

Podcast Episode 34

Welcome back to the Education Table. I'm Katie Novak and today I want to talk about something that might not sound revolutionary at first, but trust me, it is a total culture change when it's done right. Faculty meetings.

Yes, you've heard me. We have all been there. The clock hits three o'clock, you're running on fumes and then someone opens a meeting with this will only take a few minutes, and then 45 minutes later you've been talked at, maybe flipped through a packet you didn't need or want, and now you're walking out thinking, oh, I could have read this in an email.

But what if we use the same framework we want teachers to use with students, universal design for learning, to design better experiences with staff. What if our meetings weren't just something we survive, but something that we found worthwhile? Well, in signature style, let's unpack this unicorn scenario with a story, some research stats, and of course, some practical strategies.

We've all been there. You're sitting in a stuffy room after a long day and the AC or the heat is probably broken and you're facing like an 80 slide deck and a lot of monologues. The goal, maybe it's unclear.

The engagement? Non existent. The vibe somewhere between soul crushing and snack driven survival.

I remember being in meetings that got so bad at one point that the only way we could keep it together was by texting each other faculty meeting bingo cards. I really wish I was kidding, but I'm not. Now we were not trying to be disrespectful.

I myself, I am sure, have run meetings like this, but we were hanging on by a thread and if you know, you know. But here's the thing. If a faculty meeting makes people want to build bingo cards to survive it, it's a sign that something is really off.

It means we're not designing for the people in the room who we really need to serve as it's the very, very best way that we can serve our learners. And the research, well, it backs that up. Knowle's theory of andragogy, which is essentially how adults learn, tells us that adults need their learning to be self directed, goal oriented and immediately applicable.

In other words, adults need what UDL already provides. Linda Darling Hammond and her colleagues at the Learning Policy Institute, which I am a huge fan of, published a study in 2017 that found adult learning is most effective when it is active, collaborative and job

embedded. Sound familiar?

It's UDL. It's just rebranded. Essentially, let's stop death by PowerPoint and monologues and try to practice what we preach as we become more inclusive and more flexible in meeting structures.

Let me walk you through it as we dive into strategies that we could leverage in every single learning environment, including those that serve adults. First, all faculty meetings should start with clarity. When we walk into a space, we should know exactly why we're there and what we're trying to do.

And not in a vague "we're here to reflect" kind of way, but with very firm learning goals. Maybe it's "today we're going to examine flexible assessment practices and how they can be both rigorous and student driven." And then we need to layer in success criteria as we do with a great lesson. Something like, "by the end of this meeting, every single one of you will identify one additional way to increase student choice in an upcoming assessment." Now people have a target and can self assess as they move through the experience.

It provides clarity for next steps. Now, once you have firm goals, the next step is designing flexible means that embraces the variability of educators. That means we offer multiple ways for our colleagues to engage, explore, and reflect.

For example, when learning about flexible assessment practices, some people might want to watch some classroom clips of teachers using flexible assessment practices. Others might prefer to look at student choice boards or work samples. Or maybe they have the option to skim an article or have a discussion with colleagues who are already starting to implement some of these flexible strategies in their classroom.

The point is, is that the learning is anchored to the same goal, but the path to get there is flexible. It is not choice for the sake of choice. It's design that's really intentional so everyone can access and everyone can engage.

And once people are in the content, we can continue to model flexibility. For example, after we give a choice of how everyone's going to learn more, we can ask them to reflect. But that might be by jotting thoughts into a journal, sketching out an idea with sketchnotes or even having a conversation with a teaching partner.

One of the things I love to do is encourage just taking a lap through the hallways or going outside for fresh air and having a conversation that way. We're not going to force everyone to share out loud if that truly isn't the firm goal. But really asking people "what way would be most valuable for you to process what you're learning and reflect?" It provides a space that

works for different brains, different moods, different needs.

And if this becomes a routine that people begin to know what flexibility is expected, it starts to build consistency and trust. People know what to expect and they're more likely to engage because it's predictable and it's safe. Then we need to move to application of some kind.

So we need to be clear about the goals, share lots of options for learning, processing and reflection. And then we need to say, now how are you going to use it? And so instead of ending a meeting with "what are your takeaways?" It's really valuable to say "what is one thing you're going to try in your classroom before the next meeting?" Or "what is one move that you're going to make this week that aligns with the goal that we talked about today?" And when people have an opportunity to write that down or say it out loud, they're not just reflecting, they're committing to change.

And that's how we can start to build momentum. And it can be even more effective if everyone leaves with an accountability partner to nudge them. Now, finally, we always want to close the loop.

And not necessarily with a thanks for coming, but but with some options for those who really want to dig deeper. So for example, we might say, "hey, if you want to learn more about this, here are some short videos to watch." Or "if you want to co plan with someone, here's a coaching signup sheet." Or "if you want to bring this back to your team, here's a PLC protocol that you might want to use to build on this." The goal is always to extend the learning, not just wrap it up so educators see that learning is ongoing. So when we talk about UDL infused faculty meetings, we're talking about making a series of really intentional choices that make adult learning feel meaningful.

We don't want it to be something that can just be an email, because if it is, just have it be an email and start to move some of the faculty meeting structures to really intentional professional learning. And this helps educators feel seen and valued and supported. And then we're modeling exactly what we want to see happen in classrooms.

So if we want to see teachers design with UDL, we have to show them what that looks like. And that starts with reimagining our meetings, not with more donuts, although I am not saying no to donuts. I'm saying yes to donuts.

And with better design. So in closing, here is the bumper sticker. When we use UDL to design meetings, we build trust and momentum, and we build a culture where every learner feels seen and valued and supported.

So let's make it happen by creating more meetings with firm goals and flexible means. So regardless of what educators are learning, they have options for that learning, options for processing, and options to share how that learning is going to impact them as a practitioner. Thank you so much for hanging out with me at the Education Table.

Now go plan a meeting that makes people say, wait... that was actually pretty useful. Until next time, onward, you brilliant people.