

Adria Gold Transcript UDL in 15 Minutes

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 Adria Gold who is a 4th and 5th grade ELA teacher at Prettyboy Elementary School in Baltimore, MD. Today, Adria is going to share how UDL has changed how she designs her lessons, making them accessible to all students. Hi Adria, how are you?

ADRIA: I'm doing well. How are you?

LOUI: Great, thank you so much! Let's just dive in and will you share with us your teaching background?

ADRIA: Sure! So, this is my 10th year teaching and all of my teaching has been done at Prettyboy. I've taught third grade, fourth and fifth grade. And this year, I'm teaching just ELA (*English Language Arts*). We're departmentalized and so this year I get to teach two classes of fourth grade ELA and one class of fifth grade ELA.

LOUI: Oh, okay. So, what's the make-up of the student population in your classrooms?

ADRIA: So, within my three classes, I have a whole range of needs. I have students that are reading below grade level and then I also have students that are quite above grade level, so it's a whole mix in my classes this year.

LOUI: Okay, what's the socio-economic picture like at Prettyboy?

ADRIA: So, our school's actually not that diverse. We have a very, like, middle-class, upper middle-class population but of course we also have students on the other end of the spectrum as well. So we've got a little bit of diversity that's actually increasing in the 10 years I've been here. But overall, not as diverse as other schools I've seen, especially in our county.

LOUI: Now, you talked with me about how your teaching has changed over the past 10 years and how UDL altered how you think about supports that you use, you know, what used to be offered only as accommodations, and

you had a really striking example, so could you share that with the podcast audience?

ADRIA: Absolutely. So, just in the past 10 years I've really kind of had a lot of time, I guess, to reflect on my teaching experience and I feel like when I was a new teacher, I really just taught the curriculum that was provided, because that's what I thought it was supposed to do. You know, ignorance is bliss. So, just teach the lessons that you're given. And I feel like over the course of these 10 years, I've really deepened my understanding of really what my charge is what I've been asked to do, especially as an ELA educator. And now that I've grown so comfortable and I feel knowledgeable in the standards, I feel like now is the time that I can really perfect the ways that I'm instructing, and I think that's where I'm able to apply what I've learned about UDL. It is really an execution of my instruction. And so, through the UDL book study that I did, I really started looking at how am I going to focus on all students instead of just the specific learners, the individuals. Because I kind of had this shift in mindset of, if I was going to try something for one student, why not try it for everyone? So, the example I would like to talk about is when I use success criteria in my classroom. And when I'm referring to success criteria, I mean, I'm outlining for my learners, "What do we need to do on an assignment in order to be successful? How do we know that we have met the standard?", because that's what my teaching is about now. It's not just, are we accomplishing this lesson? But, how do we get our students to master this standard? So, in the past, like an accommodation that I think certain students would need is maybe chunking, having an assignment chunked. But if some students need something chunked, why not offer it to everyone? How can I break down this assignment to help all learners through kind of chunking it, breaking it down into simpler parts? So, I do that through success criteria. And one example of how I think I really helped kind of personalize it for learners, is I will color code each component of the success criteria to help students know, and visually see what needs to be included.

LOUI: Ah, so when you're talking about the success criteria, and, like, the standard, is it written up on the whiteboard and then you color code it or is it on paper?

ADRIA: So, I typically use PowerPoint when I am teaching. I'm a visual learner so I like to have something to refer back to. And luckily, students have devices in the classroom so they each have their own device. So,

everything that I present on my PowerPoint, I'm able to push out to them through our digital platform so they can access it right in front of them. They can have it open when they're doing their individual work. Which is a really nice benefit because then it's not always, you know, having to look back at the board, you have it right in front of you. But in my lesson design, I like to usually have, you know, the assignment is going to be some sort of written response, I like to give a model response. It will be displayed to them on the board and then I'll usually show them the model response, it's just black and white typed regular so they can kind of see it and analyze it first. I'll often ask them, "What did I do as a writer to be successful?" That way they can start to pull out the elements of the success criteria. I'm looking to see if they can identify how to be successful with that standard. What are the components? And then, usually my next slide is the same exact response but broken down by color.

LOUI: Wow, they're really interacting with the standard then.

ADRIA: Exactly.

LOUI: It's not just presented to them. Wow! I haven't had anybody else talk about that, so that's really very interesting and I bet people are going to love hearing about that.

ADRIA: So, I'll take the success criteria which is typically bulleted and then I'll show them the success criteria and each bullet, the color matches what's in the model response. So, for example, I was just doing the lesson on comparing settings and looking at how the mood changed based on the setting, and one aspect of the success criteria was first, they had to identify if the mood stayed the same or changed. So, I put that part in orange. The next thing that was needed was they had to analyze the first setting and talk about the mood. And so, I put that criteria in red. The next component was the analysis of the second setting and the second mood, and I changed that color to blue. And then the final part of the explanation was for them to talk about how the moods changed with what was the influence of the setting that led to the change. And so, that color for the success criteria, I actually made it purple because you're really pulling from the red and blue components in order to explain your "quote" purple section. And sometimes that's how we'll talk about it in class. You know, the students don't always have 100% ownership of the language of the standard, but they can talk about the colors.

ADRIA: And it's...

LOUI: Yeah [overtalking]

ADRIA: ...really neat to me to see, you know, when I'm giving feedback to students or they're doing self-reflection, they'll say, "Well, I really need help with the purple." Or, "I'm ready for the blue part!" And I just think that's so awesome. Even if they can't own the language of the standard their understanding that it's broken into components, and you know, ultimately, as they move through the school year, I hope that they'll, you know, learn the language of the standard, but at least they're seeing the component.

LOUI: Right! Now, have you ever had students who, it's been demonstrated that they're experiencing color blindness or come across that? Or, have you ever needed to change how you're coding the standard with some students?

ADRIA: I haven't had that color blindness example. It's elementary school, so, you know, they get a big kick out of using crayons or highlighters,...

LOUI: Yeah, yeah [overtalking]

ADRIA: ...or colored pencils to go back and underline their work and then, you know, if this one can't find a blue or red, they'll change the colors. Some like to invent a color-coding system. But to me, I think it's great that some of them want to physically go in and touch it sometimes when they type their responses, they'll have fun changing the colors of what they're typing.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. And so, it seems like the flexibility is there also so, if you had a student who is just not understanding, for example, the connection of the red and the blue creating purple, that you've got other ways for them to actively participate with this, even if they aren't seeing the same colors or participating in it in a color way. So, okay, so I definitely interrupted you because you're talking about this and then how you went into chunking. So, let's hear from the chunking part!

ADRIA: To me, like, just having them for my students that really need like

the chunking or the structure, then I'll just ask them to start with the first aspect of the success criteria. All I need for you right now is to identify the mood, right? You're opening sentence. Make sure you have the red part. And we work so closely, like, as a team. There's another fourth grade ELA teacher, there's another fifth grade ELA teacher, like we're constantly in communication about how we're going to present the material, and we'll often print for the students mini checklists with the success criteria. So that, as they work through an assignment, they can check off what they've accomplished. So that's like, I think another visual way if you have students that don't necessarily want to color code, they can use it as a checklist. So, once they've accomplished the first aspect, they can check it off, move to the second, move to the third. I think that's another example of how I can chunk the assignment for them.

LOUI: Right. And as you said, maybe typically somebody would look at an IEP and see that students need to have information broken down into smaller pieces and so then we would employ the chunking, but you're saying, "No, everybody has access to this. If they want to use that then they can. They don't have to, but it's there and available to them!"

ADRIA: Yeah, I think...

LOUI: Lovely.

ADRIA: I think about myself, when I was a student and how, or just the students that we've encountered in our years of education and we think about those students that get, you know, a written assignment to do, and they don't even know where to start. And it's not always the IEP students. It's not always those that we might say, "Oh they struggle." You know, it can be anyone who sometimes doesn't know which direction to go to. And,

LOUI: Right.

ADRIA: ...so why not offer them a little bit of structure, or chunking, or just breaking down your expectation so that they know what they're being held accountable for?

LOUI: Yeah, yeah!

ADRIA: I think all students deserve that.

LOUI: I think so, too. This definitely loops back to something that you said very, very early on when you started to share, was that you feel that you have a charge, and it's obvious you see your charge as educating all learners and it doesn't matter who the learner is in your classroom, but you're in there to reach all of your learners and so you're looking at a variety of ways and you're using the UDL framework to help you design those variety of ways, so that you can address this charge that you feel that you have. Which I think is awesome!

ADRIA: Absolutely. I'm all about building the pool of strategies, because it's so funny when you introduce a new strategy for summarizing, for example, and then I had a student during an observation say, "Arrg! I hate that way!" And my reaction was, "Well then, I've got news for you. Here's a new strategy you can use!" I think it's so important that we empower our students to have options, because I always say to them, you are the learner. You know what works for you. I think we need to break from this "one size fits all," or, "Do it this way 'cause this is the way I'm teaching." Everyone thinks differently, everyone learns differently, and I think it's our responsibility as educators to provide these multiple options. So, each student finds what works best for them.

LOUI: Absolutely! And, oh, it's such a different message! Instead of saying, "well, you know what, buster? You just have to do what I'm telling you to do!" Instead, you're saying, "Well, you know what? I've got another option for you." [laughter]

ADRIA: Exactly! And I think that's a little bit scary sometimes to give that freedom and choice, but I just feel that I've seen such empowerment in my students come from kind of me stepping back because you can ask anyone, I'm a control freak! You know, I have expectations, and I know what I want, and I know how I would do it, but I think, really, through my study of UDL, I've learned that just because it's my way doesn't necessarily mean it's going to work for everyone. So, I have to help my students find what works for them.

LOUI: And I think something else that you talked about the very beginning, so right here as we're coming to the close of this particular podcast, but you talked about that you are becoming more comfortable in knowing the standards, and just kind of getting to know what it was like in the

classroom, and then you came to know about UDL. And sometimes that's flipped. Sometimes people are learning about UDL and they're either teaching a new grade level, their new to teaching, and so they haven't had that opportunity. And would you have any words of wisdom to pass along to those people that maybe their flipped from what you got to experience?

ADIRA: My advice would be to really think about what your end goal is. I think when you know what you're expecting of your students, that's when you can play in the instruction to get them there. And that's when you can start to think about the different avenues and roads that you can try and different representations and ways to getting there. But I think it's critical to know what you're anticipating the final outcome be. I think that's fair for your learners as well. They need to know what's being expected of them, and then you can think of all the super fun ways and engaging techniques you can use to get them there.

LOUI: Perfect! It's knowing the goal! That's so awesome! Yeah! Oh well, thank you so much Adria! Thank you for taking this time and chatting with us about how you've been implementing UDL your classroom!

ADRIA: Oh, no problem! Thank you so much!

LOUI: Oh, you're welcome. So, for those of you 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/media. 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 in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.