



CIDDL Research and Practice Brief 4 Interview Transcript

0:37

Nicholas Hoekstra: hello, and welcome to the CIDDL research and practice brief series, my name is Nicholas Hoekstra. The purpose of the research and practice brief series is to have conversations around the innovative use of technology in special education, early childhood education, related services and leadership personnel preparation programs. Today we have with us Cynthia Curry, Director of Technical Assistance at CAST and Program Director at the National Center on Accessible Educational Materials, the AEM Center to talk with us a little around her research and practice around accessible educational materials and standards. So welcome Cynthia.

1:29

Cynthia Curry: Right thanks Nick, it's a pleasure to be here. Thanks for the invitation.

1:33

Nicholas Hoekstra: So, to start with, could you, could you tell us a little bit about your work around the integration of technology to promote universal design for learning and inclusive education and perhaps a little about how this applies to teacher preparation and what are some of the main issues you're trying to address?

1:58

Cynthia Curry: Sure, so to the first question about how we approach accessibility and technology through a universal design for learning lens - Because it's CAST, it's really the foundation for our approach to technical assistance to support improved provision and supportive use for accessible materials and technologies -

2:19

Cynthia Curry: Really across the lifespan, so not just K-12 but, as you... as the shared focus is early childhood, of our two centers, as well as higher education and workforce development, so we're really looking at accessibility within UDL settings and improving settings so that they're more universally designed, really from early childhood through post secondary. And we look at UDL through an accessibility infused lens by looking at really the first row, if you're looking at the UDL guidelines. There are three different levels, the first is is access, so in order for individuals who access information, materials, technology in highly varied ways, really the entry into a UDL framework is to make sure that everybody can engage with those materials. So recruiting interest, for example, and making sure that choice and autonomy is is optimized in a way that that is inclusive of individuals with disabilities, in addition to other variability.

3:30

Cynthia Curry: We also focus on multiple means of representation, so providing options for perception, making sure that things in the design of materials include customization of display, alternatives for audio, and video, for example.

3:48

Cynthia Curry: And then action and expression, of course. We want to make sure that there are options for physical action. So that's where assistive technology and accessible education materials and accessible technology really shine in the UDL framework, and making sure that the procurement, selection, creation whether these materials and technologies are procured at the system level or whether it's, you know, teachers who have the freedom to select their own materials or select their Apps. Or whether materials are being curated through open educational resources, regardless of the source, that once it reaches the student it is, you know, available for them to engage with and has multiple representation and there are, you know, means for action and expression that meet a wide range of needs and preferences. So that is the way we really embed accessibility within the UDL framework and, of course, it also has implications going down, through right to making sure that we are, we're fostering and nurturing expert learners.

4:51

Nicholas Hoekstra: So, So could you kind of walk us back here and how, how can we apply this or how is this being applied, then, in kind of the preparation of teachers or service providers.

5:05

Cynthia Curry: So, you know, I don't know, in my experience in teacher education, I worked on an OSEP funded - Office of Special Education Programs funded - project from 2008 to 2013. And the goal of that project was to really infuse UDL and culturally responsive pedagogy into both general education and special education pathways. Really, to ensure that regardless of certificates or degree that the teacher educator was pursuing, that they had what they needed to support students with disabilities, whether it's direct service or whether it is, for example, in the content areas, what is it that math teachers need to know, social studies, science, history, language arts, etc. So I think the best model really does pay attention to looking at it, when it comes to teacher preparation and individual teacher responsibility, is to have a clear a clear model of "what is it?" based on a role, "that educators need to know and to be able to do to support a student's use of assistive technology," whether it is at the depth of supporting the selection of that assistive technology, or whether its ensuring that as a, you know, as a classroom teacher - I use the word classroom ah pretty broadly in light of COVID and remote learning - but what is it that classroom teachers need to know to make sure that they are being responsive and agile, making sure that they are being proactive in the materials and technologies and the way that it is infused in the curriculum. So that is, I think, a lot of your teacher education programs really struggle with that. What is it that, is that that model of making sure that all teachers, all pre service teachers, teacher candidates, you are situated, upon leaving the program, with what they need to know and be able to do to support both assistive technology and accessible materials, regardless of the setting that they're in. And then, of course, going into settings where those roles and responsibilities may differ as well. So



making sure that we are being flexible in those in those expectations and providing both the in service training, in addition to that pre service training.

7:32

Nicholas Hoekstra: So, with that in mind, are there particular innovations or particular resources that are, that you feel are kind of particularly suited to to facilitating this, this preparation of teachers.

7:49

Cynthia Curry: So I would ,of course, advocate for the the AEM Center resources; we have on our on our site, you know, regardless of what an individual educator's role is resources around how do you communicate with a, with a vendor in the process of selecting materials and technologies. So, if there are new teachers who really aspire to be part of curriculum committees what is it that they, you know, need to know to inform the selection of accessible materials and technologies that are part of that curriculum. So what is it that they can contribute. And a lot of systems that currently may not be considering accessibility, so to prepare new teachers to play part of that, part of that role, what questions to be asking. If they're creating their own materials and, again, whether this is going to be in a special education resource room setting, or whether it's in the classroom setting, what are the skills that are needed to create accessible documents, websites - whether it's a Google site, or whether it's going to be, you know, a site that is, you know, being created with wordpress - and then of course slide decks or any material that a teacher is going to be creating, how can we make that accessible for all learners. And then curating, of, going out and selecting. A lot of teachers have the have the have the liberty and the freedom to do that: what to look for around accessibility to make sure that it's perceivable, that it's operable, understandable and robust. Which we like to use the POUR model for. We think the POUR model is an excellent model around accessibility.

9:29

Nicholas Hoekstra: So it sounds like there, I mean, there are a lot of potential factors that can come into play, what, what do you think are some of the challenges that emerge when teachers are... are looking at this through the lens of accessible educational materials.

9:49

Cynthia Curry: I think that there is a lack of common understanding of what accessibility means. Which is understandable, you know, accessibility is a little bit different from availability. Very different from availability. So, for example, during the pandemic and the school building closures in the spring of 2020, there was a lot of talk about accessibility. Making sure that materials and technologies are accessible for students who are learning remotely. And we were really trying to correct that language, because, really, what was what the better, the more appropriate term for that would be available, making sure that students who are learning remotely have available to them broadband, that they have available to them their textbooks, access to the learning management system or the portal

that their teachers were using to provide curriculum during remote learning. So that is really the first step, making sure that those, that there's equitable distribution of what's needed for, you know, for students to have access to the curriculum. But then, you know beyond making it available, can all students use it? Making sure whether it's, you know, English language learners who need in their families who need the materials in a different language, and students with disabilities who need their assistive technology, they need accessible formats, they need accessible built in features, and everybody in between. So the federal definition of accessible is that individuals with disabilities can acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions and enjoy the same services as individuals without disabilities in an equally integrated, equally integrated manner. And with substantially equivalent ease of use. So we use that at the AEM Center as really our bar when we're talking about, "is it accessible?" Are really that that federal definition of accessibility to distinguish from other means of making making sure that materials and technologies are available for all learners.

11:56

Nicholas Hoekstra: Excellent and out of that, do you have suggestions for potentially, you know, people out there who are also doing research. Are there specific areas where you see a lack of research or where you think that more research is needed, moving forward?

12:13

Cynthia Curry: I think for, for research, for teacher preparation, we know that that training around accessibility and assistive technology works. That where teachers have been well prepared, that that they that that it does impact their educational practice once they're in the field. But we also know that it's inconsistent. And I don't think we actually know specifically what works, what are the, what are the, what's happening in those teacher education programs where there's more of an infusion of accessibility, of materials and technologies, what is it that is, that's being taught that actually transfers from the induction period and then, when when teachers start in systems where maybe accessibility, or UDL are, you know, part of the part of the conversation. They may not be part of the culture. So I think we need more research of what works, because accessibility is different from UDL. You know, as we opened as we opened, accessibility should be embedded within a UDL framework. It's, you know, it's essential for individuals with disabilities, but we know that the same practices really are good and benefit all learners. So what's the distinction between UDL that may be Part of a teacher education curriculum versus really embedding accessibility considerations for individuals with disabilities, when it comes to considerations, for example, around POUR and making sure that perceivability, operability, understandability and robustness is part of the curriculum decision making process. So that would be I think a really important area. And where are those areas where, as I also opened in the beginning, where special education and general education preparation really are are done in a way, an intentional way, where these skills are distributed across both so that it's not just, this information

isn't just contained within a special education pathway. Because there's there's, we're just not going to get to a systems level approach to addressing accessibility in a way that is you know, robust, that it's consistent, that it's high quality, without everybody across the system really understanding their roles and responsibilities. And then, what does that induction process look like going into a system. How is it that universities that are really doing well at training teachers, new teachers, around accessibility and UDL what are the bridges that can be made around induction to make sure that there are plenty of laboratories, where new teachers can practice.

14:55

Nicholas Hoekstra: I think those are all extremely important areas of focus. Before we close, are there any specific resources or tools for anyone that would like to learn more about your work?

15:11

Cynthia Curry: Sure, so if you go to our website, which is aem.cast.org - so that's "a" "e" "m" dot cast dot org - there are a number of resources on our site. You'll see that our site is structured around a navigation menu at the top that is how to get started with accessibility, how to acquire accessible materials and technologies, how to create them, how to use them. And then, how to coordinate with others. So we think that there's an individual responsibility. Around aem, but really most impactful is going to be the systems change, how can systems work together to coordinate around making sure that, from the source to the student, accessibility is a consideration. So under our resources section, you'll see, we have a five part online module series. That covers all considerations related to providing accessible materials and technologies and using them... so everything from really, the procurement process for large scale large scale procurement, learning management systems, all curricula that may be digital, what are the considerations. And then down to the individual student level, what is the decision making process, how do you determine that a student needs an accessible format. Braille, digital texts, large print, tactile graphics, and then, what are the pathways to acquiring those formats and coordinating with others. So we have our quality indicators for providing accessible materials and technologies, and that really does reach the system level leadership level, but we encourage everybody to be aware of those because, along with it, we have an AEM pilot, which is a self assessment and progress monitoring tool that supports states and districts with implementing the quality indicators in that coordinated systemic approach.

16:59

Nicholas Hoekstra: Excellent and we will provide links to those resources on the blog as well, so that people can easily find them. Well Cynthia I want to thank you very much for joining us today to talk with us about your work in accessible educational materials and standards and the promotion of UDL, we really appreciate it.

17:20



Nicholas Hoekstra: Just in closing for more information about CIDDL research and practice briefs and other resources or teacher education and related services personnel preparation, please go to ciddl.org. Don't forget to follow us on social media, subscribe to our channel and leave us a message. Okay, so thank you all very much.