

This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast "Interview with Lisa Dieker".

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]

Lee Anne SULZBERGER: So I am fortunate enough to be sitting here with Dr. Lisa Dieker, who just finished up the keynote with Symposium 2012, and Dr. Dieker is a professor and Lockheed Martin Eminent Scholar at the University of Central Florida. So welcome, and thank you for chatting with us!

Lisa DIEKER: Thank you for having me.

SULZBERGER: This is always such a fun activity because the symposium, we targeted it toward new co-teachers or co-teachers who are new to a partnership. I loved you talking about the past, present and future, sort of the themes. What are some of the changes that you've seen with co-teaching over the time that you have been studying it and involved with it?

DIEKER: I think the one that's very interesting to me is I'm seeing less and less argument about "Do I have to do this?". You know, I think people are starting to say, "Well yeah, this is what we're doing, so how do I do it better?", which I think is very exciting. I think I'm seeing a lot less of kids being confused by why there are two teachers, or asking that question of, "Well, if there is a second teacher in the room, what are they to do?". So I find that acceptance of "We're doing this, now how do we do it better?" seems to be where we're at I think as a field.

SULZBERGER: You were talking about, you know, your seven different keys to success and seeing this change for co-teachers. If the listeners, you know, the teachers that are out there had one thing that you could tell them that you think this will really help make your co-teaching what it is really supposed to be - you know, this great synergy of ideas - what would be some of your top three things you would tell them?

DIEKER: Well I think the first one is stop getting caught up in the minutiae and really focus on what it is that you're bringing and I'm bringing as far as content and even as behavior. I think we're in a dangerous point right now where we are so focused on higher level content that we're forgetting that we also still have to pat the kid on the back and love the kid. So it's that balance - you know, this week I'm the lover and you're the bad cop, you know, good cop bad cop kind of thing. So that's the first one, not getting caught up in the minutiae and really focusing on both the kids' needs as well as the academic goal that we have. The second one I think that is really a new piece in my own thinking is just moving past traditional paper-pencil, sitting in my desk, bored out of my mind. And I don't think that's easy to do all by yourself, I think it's unbelievable if we don't do it when we have two of us. I actually think that it's unacceptable. I think with the two of us we should really be thinking about creating a different environment. And then the third one I think we haven't done is I think we really haven't assessed kids' learning on a daily basis, and I call that the status of the class and I think with two of us really saying did we

really get a temperature check on the classroom every day. So those are three things, and they kind of go with planning, you know, the co-planning, co-instructing and co-assessing that is kind of the next evolution of those concepts.

SULZBERGER: I'd love to follow up because when I look at that order I almost think maybe co-assessing should happen before you do the planning, so it's kind of cyclical, but that daily assessment is so critical for the co-teachers to form their instruction. What are some sort of quick and dirty strategies that work well? I know you mentioned the fist of five which is a great one. Are there other ways that when you get the two teachers in the classroom that you can get a quick temperature check to figure out where the kids are?

DIEKER: Well I was in a classroom yesterday and actually did three status checks. So on the warm-up I went around the room and I took data on who didn't get the warm-up and I said "Could we please focus on these two questions?" because the class was half split. So that was a quick way I could look at their written work and get feedback. The second way that I thought was very interesting is I then took the big idea and did an oral assessment so I went around to each kid with the class roster and did check plus and minus. And then the third way that I finally did it was at the end of class, I went through and tried to look at their work to see if they had evolved to that next level, and we ended the class with three kids that we all agreed didn't get it, and as you said, we should assess before we start - we actually had done that. So the next day then they were going to do an alternative teach with those three kids and kind of getting that loop going so it actually turned out that our assessment turned into our planning.

SULZBERGER: You think if there are two adults in there that there would be more teacher talk, but you said absolutely no, less. So tell us a little bit about - how do you get the teacher talk to be less than 50%?

DIEKER: Well I think the first way is that you leave the one lead one support model, which we all know is kind of one that we don't find as highly effective. I think it has its place, if you're, you're a high level content mastery person and I'm really struggling it's probably hard to do some of those other types in the beginning. I know we say it's fine the first nine weeks to dance a single dance and then it gets boring. So after the first nine weeks, moving out. I think in order to do that and lower teacher talk we've got to be using various models but we also have to be turning that learning back to kids. And I just find that teachers fear turning the over the learning to kids because they won't behave, when the reason they're not behaving is because they're not turning the learning over to them - so it's again, this catch-22 we can't get out of. I've found that when you turn it over to kids it really is not hard - it's easier to do when there's two of us. So if you take 10 and I take 10 and we do something completely different that's engaging to kids, well if it's not working for one or the other of us, we can change our instruction. If it's not working for both of us we can put it back together and try something different. So that's two things, I think, not only using the types but also reminding ourselves even with two we can change. And I think, "We planned stations and it's going bad so let's keep doing stations"

and I'm like "you wouldn't do that by yourself so you shouldn't do that when you're together.

SULZBERGER: When you're together in the classroom you said that the only thing you have to control is the time within the classroom and talking about that bell to bell active engagement. Tell me a little bit about what you've seen in the classrooms that are really good celebrations about how kids are actively engaged?

DIEKER: Well, one of the things that I encourage teachers to do is we call them co-teaching backpacks. I was using one yesterday. It's just filled with things from wiki sticks to highlighters to pencils to Post-It notes, to I'm in love with solo plastic plates and dry-erase markers because they work just like a dry-erase board but are very easy to carry in a backpack. And constantly saying, so I'm always saying "What are you bringing that's different than if you were by yourself?" and so one of the things I can bring is a kid's disengaged, "Here, can you write that answer on the plate?" and you know, for example, a kid said "I get to do it on this." Well what he really didn't know is he's the only kid who didn't understand so it was actually my assessment of him that was driving that strategy. But I think saying that if you're not getting it, what can we do differently to get you engaged? Can we get you out of your chair? Can we do brain breaks? I even have had a kid who said to me "I need a brain break now!" and I was like "Okay!" But again, self-advocacy - this is "I've been sitting for 20 minutes, and I can't sit for one more minute!" so again, I think making sure that those environments have ways for kids to give what they need but also to bring in things that are actively engaging and I believe technology is the answer to that. And again as I shared in the keynote, I'm over us saying we don't have it. We have it but we're not using it. So when a school can tell me that they have a computer that is on 24/7 and a kid is in front of it all day and they have used it to capacity, then I would say "You don't have technology." I haven't seen that happen.

SULZBERGER: Did you call it a Technology Accessibility bucket?

DIEKER: Yes

SULZBERGER: Which is just a really interesting idea that I would love for you to share and expand upon for the classrooms where co-teachers are working or even in individual classrooms.

DIEKER: Sure, that's what I loved about it - could be anyone. So it was actually just a big plastic bin if you think and in the bottom was a class roster and all the kids took ownership of the bin. So they not only took ownership of what they could do with the bin, they took ownership of taking care of the things that were in the bin. So in the bin was an iPad, there were highlighters, there were golf pencils, there was paper... there was whatever kids might need to access learning. So that's what it was, it was the Access Learning Bin. So then the kids wrote on there what they were experts at doing, "I know how to draw pictures to help you summarize your learning", "I know how to use Post-It Notes to write key notes", "I know how to do a graphic organizer on the plate for you", and the kids were bringing stuff, like one kid said "I brought that mp3 player that's in

there because I didn't use it anymore." Well a lot of kids have throwaway technology and some kids don't have anything and so that basket just keeps growing and growing and that's what it is. Kids say "I need to access learning differently" and they go to the basket and grab whatever they need versus what the teacher says "Do it this way."

SULZBERGER: Now are there things that teachers can do ahead of time to set up their classroom that make that type of freedom and choice easier for kids so they know how to do it? What works well?

DIEKER: Well I think the big one - I love to talk about "fair means every kid gets what he or she needs", I think that needs to be the prescription pad on the wall - I like it to be emphasized that you know, you're all going to get whatever you need. But I am finding that's less and less of an issue anymore. Especially as I move from elementary to middle - there seems to be, if I give a kid something different, kids are getting very sensitive and the reason they don't make a big deal is because the adults don't. When I see the problem is when I see the adults go "Now I'm giving this to this person" - you know, versus, "Here, you need this now and if you need it later I'll give it to you." and I think that is a culture shift that I'm seeing in this country as schools have had kids included more and more and more. I think kids know that everybody needs something different.

SULZBERGER: And do you find that as proficient as kids are with technology that they know how - I mean, when I learned how to use an e-reader and I thought "Oh my gosh, I can take notes, I can highlight, I can look up a word" - is that something because kids tend to be so proficient with different ways of accessing knowledge and it's not a big deal to click on a hyperlink to find something else out? Is that helpful?

DIEKER: And I think that they are a generation that is, through their social networking, you know, now we've got Instagramming versus Facebook, you know - Facebooking is out and Instagramming is in, and I'm like "How do you keep up with that?" But what I find is, if you look at Instagramming, that's the pictures, so I just send pictures of everything. Well, you know, my own son doesn't really like to write so Facebook involves writing and I've got spelling errors. Instagram, here's a picture and people comment on it. I think their world is so filled with diverse ways to learn that they are a little frustrated that in school we only expect them to learn in one way. And so I think they look at that as "Well of course you're doing something different - cause I don't do the same way of all my social networking. You know, some kids call, some kids don't, some kids text, you know.. I think it's just a part of who they are right now.

SULZBERGER: The other thing that I found so interesting that I just love when you talk at schools that are very inclusive and I would imagine classrooms that are very inclusive is this consistent yet flexible, and that sort of oxymoron. But you know, I'd love for you to talk a little about that and how does that play together to really create a supportive inclusive environment?

DIEKER: Well if I had my dream, I would have a K-12 district that was consistent in everything. But 21st century... so we wouldn't ever walk down the halls in a straight line

ever, because that is not a skill that you ever use in life. People learn how to talk to each other as you walk down the hall, we did it on the way here. So we wouldn't have artificial rules in one place that I unlearn and change at the next place. Because I think that's where kids with disabilities are extremely vulnerable. So we would have a 21st century kind of thinking K-12 that is consistent. It's consistent that if I need help I'm going to get it. It's consistent that there is an Access Bucket. It's consistent that we're not going to talk about letter grades, we're going to talk about the skills I can and cannot do. It's going to be consistent in how we behave because it's the culture that we expect to behave, versus everybody is going to force me into a different mantra. We're going to talk about homework being meaningful. So what are you going to do tonight? "You didn't do well in this, so what do you want to do tonight for homework?" You can choose versus me telling you what your homework is. So I think that culture is where we really need to go. Schools that have more of that in place, the more they have that in place, not only is it easier to include kids, but it's easier for co-teaching, and shocking - higher learning. And most places are that way. I mean, if you think of a college campus, it's extremely consistent - you sign up for classes or you pay a late fee. You show up for classes or you don't pass. Again we don't have to say "Here is my rule today for class." And so it's funny that we have this artificial place called school that doesn't look like the rest of life.

SULZBERGER: You know, some of the other things that you were talking about with universal design going on, that idea of a universally designed school with multiple ways for kids to access information and engage in it and show. You know, what would you say to the teacher who says "Well, that's not how the state assessments are"

DIEKER: So, a couple of things I always mention. One is you know, some of the research from the study from the Gates Foundation where they looked at ten thousand hours of video teaching show some strong correlations that are negative in the number of times teachers talk about this being on the test. And if you think about that, it's like, so logical because every time I say "This is on the test" there's an anxiety involved. You now, and if I said to you today, "This will be on the GRE" and "This will be on the..." you'd be like "Yeah, exactly." Your reaction was exactly what I would assume. And so one of the things I think we have to stop doing is stop saying "This is on the test." What we need to change it to is "This is something you need in life because..." What I've found is that many of our kids with disabilities, and I'll put my own son in this, has a severe learning disability in writing, if he didn't have a scribe he would never pass a test in writing. He just never would, and so it wouldn't matter how many times you made him write, he is never going to get out of that wheelchair of writing and be able to walk. And so what we're doing with Universal Design for Learning is that we're really taking kids to a place to learn the content and then if the testing, which I do believe we're going to see changes with technology, but even if the testing still doesn't embrace the way they learn, they won't do worse because they've at least had a chance to think deeply about that concept. They may not do better because the testing is testing what they can't do versus what they can. But I really do have optimistic hope in seeing some of the new technological tests that are being developed where kids have 95 different choices. I think testing will have to follow. But a teacher who says that to me, I simply say "Here's the

deal. They will do poorly on their testing if you keep teaching them the way they can't learn. Isn't it about learning so they will do well on the test?" And I've found that it's really the power of getting the teachers to buy into that. And I've even challenged teachers, I've challenged a set of teachers and said "Alright, do it your way, do it my way and give me your quarter - or your tests. Your chapter tests. Inevitably. I have a doc student who's doing a dissertation on that right now who is going to look at a unit where kids do traditional and do traditional science tests and do a UDL. I guarantee the outcomes will be stronger on the multiple choice test that they have to take, it's required at the end of the chapter, with the group that got it through Universal Design.

SULZBERGER: Well, in Virginia we've added technology enhanced items, so I think that that aligns very nicely and makes it very comfortable for teachers to say "Oh, this makes sense to use more of the technology and more of the UDL within the classrooms because the assessments are looking more and more like that."

DIEKER: Absolutely.

SULZBERGER: One of the other things I loved is the strengths-based approach with kids, looking at what it is that you can do. Are there good ways that you have learned that teachers can help kids learn how to identify and then self advocate for not only what they need, but what they do well?

DIEKER: I love for younger kids, as they are newly diagnosed, to do social stories and I think oral, written, video, whatever works for the kid. Talking about their strengths - storybooks that they write "All About Me". I think by middle school that some of the best things I've seen is a lot of the middle schools are doing student-led IEPs with PowerPoint slides or a Prezi or something that's "This is what I'm good at", the first slide, "This is what I need to work on" and "This is what I hope you'll put in my educational plan." And I love that fact and in some of the schools I like the fact that they don't make the kids stay for all of the rest of the paperwork and that discussion. I mean, I think it's important but in eighth grade, the one school I really love says "You don't have a choice, because when you go to high school you need to be here and hear all the talk because you are going to have to do that talk for yourself." And then in the high school, the best one I've seen is they actually bring the kids in a couple of days early. The kids go through their cumulative folders, look at what teachers have written about them from first grade - "Gosh, it still says I don't sit in my desk and do what I'm supposed to do" - and they look at that cumulative folder over time and then they share their testing results with them and the kids write all the letters to their teachers and they ask them for their own accommodations, just like they need to in college. So I think that self-actualization, you know, journey, of me realizing very young that there's nothing wrong with me, there is still nothing wrong with me, I just need these things, and knowing that as an adult, to me that is what special education is supposed to do. It's not supposed to make me feel bad, it's to make me celebrate what I do well.

SULZBERGER: We've spent a lot of time talking about getting to know the kids, and some things that co-teachers can do in the classroom that is a very important part to that

is the co-planning process. We know the reality of schools is that one fire drill or one snow day can totally derail. What are your recommendations or considerations for teachers when it comes to co-planning and really being kind of efficient and quick and again, what have you seen that works?

DIEKER: So, I loved it at lunch today, two teachers said "I love the ten seconds! You gave us ten seconds to say 'What do we want all kids to know by tomorrow?'" I mean, that's the big thing, that I think if we were to move in that direction and say "Lee Anne, tell me exactly, by the time the bell rings, what do I want to see every kid do?" That gives me enough to walk in and do something different and if a kid isn't doing that then I can say to you, you know what? Why don't you let me take over for a minute and you see if you can get this kid to do that?" So that's the first thing really, right? But I also then think planning to that highest level - if a kid can already do this what is the next advanced level in making sure planning for the top and the bottom, not necessarily the bottom being kids with disabilities but the bottom being "this is the minimum threshold." And I think again it goes back to that minutiae. Too many times, people sit down to plan and talk about "Here's the page and here's what we are reading and here's how long" and I get all of that and I think it's important if we have time, but if we don't have a lot of time at least to find out what all kids are gonna learn, and I empower you to teach to the top. Then we've got some differentiation happening without even having a lot of planning time.

SULZBERGER: What I hear you saying is, okay, you would ask me as the content teacher, "What do you want the kids to walk out of here - they must have by the end of the class?"

DIEKER: What's my exit slip? If they can't leave here and do it, we have failed today. I will take care of that if you will tell me what it is. If you say "those three are most important", I should still know what four and five are, and I should reach for that goal, but if one kid gets only three and everybody else gets three, four and five, then that's good because we said we've met that minimum level. I think we don't tend to have those arguments about planning. Either one of two things happens - I don't know at all what you're doing, or B - you tell me but you tell me so many details that I don't get down to that fight to, I don't think a kid can do that. I can't argue with you because I am listening to you versus actually engaging with you.

SULZBERGER: So it almost sounds like a little bit of creative conflict there - you have the conversation, but something new grows out of it. But you talked about Edmodo for common planning and some other technology tools.

DIEKER: Now I like the idea of the Edmodo, because what we know in co-teaching, and Edmodo is just like a Facebook for the classroom that is closed, private, no one else can see it. But one of the things we know good teams have to do is they have to have to do is they have to have task and maintenance. So what we know is that if I only show up every time and say "What are we doing next? What are we doing next?" Whereas if we do task and maintenance, you know, how is your son, how is life, what are you doing - so

the Edmodo they said has allowed them to have a culture of let me share my pictures of my kid, let me share with you what fun I had this weekend, cause it's private, and it's amongst the five of us so that when we sit down to plan we've already had a little bit of that social piece and we can talk quickly about that and then we also know already what is on the lesson plan, so we've gotten ahead of the game and both the task and the maintenance. Because co-teaching is relationship building.

SULZBERGER: Well I was just going to say, that sounds like a really appealing way to relationship build, particularly for teachers who are newer to the field. What are some of your greatest wishes and hopes for the future when it comes to co-teachers, you know, working to serve kids with disabilities?

DIEKER: Some of them are coming true. I am seeing less and less argument about doing it, which I mentioned. My real hope is we start to do it - we're in a dangerous place right now. I think we're moving so high and hard to academic outcomes that I think we are forgetting about the human. So I hope we'll balance that, and that every kid will love being in the classroom and every kid will learn the big idea for the day. And when I mean every, I mean every every. Um, the second one is, I'm hoping that not only will we no longer have to have negotiations about kids being in there, we'll no longer have to have negotiations about them getting something different and that we won't have to have any negotiations about kids leading their own learning. I don't think the third one - the first and second one we're at, kids being in charge of their own learning, we're just not quite there. I really thought when the portfolio movement happened we would be there faster. I don't think the kids are the problem, I think it's the adults. I don't mean that in a negative way, but I think two teachers and co-teachers give us the ability to do a little bit of a washing our hands of being in control and letting it be a little bit more out of control because we all know we learn more when we do what we love to learn.

SULZBERGER: Well, and it is truly clear that you love doing what you do, you love learning and we're just so thankful that you came and you shared your enthusiasm and your excitement and it was definitely a great and exciting way to think inclusively and work collaboratively.

DIEKER: And I want to end by congratulating you all on 23 -

SULZBERGER: 23 years.

DIEKER: 23 years of symposium, which says a lot about your vision and drive and the influence you have made in this area, so thank you for the privilege!

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]