but you gave some reasons for that and I think it's important to share those. But then also just talking through what you guys did find.

LaRon: Sure. So again, the survey was sent to approved special education preparation programs that at that time was listed on the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education programs website also known as NCATE. Obviously in NATE has done some has changed over the last few years so most people probably know is now as CAPE at the time, but NCATE, at that time, cataloged the accredited institutes by both state and specialized professional association. So, we selected special education, that option, and compiled a list of every university and college within the United States that had a special education accredited program. And with that list, we went University by University [Loui laughing] assessment, websites, looking for…you can imagine how difficult that was, looking for content or information about program coordinators who could answer the types of questions that we wanted to know about their, about their programs, and that really was how in-depth, our courses and their syllabus or their program really looking at UDL. Is it at a more cursory or broader level, or are they doing in depth work with UDL? And that, again was was the method that we, we looked at and what we hope to get out of the study.

Loui: Nice

LaRon: So, in terms of the results, as you pointed out, our analysis was interesting. You know, indicated that a majority of programs implemented UDL to some, to some degree. So, we looked at the degree of implementation, and three, a continuum of three stages. And level one, we'll call it, was more of a cursory dive into UDL. Level two programs that, that engaged, a bit more with UDL in their courses and with their pre-service teachers. And level three were programs that were really hitting it out of the ballpark. So those programs that we're infusing field-based experiences, having students evaluate, k-12 students were in classroom, in the classroom, and we're being instructed by pre-service teachers that we're doing student teaching and other field-based experiences. And so, what we, what we gathered was overall respondents indicated that they are pre service teachers we're getting a general understanding of the UDL framework

strategies. So, many programs which was promising to some degree, were providing their pre-service teachers with a with a cursory understanding of UDL. So if you participated in the program, you went through their training, training program and courses, you would walk out of the program or graduate from the program with some understanding of the UDL principle, and how to, how to use it. In terms of our second research question which focused on the effective implementation and those strategies for programs to integrate content related to UDL, that was a little less a little less exciting news, I guess. In terms of, again that more like that level one level two activity, the programs were really struggling with ways in which to implement strategies related to UDL for, for their graduates, or for their pre service educators in this case for it. So for example, going back to having a cursory understanding of the UDL versus pre-service educators that are actually engaged in using UDL strategies to inform their content, curriculum development ,lesson planning, those active activities were less frequent in programs that were reporting in the study so again we have some work to do in that area. And this study was more of an exploratory… it gave us some exploratory information at least on what's happening and preparation programs or surrounding UDL and lets us know what that we have some more work that we have to do.

Loui: Yeah. You know, originally, I was gonna ask you a question about kind of what, what we can do in the field in, in respect to the personnel programs, but I think in our little bit of time that's left here, about two minutes or so, I kind of want to do some thinking about how this is so important for our K 12 schools to recognize and know that even though they have folks that they're hiring that say, "Oh yeah I learned about UDL when I was in my undergrad in a pre-service," that your study is helping inform them that. Okay, it's likely that these, these new teachers are going to still need a lot of support.

LaRon: Absolutely, and having data to help support, how much support these, these educators will need I think is going to be important. And so, I think as we plan and engage students and more field experiences, these opportunities, really, are low hanging fruit for not only creating higher level opportunities to engage in UDL practices, but can offer an extension of time on, on UDL that can influence how it's applied in K-12 schools. So I think, you know, as we think about our K-12 School partners, that onboarding process, I think is going to be incredibly important and in engaging in conversations on what types of training and professional development should be had for these educators if a UDL framework is something that is the school district hopefully is investing in.

Loui: Yeah, yeah. Oh, absolutely great. Well, LaRon. I thank you so much You, you're the second guest on UDL research in 15 minutes. Oh, yeah, I need to send you a big gift basket or something.

LaRon: Well, I'll tell you. I had so much fun. I loved talking about UDL and again, I applaud you for all the work you're doing in this area so hats off to you.

Loui: Oh, thank you so much thank you! For those who are listening and watching this podcast, you can find supplemental materials like the recorded video of this interview with closed captioning and a transcript at my website which is www.theUDL approach.com. The citation for the article that we discussed during this podcast, you can find that below the video at my YouTube channel which is going to be UDL Research in 15 minutes. And then, also, if you are a researcher, UDL researcher, or know of UDL research that you'd like to hear about contact me through my website at www.theUDLapproach.com. I'd love to hear from you. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolution revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.