UDL in 15 Minutes Transcript
The UDL Gears

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. Today I'm turning the tables on myself. Dakota Huddleston, UDL in 15 minutes guest from Episode 8, is going to interview me about a new tool for UDL enthusiasts and learners alike. It's called The UDL Gears. Hi Dakota! How are you?

DAKOTA:

Hi, I'm doing great. It's a beautiful day in Indiana, and I'm so happy to be here.

LOUI:

Oh, thank you so much. And thank you for interviewing me about The UDL Gears.

DAKOTA:

Absolutely. I'm really excited that I can kind of turn the tables and ask you some questions. Please tell me what drove you to create The UDL Gears.

LOUI:

So I've messed around with this concept that UDL is more than the guidelines a couple of times prior to this. First, I wrote A Tree for all: Your Coloring Book for UDL Principles and Practice and Alison Posey created the drawings. And that book walks the readers and artists (because I think we're all artists), through those unseen pieces that we need to apply when we apply the framework. So, learner variability, accessibility, flexibility, goals, rigor, choice, and in my analogy, those are the roots of the tree. And it's that part of UDL that people like to frame as the theory of UDL, but without those roots, there's no UDL. So, I had that, and that was great. And then all of a sudden, I said, "No. There's more," and so I created the UDL Tapestry. And that idea was initiated on the back of a cocktail napkin on a Friday after I closed my computer but my brain kept going. So, I

eventually laid out three areas that weave together to create UDL. And again, thinking big picture here. The three areas are the content of the UDL guidelines, just, you know helping people know this is what a principle is, this is what a guideline is. Second, the constructs and concepts of UDL, which expanded on the routes that were the coloring book. And then third are the processes and practices that we need. So, I was thinking about like articulating the clear goal, using backward design, design thinking, flexible materials, including all learners, and scaffolding. And I wanted this to be a graphic where people could get a sense of UDL's fullness and not have to read my entire book of Design and Deliver. So, I figured out, like a year and a half ago, that well, I wasn't done. I wasn't satisfied. And that's because my work places me in really deep partnerships with individuals and cultures around the world. And I've paid attention to some things and there were four things that popped up. So first of all, there's like this definite enthusiasm about UDL around the world, which is really cool. And then second, some are starting to see that UDL is helpful for any kind of instruction. So, whether that's K-12, post-secondary, trade instruction, meeting design, resource design, like anywhere that learning is going on. The third thing I noticed is that we know the language of UDL could be a barrier, but that's specifically challenging during translation across languages. And then fourth, I've paid attention to how UDL is communicated. It's a vast framework and that makes it so beautiful and so challenging at the same time. So unfortunately, it's often sliced apart in a way that might feel helpful, but ultimately leaves people uninformed and confused and then sometimes they just can't even perceive the power of UDL.

DAKOTA:
Yeah. You know, that's really interesting. So, you were seeing a global need, but you also saw how complex any kind of framework can be across cultures and languages.

LOUI:
Yeah, yeah. And so, you know, and you've experienced in your own learning environment that there's so much in the guidelines, but there's also a lot of language around the application of UDL. And those of us in the UDL world know that that

language can be a barrier.

DAKOTA:

Right, and so you're not breaking down the UDL Guidelines in this tool. Instead, you seemed to really focus on the things that should be true across any setting that's applying to UDL. Can you talk more about that?

LOUI:

Yeah. So, thanks. Yes. So, I actually started with a persistent question that we know is out there, which is what does UDL look like? And so that made me think about things around all of us, things that everyone in this world sees that have consistencies but are different all the time. And that's when I thought of a sunset. So essentially, I was thinking of an analogy, and I thought this would be a good way to help people see that they, …the question is a different one. The question is actually, what are the consistencies of UDL application? So, for the analogy, every sunset is different, but there are consistencies. Like there's always a sun. There's, there's usually beautiful colors, and it signifies the end of the day. We have the same thing with the application of UDL because it's different all the time, but there are consistencies. So, I started pulling those ideas together. I kept playing with it. I kept challenging my own assumptions and pushing myself into counter arguments and looking for evidence. And I found myself grouping the ideas into three areas which were skills, mindsets and practices. So okay, to explain this. I'm gonna use a term instructional leader. I use that within the graphic. Yeah, because I needed to find something that would include anyone who is creating and leading instruction because well, like I said earlier, UDL goes beyond the classroom, right? So, I wanted to discover what skills the instructional leader uses when applying UDL. I wanted to identify the mindsets and practices that need to be in place so the instructional leader can apply those skills. And then somewhere in there, the analogy of gears just made sense to me because gears have those little teeth, which are also called cogs. And those cogs interconnect to make the gear turn the other gears and if the gear is missing, a cog machine doesn't just stop, but it's just it's not as efficient. It's the same with UDL. So, if you haven't gained all the skills yet, you just keep

moving toward acquiring them. You don't have all the associated mindsets? You're probably not really supporting all learners even if you say you are, but you keep working to expand your mindset. And the practices are just to set you up for success. So I wanted to articulate those skills, mindsets, and practices so those could become clearer to people so they could see how their gears were working.

DAKOTA:

Oh, I love this analogy. It's a great one. And I'm looking at The Gears right now. So when I hover my mouse over The UDL Gears, it's looking like the cogs are the skills individual skills, mindsets and practices.

LOUI:

Yes, you got to peek at it ahead of time so you're exactly right. That's what they are. I ended up with 15 skill statements and 14 mindset statements and 13 practice statements. And I know that some people won't want to use that hover feature. So, I made a PDF and EPUB of the same information that's available at the top of the page.

DAKOTA:

That sounds like providing options for Representation.

LOUI:

Yes!

DAKOTA:

Yes! That is great! Awesome, very UDL! So just back to the content. You didn't just pull these together with good ideas. You made sure that they're talked about by people who are applying UDL so where did you look?

LOUI:

Ah, yeah. So, I had to go beyond the juried research literature. The standard that I held myself to when I wrote Design and Deliver and then my second book, Cuturally

Responsive Design for English Learners. Those books are heavily cited and go back to the grounding literature and I think educators deserve that. We all should know where all of this started so we can understand the trajectory of growth or the missteps that the field has taken. It happens, right? So, the challenge here is that the concept that I'm asserting is ahead of juried journals. So, I used the CAST roots of inclusion and disability to bring that research forward, but I had to go into what's called grey literature for the application of UDL. So, one of the first places that I looked is actually on the CAST website, because right now they're working on the UDL Rising to Equity and as stated on their website, they're "re-envisioning the UDL Guidelines to the lens of equity." So, I knew that needed to be part of this. I've been listening to my fabulous podcast guests like you for almost 100 episodes now and I've heard a lot there. Graduate students are discovering things all the time and UDL colleagues around the world are constantly publishing research and white papers and reports. So, I asked myself, okay, what do these experiences with UDL look like? What's talked about in the global literature? I have also seen and read materials that are filled with misconceptions and misinterpretations. So, my big driving question for this was, what can I do to help more people see the beautiful diversity of instruction that can happen but also provide some identified parameters so they feel comfortable saying "Ah, this is aligned with UDL." And I'll say again, The UDL Gears were not based on applied research. This is created based on best practice and field-driven input. So, the last thing that I did, I shouldn't say last thing, but during this process, I turned to my friends around the world. So, I give a nod to my American counterparts, but I did not ask them to review this along the way. Instead, I turned to colleagues in Algeria and Belgium and Cambodia and Chile and Japan and Korea, Uganda, Wales, to ensure I was within the parameters of UDL, that the language I used was not only clear, but it lent itself to translation. So, for example, you won't see the word variability in this work. Instead, that concept is broken apart to communicate it more effectively. And it was a fabulous piece to put myself into as a learner and explorer.

DAKOTA:
Wow! So, where where can people find this if they want to look at it.

LOUI:

So my website is the www.theUDLapproach.com and to see the gears people can go to the www.theUDLapproach.com/theudlgears (all one word).

DAKOTA: Well, when I first looked at it, what I really appreciated the most was that mindset piece. It really the whole thing was very visually appealing, and I love the UDL analogies that I see. This is one that I've already love when I heard that word gears, before I even saw it, and I thought I, I can see where this is going. And I love this idea of it all snapping together. But the mindset piece, I really appreciate it because it's often something that we forget about the necessity of keeping UDL as a mindset and getting in that headspace where we're really thinking a lot about providing these options. And what that means for our learners.

LOUI:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, thank you so much, I appreciate that feedback! It feels good! But thank you so much for interviewing me for this. So, it's been fun to turn the tables, but it's hard to express my gratitude for taking this time. Thank you so much.

DAKOTA:

Oh, absolutely. I love it and I can't wait to see where you go with these gears. This is very exciting.

LOUI:

Thank you, Dakota. 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 associated blog at my website, www.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 and revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.