

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Kyanne Obrock and Carrie McSwain
The Transcript

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 talking with Kyanne Obrock, who teaches 4th grade at St. Patrick's Catholic School, and Carrie McSwain, who teaches 5th grade at Challenger Intermediate School, in Goddard, Kansas. Today, Kyanne and Carrie are going to share how UDL has deeply affected their lesson and environment development and how their students now work harder. Hi Kyanne and Carrie, how are you?

KYANNE:

Good, thank you. Very excited.

CARRIE:

Hi there. We're happy to be here.

LOUI:

Great. Thanks so much. It's so nice to meet you both. So, let's learn a little bit about each of you. What's been your journey in education and with UDL? Let's start with you, Carrie.

CARRIE:

Alright. Well, I have been teaching for 24 years, and 14 of those years, I was blessed with Kyanne as a co-teacher. We kind of developed the mindset in those years that if all students could do the academic and social and all those things that we want them to do, then they would. So, we just set out to figure out how to make that environment so all kids were successful. About a year ago, January ish, we got invited to be a part of Access for All project. So we have been in a UDL PLC, so a lot of initials there, for the last year, and just with our co-coaching foundation that just gave us enough confidence to take the risks and get started.

LOUI:

Awesome and what about you, Kyanne?

KYANNE:

So we started the project with a PLC called Access for All that was, we were invited to be a part of through people in our district and through an association in the state of Kansas. And so through that PLC, we were able to kind of start from the ground up. We didn't really know much about UDL except for that we were passionate about giving students access to whatever they need and individualizing based off of students' needs and learning about that. Learning about the different ways that we could enhance student learning, and so we started with that project. And through that project, we were able to go to different conferences and be a part of the PLC that started us identifying kind of where our baseline was, what we thought we were kind of already doing and didn't know it was called UDL, or what we wanted to try to implement together to you know, just help students with their accessibility with their engagement and their action and expression.

LOUI:

Awesome. So Carrie, like you explain, you guys co-taught for a lot of years, and you said 14 years, and that's when you guys were first teaching about UDL. That's just incredible. So, can you guys share how that co-teaching model worked at Challenger? Or works currently but, anyway, and a bit about Challenger Intermediate Center?

KYANNE:

So co-teaching has been around at Challenger for a long time. Even before Carrie and I taught, she co-taught in other environments prior to me joining the team. I actually got to student-teach with her as a newbie and got to learn from her, which was really cool. And then, after I was hired, I got assigned back into the co-teaching environment which was like a dream come true for me. And I tell people that all the time that you know I got to be in my dream job because I was able to co-teach with Carrie and another teacher. Her name was Angie. We were kind of the the trio where we taught together, but the system of co-teaching at Challenger it works that there are certain identified students placed on a team, so it could be a team of two teachers who flipped back and forth for ELA, writing math, and social studies. or it might be a team of three. So, the special education teacher would co-teach with those teachers and facilitate the special ed services that are needed in those classes. And early on, a big focus for both Carrie and I were individualizing that was individualizing the content, we were individualizing student output, and modifying assignments. And of course, teaching together where we would both be up at the front of the room, complimentary teaching and delivering content. And it really did evolve because that type of environment and that type of collaboration, you know, there's a certain trust factor there. And so trying new things like incorporating UDL practices that was really easy for us just because we had that relationship.

LOUI:

Nice. Okay, so with that co-teaching model, that means you guys had some patterns that you were relying on that you've developed over the years, and those patterns included lesson planning and how the learning environment worked. When you learned about UDL, how did the patterns shift?

CARRIE:

Well, not only the pattern shift, but like our tool kit grew also. With co-teaching you usually have one person that's a content expert and one person that's an access expert. Just working together, we kind of became both. Kyanne learned the content inside and out, and I was able to help students access it so that we could shift seamlessly through those co-teaching models. With the project, we were able to learn from and do book studies with people like Leanne Young, and Allison Posey, and Catlin Tucker. Going to some of those professional development opportunities, we just kind of jumped right in and started implementing the UDL framework, which naturally just shifts the focus from what the teacher wants from the lesson and what the teacher not so teacher-centered, but it comes about this becomes about the students, their choices, their interests, their strengths. It just surprised us that when we started planning, we used to plan. Here's the lesson, here's our standards, here's the lesson we're going to do with that. Okay, so how do we modify this or accommodate for students who aren't going to be able to do that? That was definitely a difficult conversation we would have. We'd have a regular assessment and the quantified assessment. Through the UDL lens and all of our new learning. We now were able to plan for the variability, and we thought about barriers and how we could present these opportunities for our students with those barriers in mind instead of specific students and their weaknesses in mind. It shifted everything about our lesson planning. It became so much more fun also. And we were able to be creative and just give our students these authentic learning opportunities that they were in control of.

LOUI:

Nice and then would you say that that changed student effort?

KYANNE:

It absolutely did. Once we figured out how to engage students in a way that wasn't us being the sage on the stage in front of the classroom or like being the entertainment. When we designed the lesson to automatically engage kids based off of their interests, or even a learning preference, we saw an immediate change in their engagement and motivation. And just with like their sustaining work and work completion and not to

mention, you know those benefits for the students, but modifying assignments and accommodating for assignments, it takes a long time to do that. And it takes a lot of preparation ahead of time and collaboration. When we were able to plan and design lessons for the variability. It cut that planning time in half, and that preparation time no longer were we modifying and changing the assignments. And so kids didn't see those things. They just saw the lesson designed, and they knew what they wanted to do. And then they could perform within that.

LOUI:

Nice. So, when you talk about that shift from the modification to designing for lowering barriers, is there an example that you can give from a lesson or a unit?

CARRIE:

Absolutely. We were able to go see Catlin Tucker speak about The Shift to Student-Led. That gave us some confidence to implement the playlist model. We just saw the kids taking ownership of their learning, motivation increased, as well as all their critical thinking skills. But there is this moment that kind of nice stood back as the kids are doing all different various things in the classroom, and we just sit back like whoa, they're all learning, and here we are available to help and to teach. And, but we're not guiding them like they're doing it. It was such a great aha moment. And it's exactly what we wanted from our classroom.

KYANNE:

My favorite part of that was on playlist. There are certain points where it says check in with me, like check-in with the teacher. And so because each student was kind of working at their own pace, and they had the different activities that they could choose, we were able to do one-on-one feedback time with these kids throughout that lesson. And it wasn't, I mean, it was individualized, actionable, and timely feedback for kids because we were available in those moments to give that, and so that was my favorite part about it. Not just like the revelation like, oh, this is really working, and this is the sweet spot like we found the sweet spot, but then also the feedback component that comes along with that.

LOUI:

Nice. Before you jumped into this when you looked at your students and you thought about them doing either independent work or small group work, did you have to do a lot of front-loading? And then, how did that shift when you went to this model with the playlist?

KYANNE:

I think we had to do a lot of front loading, like pre-teaching content or pre-teaching expectations, and a lot of planning ahead of time between the two of us. And the planning is still there when we shift to the lesson design. But the amount of front loading is coming from our perspective and how we're going to design the lesson and not necessarily any type of pre-teaching. Especially when we figured out the way to engage them and get them motivated for learning by unleashing their background knowledge or just taking a like a temperature of how much background knowledge on this concept do you have and then building upon that. That pretty much got rid of any type of like pre-teaching for content that we would previously have done prior to UDL. Does that make sense, Carrie? Would you agree with that?

CARRIE:

Yes, absolutely.

LOUI:

Nice. Nice. And I'm also wondering when it comes to assessment toward the end, so there's the check-ins going along the way like you talked about the one-on-one feedback. So, how did that go when it comes to the summative assessment?

KYANNE:

So the, I guess the thing that we can talk about with this is we were still like required to do certain summative and formative assessments with some of our content, and that maybe the UDL spin on this was we weren't quite sure how we were going to implement that. And so that was probably one of the moments where we're like, okay, let's just try it, and we jumped in with both feet. And then after the end of that, we didn't really like it. So we threw it in the trash, you know? So we're like, Okay, that didn't really work. And so, back to the drawing board.

CARRIE:

We knew we wanted to really focus on firm goals and flexible means. We wanted those assessments to not just be what we had designed but really focus on the construct and learning. But I would say that is probably our next focus and our goal, our jumping off point for this year.

LOUI:

Yeah, yeah. I really appreciate you sharing that, and I appreciate the fact that you guys were willing to share. Okay, so we didn't like that. I mean, you wouldn't be a teacher if they haven't had that moment. I always say I want to apologize to my first-year students, right, because it's just, it's just the way it is. And that's the way we all live. So thank you for being brave and talking about that. And, then, but also pointing out the fact that you said, look here in the beginning, we're going to focus on the firm goals and the flexible

means. That's where we're going to put our attention. And then as we practice with this more than, we're going to figure out the whole formative and summative assessments, especially because, like what you just talked about, you have some requirements around that. And when we have some specificity around requirements, we have to figure out where the flexibility is within that specificity, if that makes sense.

KYANNE:

Yes.

CARRIE:

Well said.

LOUI:

So that's what you're going after. Oh, this has been great. I just really appreciate this so much, Kyanne and Carrie. Thank you. I know it's been really hard for you not to be teaching together because you did for 14 years. Oh my gosh. But I loved having you on this podcast together. Your energy is fabulous. And I know that you guys still chit-chat and share your ideas, but thank you so much for coming on for this podcast!

KYANNE:

Thank you.

CARRIE:

Thanks for having us.

LOUI:

You're welcome. You're welcome. 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 an associated blog at my website www.theudlapproach.com/podcasts. 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 in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.