UDL Research in 15 Minutes
Kathy Howery, Ph.D.

LOUI: Hello and welcome to UDL Research in 15 minutes where researchers share their findings about the implementation, the impact, and their introspective investigations of the UDL framework. I'm Loui Lord Nelson, UDL author and leader. Today, I'm talking with Kathy Howery who is a principal with Kate Consulting Incorporated, and she's a lecturer at the University of Alberta, at Concordia University, and she's also on contract with the Ministry of Education, so, she's a very busy person. And she has grandbaby, so this is very important! But, welcome, welcome Kathy! She is going to be talking about research that she and colleagues conducted and reported in an article titled, "More than one way: Stories of UDL and inclusive classrooms". Hi Kathy, how are you?

KATHY: I'm well, Loui. How are you?

LOUI: I'm good, I'm good

KATHY: Good.

LOUI: So, can you share a little bit about your background because I know it's incredibly varied and people are gonna be very curious.

KATHY: Sure! Yeah, yeah. Some people call me un fils unique, which is, yeah, en français. So, I, I actually came from a background of psychology and psycho linguistics and worked for a long time with kids with really significant disabilities in the context that most people, would think of an SLP, but I never really was too interested in kids that could talk. So, at that end, I came to it having done lots of APE studies and, you know, about Prereq symbols, knew about lists, blah, blah, blah. So that was way back in the 80s. I was working in private segregated school. And then the next, where I started using technology and Apple II computers, and adaptive firmware cards, and you know all of this, you know, it was it allowed these kids to do things that was amazing compared to,and it allowed us to see in lots of ways that these kids were capable of doing so much more. So, and then went to a totally inclusive preschool environment where I still did much the same kind of work, but those kids were included from two and a half to five. Then was supposed to do a little bit of a jaunt at the rehabilitation hospital

with the assistive device service, where many of you might know Dr. Al Cook, so he was the Dean here and he has been a wonderful mentor to me and, it was actually Al who first got me interested in computers, but that's too long of a story for UDL Research in 15 Minutes. So, during my time at the Glenrose I actually used some of the early stuff from CAST. The Gateway stories and the CAST Reader, and I kind of feel like I grew up a little bit with, well, with AAC, ATN and UDL. And then I was secunded to work for the ministry to do the assistive technology initiative, and we really, I really went to CAST to the summer institute a few times and got what I now call a UDL addiction because I keep saying, "Nope! I'm not doing this! I'm done with this! I, it confuses me too much!" But I, I jokingly sort of jokingly say I need a UDL 12 step program because here I am coming right back at her again!

LOUI: I'm so glad! We love having you! You ask great questions! You asked great questions! So, I mean that gets to your interests in your work but talk about what you're doing, kind of right now what are your big

KATHY: Right now I'm, I'm massively involved in an initiative at the provincial level to work with kids with low incidence disabilities and happily, we are, including kids with complex communication needs in our definition of low incidence, which is, I think, very unique, but also really appropriate. So, my work is really trying to create more accessible opportunities, more inclusive opportunities for those kids. I also work with several jurisdictions in the province, continue to work on UDL. I kind of have a model where UDL is the base, UDL is what we think about doing before we get bums in seats, expecting diversity and expect, especially in those inclusive classrooms, and one of the things that I'm talking about in this research is I was astonished how few really inclusive classrooms, I'm gonna say this, especially in the States, we have quite a few up here but in terms of kids with significant disabilities, intellectual disabilities. So, I do that work. I teach on inclusive education, and ethics, and significant severe disabilities, and I've just started a certificate or working with UV on a certificate for teaching kids with complex communication needs…

LOUI: Nice!

KATHY: …and I continue to do research with Elisa Lowery and Alex Hollingshead on ULD. So because, as I said, I just can't stop myself.

LOUI: I think it's so good and you guys are so strong. It's such a strong trio! It's awesome. We have not clarified; you're in Canada. So, we just haven't said those words.

KATHY: I am. Oh, Hey, look at what I have! Here we go!

LOUI: [singing] Oh, Canada!

KATHY: I sometimes I do feel like I'm the token Canadian in this conversation, but not that's not true. There are people who are in the UDL conversation.

LOUI: Yeah, it's true, it's true. So, for this study, you and your co-authors you decided to talk to general educators who were implementing UDL to create inclusive environments and you were hoping to find educators who had at least one student with severe disability in their classroom, but then you had to expand that to include students with moderate to severe…

KATHY: And it was intellectual disability…

LOUI: Intellectual disability

KATHY: It wasn't, you know. That was the, that was our challenge is to find. So we, in general, what again that's not our language. General ed versus special ed. We don't kind of have that massive divide here. So, in a typical classroom of everyday regular classroom, Gen Ed stateside, and then we wanted them to be involved at the district that had a UDL initiative for at least three years. So, and this teacher would've been following UDL carefully for a year, and they all ended up to be women by coincidence. And who had your first looking for a job with significant intellectual disability. We had to change our search to mild or moderate to severe, and then we still even had kind of a problem with finding an inclusive situation.

LOUI: Right. Yeah, yeah.

KATHY: Yeah, that's one of the things that that, that, that research that really kind of hurts my heart that we just really aren't there.

LOUI: Well I also was interested to notice that you guys use the narrative approach and so valuing an individual story, and understanding that you're going to need to dig into the depths of it, and then you did a thematic approach going across those and looked at

your themes. And you, with those four themes, can you take us through those which ones you identified in the end and just kind of how you move forward with that. KATHY: For sure. Yeah. Sure. So yeah. Right. We had quasi-structured interviews because we wanted to hit on some sort of questions that were similar, but we also let our participants go in directions that they wanted to go which is part of that, you know, narrative inquiry. And our four themes were, that we found that across the board, they all talked about UDL as something that they use to design for ,to address the variability that they had in their classrooms. So they all talked about designing for learner variability. And I'm going to be quite honest, Loui. When, when you asked me about this paper I thought, "Holy smokes! I haven't thought about that paper for a long time!" So it was really kind of fun to go back and read it. But you know really that was a consistent thing that across all of the all of the seven really we didn't have a massive number, and again, I think that's because of our inclusion criteria. So, we did find some themes. And there's my dog barking. So, you know there's lovely stories here. I think it's a challenge for us all the time, it forces you out of your comfortable area. So, while they found designing bringing diversity even using the UDL framework, and many of them still found it to be a challenge, right? So that's one. And the second major theme was how they talked about inclusion. Because again, we were, our criteria demanded that we talk, that we that they weren't an inclusive, they were teaching in an inclusive manner. So, the overall connectedness between inclusive ed and UDL was really strong. Maybe because of who we got, you know, but I, again, that's a really important to me. From my point of view, I don't, I don't see if all means all, and then, how can we talk about classrooms that aren't inclusive, and how can we talk about UDL outside of inclusive education? For me they're just so intricately entwined, and so I was happy to see that that was something that really was something that a lot of our participants talked about. And this is my favorite quote and it's kind of, you know, you've got to wonder if this kid didn't see some images or something but, when reflecting on UDL implementation inclusion of students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, Sue shared one of the stories of our students. "I had one student say it's kind of like the ramps and the stairs and I said well what do you mean by that. And he says, 'well, there's, here's the thing. It's like if we all have to come up the stairs and it gets real crowded but if

someone's in the wheelchair we could push that person up the ramps and we could get up the ramps and go.'" You know, so that's sort of the classic Michael…[overtalking]

LOUI: Michael Giangreco!!

KATHY: So I think maybe he's seen it but I just love that the kids had internalized that, right? That they, they just, yeah, well you know it's gonna be better for you here to get it. We're going to benefit! So that, that's one of my favorite quotes in the inclusion piece. And another really strong piece that I think we all know, and this always, this, this is something that came to me for the first time when I was at, probably the first time I was at the UDL thing at Harvard, where Tom Hehier said we got to stop having a egg carton classrooms and make omelets. So, you know, so teachers don't go in the door, close the door, nobody comes in here, and these teachers talked about what an important thing it was to have teams and teaming, and that included teams that went across the jurisdiction. They felt like they needed support at the top, as well as support, you know, sort offrom the bottom and other people to work with that was clearly important to them, as well as strong professional development, they all we're really important. That was critically important that they had really strong ongoing PD and that that was critical to their being able to implement UDL in sort of building capacity, and PD was the third. And then the last one is probably, for me, this is always my, my quandary, is different descriptions of UDL.

LOUI: Right?

KATHY: So, um, you know, there was a significant difference in how these teachers described what UDL was and how they interpreted it and how, so the language that gathered around that sort of. Some talked about UDL and individualized planning as the same thing, so it wasn't. Which was kind of confusing, you know? Okay. Well, yes. Of course. We're individualizing, but isn't the idea of UDL that we're going to proactively get a lot of those barriers from the front so that we won't have to do so much individualizing? But so, there was, for example Julie, had said, "They're on a complete individualized plan so their planning was completely, completely different." It was hard for me to square that with what we talk about with UDL. Okay. Okay. Then the other one, which is probably one of the things that really gets in my craw I guess, is UDL is just good teaching. "I was doing this already, and somebody just came and told me that

what I was doing was UDL!" And I'm sorry that my voice got a little...but I, if that's true, I mean I know lots of wonderful teachers and I suppose I could align much of what they're doing with framework, but you know, is that UDL. I mean that, you know, or is UDL actually intentionally thinking about what you're doing, potentially thinking about the framework and putting that into practice so this idea about. "I was already doing it and it's just good teaching," came up, and we wondered about that. Technology and UDL, and I know, even my, my colleagues and I probably vary a little bit on this, you know, that one, one or the two of them, our participants just completely only talked about UDL in the context of technology. And, you know, while I probably tend to be the closer aligned if not technology to digital media, so that we can do some of that flexible design without having to retrofit everything. But, you know, according to Rose et. al., in 2012, UDL is not synonymous with technology. And you can, can implement UDL, I don't know (I don't like implement) the UDL framework without thinking about technology. I, and that's our last point, but maybe that is a nice segue to me to say you know, that's been one of the biggest concerns that, that I've had, is that UDL definition seems to morph and twist and change and, and how do these teachers come to understand what it is that they're, that they're really about? So, so that was that was one of the, one of the findings that we, you know, probably were most, I suppose, concerned about that. That that the language is so broad…

LOUI: Yeah.

KATHY:… and again, a concern of mine, and I know others, if UDL becomes everything, then does it become nothing at all? And that's you know, we didn't put that in the paper, but that's one of the…

LOUI: But it is…

KATHY: is that it's an extension of the belief.

LOUI: Yeah, so we're closing it on our 15 minutes, but I think that the, the, some of the things that I had going on in my head when, when I reviewed the article because I was like, oh I really want to talk with somebody about this article! So, so excited that you said yes. You know, I always think about what the takeaways would be from a piece like this if teachers were thinking about it and administrators, right? And so hopefully, folks would listen to this and take away, and so, like we were just talking about that definition

thing is so key, and I want to send people, you know I send them to CAST a lot. I send them to CAST produced products. Because it's wide and varied enough that things are starting to kind of get a little fluffy around the edges and at times. But I also want to encourage people to have more discourse about it and not be so absolutist. We have to have more discourse in the field as we're discovering. And I think that those you know the CAST and UDL-IRN conferences are great places for that. And then those spaces for those things, but the other big you know, takeaway for me though, when I thought about, I thought about your four themes that I, I loved hearing and reading the voices of the educators that were involved and their personal kind of A-ha's. And those are so enlightening. And so, even though we have the people who say, "I'm already doing it" and we're like, but "Okay, so let's check out where you're coming from." When you say that but then the more we can have the voices of the educators I think in the literature, it's just the better so I just loved the story for that reason and I loved the methodology that you guys used to, to write this piece.

KATHY: Yeah, I'm doing in terms of my go to as a researcher, I probably even go farther and go to phenomenology, but certainly this narrative inquiry, these experiences the experiences from real people in the field that are trying to not only read about it and, and talk about it but, but, implemented about bringing it to life, I think are is really critically important for sure. And, and I think I'm going to just follow up on your point about more dialogue. One of the things I'm really excited about that. I hope will spur more dialogue is the new book that's coming out by, edited by Elisa Lowery, and I, I wrote a chapter in there that I'm really pleased about that I hope spurs more discussion. And that should be out in 2020, and I think that that's exactly right, we need to keep digging. We need to keep having a discussion we need to keep it, maybe having some disagreements about things, so that we can get to deeper thinking. I think that's one of the things that I first really, what I loved about UDL is it made us, made me think more deeply about what teaching and learning is all about, about differences between. And I'll say there's a difference between the medical model of disability and the social model of disability, and that, you know, how can we bring that to life in the classroom. So, I agree that, you know, teachers voices people's voices, experiences are really critical, and more deep thoughtful dialogue is, is gonna bring us further along, for sure.

LOUI: I think so, too. Well thank you so so much for being a part of this podcast, Kathy!

KATHY: You are your most welcome Thank you for inviting me! Congratulations on your podcast!

LOUI: Thank you so much.

KATHY: Okay.

LOUI: So for those of you listening to the podcast, you can find supplemental materials like a recorded video o f his interview with closed captioning and a transcript to my website, which is www.theUDLapproach.com/podcasts, and the citation for this article that we discussed as well as anything else we might have referenced, but I don't think so, I think we just referenced this article, that will be below this video in on the YouTube station which is UDL Research in 15 minutes. That's the channel, I shouldn't say. And then, finally, if you are a UDL researcher or you know of UDL research you'd like to hear about, contact me through my website, which is www.theUDLapproach.com. I'd love to hear from you. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.