

Transcript with audio descriptions

LOUI: [podcast host Loui Lord Nelson] 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 Karen Keener, a 7th and 8th grade Language Arts Teacher and Jordan Landis, a Grade 8 Intervention Specialist, who co-teach at Crestview Middle School in Ohio. Today, Karen and Jordan are going to share how UDL has changed how they plan and how they co-teach, and their mindsets. Hello to both of you!

JORDAN: Hi!

KAREN: Hello there!

LOUI: Hi there! Well, this is the first time I've interviewed two people for UDL in 15 minutes and I'm totally jazzed! Thank you so much! [Jordan Landis and Karen Keener]

KAREN: Excited to be here!

JORDAN: Thank you for having us!

LOUI: Great. So right off the bat, um, tell me about the students at Crestview Middle School like your, like the demographics and then the classes that you co-teach.

JORDAN: Well, Crestview Middle School is a pretty rural school out in Ohio. We're in between, kind of, Cleveland and Columbus. And then in our classes that we co-teach, we have a pretty wide variety of students in them from students that are on the talented and gifted spectrum to students that are also have disability, learning disabilities, things of that nature.

LOUI: Nice. Is the, um, kind of socio economics, are we talking middle class? Is this rural with some poverty? Is this upper middle class? What would you say? [The outside of Crestview Middle School]

KAREN: We are a rural community with some poverty. A working-class community.

LOUI: All right, so I'm sure you both have other teaching assignments throughout the day, so what are those? [Karen Keener]

KAREN: I teach two periods of seventh grade writing. I also teach a writing elective class for a period, and then I co teach with Jordan two periods of eighth grade language arts. We also have an extension period where we work with kids on different needs that they have throughout the week on different subjects so it's kind of an extra half period that we have where we pull in, and it's called academic extension time.

LOUI: Ah, so do all teachers participate in that extension period? Like everybody? Like all the students are spread out across seventh or eighth grade?

KAREN: Correct.

LOUI: Okay, and then , what about you?

JORDAN: So, I teach, in the morning I teach two periods of math. I co-teach two periods of math with our eighth-grade math teacher. In the middle of the day I teach my own class. Half the year it's an intervention class where we really do a lot of reading, writing, and math all together, [The Crestview Middle School homepage] and then the second half the year it's a little bit more intensively focused on writing because I'm their teacher record for writing for that year. And then the extension period, like Karen talked about, and then at the end of the day I do co-teach two periods a day with Karen.

LOUI: So, we're going to talk about this, the fact that you do work together, so how and when did you begin co-teaching and like what steps did you take? People are always so interested to understand how people get started with it and just how that works.

KAREN: Co-teaching has been a really great experience for us. We've only been teaching for a couple of years, I have been teaching for quite a bit longer than Jordan, but he came on board a couple years ago and we kind of just took off. It's been great because we both are kind of have the same goal in mind, we are willing to, like, try new things and use both of our strengths in the classroom.

JORDAN: Yeah, I would say that, like Karen said, for me this is my well this is my third year with Karen, and ever since I got my job as intervention specialist co-teaching just been a part of what I've done so to me it's just kind of my normal, but yeah, I would agree that the co-teaching has been a great experience just because I think each of us have strengths and I think we're really good at playing off of each other and helping kids in our own ways and when we plan and do things like that, ,I think we're really good at balancing what each one of us does well and then combining those in the way that's going to help the students, the most.

LOUI: Yeah, so it sounds like the schedule is set up, the expectation is there in your building for co-teaching. Is that correct?

JORDAN: Definitely. I think in just about every grade level in our building, co-teaching is, you know, the standard not the kind of exception.

LOUI: Okay, and so is there a specific time that is set aside for you two to plan together?

KAREN: Yeah, we, we make it a priority to plan together each week. We are disciplined about meeting every Thursday, and we plan out what we're going to do for that following week, that really helps us be able to meet the needs of all of our learners in the best way. And to use those strengths that we were talking about. [An online article titled, "6 Steps to Successful Co-Teaching"]

LOUI: Okay, so I'm just trying to paint the picture for myself and for the listeners so for example Jordan does it, it sounds like maybe on Thursdays, just as an example, or maybe during that time period you have that open and you said, "I'm going to dedicate and give this time to Karen," because you already co teach with somebody else for

math. So do you designate a special time to plan with that math teacher with whom you co-teach?

JORDAN: Yes, I usually spend either, depending on the week, either Wednesday or Friday specifically planning with my math co-teacher and then every Thursday is always Karen and I sitting down to plan the next week or unit or whatever it may be for our language arts class.

LOUI: Okay, nice and then my last really technical, like I'm beating on this planning thing but people ask! How much time do you have? This is like a half hour, 40 minutes, or you know like the classic 41 minutes because that's the way school schedules are?

KAREN: Well, we have a 50, 50-minute planning period on, on Thursdays, and it depends on how much we want to dig into that day how far out we're planning and how much we have to plan. Typically, we spend about 30 minutes looking at that.

LOUI: Okay. All right, now that makes sense. Okay, you've given some great background information so the listeners can better understand what you're going to share next, which I'm really excited for you to share. You gave me a teaser about your approach to your lessons, and, and how that's shifted with UDL, and how that shift has impacted your mindset, so I can't wait to hear more so, please share.

KAREN: Well, UDL has been, learning that framework has been great for the two of us. We now when we sit down to plan on those Thursdays, really look at the lessons that we have been teaching for the past couple years and we just kind of look at those lessons through a new lens. We look at everything through that framework now. And we're looking for ways that we can just tweak the current lessons we have to offer more to our students. To offer more learner variability. To look at, I mean more barriers we can break down to get to more students. It's been a really rewarding experience for both of us. [The UDL Guidelines]

LOUI: I was really taken by the word "tweak", because so many teachers when they get started with UDL, they say, "Oh my gosh. Do I have to start completely over? Start from a clean slate? This is so overwhelming!" And so, it's really interesting to hear you say that you look back at lessons and you tweak. Maybe you can talk about that or give a little bit of an example about that.

JORDAN: Yeah, I think, one example that we have that a pretty good example is we do a pretty large unit on Edgar Allan Poe in our eighth-grade class, and we really focus a lot on being able to compare contrast, and dig through theme and moods and things of that sort. And a good example is one lesson we usually to do is we read three stories on Edgar Allan Poe, along with some nonfiction but our three stories we read: The Raven, we read The Tell Tale Heart, and The Fall of the House of Usher. And we always used to do triple Venn diagram with them, which was a lot more alone and students are working on it individually at their desks, which we had kids are pretty compliant, I mean it wasn't a bad lesson. I think kids for the most part got our, you know, our goal for the

day. [One student's concept map of The Tell Tale Heart] But we, we were always missing some of them. So then, now what we started to do is we looked at that and looked at how could we possibly tweak this lesson? And we implemented what we call a placemat where now, students are working collaboratively on really like a large chart paper and they're working and then now doing it this way, each person's in control of one story, the story they understand the best, and then they're bouncing ideas off of each other and working really well through that. For instance, on this one assignment we had, we had one group this year where we had kids working in essentially the first percentile ability and the 99th percentile of ability on the same assignment. And they were all being successful, being able to compare and contrast, just in a more collaborative manner.

KAREN: So, we turned that individual assignment into a collaborative assignment where kids are interacting, discussing, talking, and bringing it to a much higher thinking level.

LOUI: Another question, so with changing it to the placemat, and they're using the chart paper, do you find that that still fits within the same timeline that you had for that lesson? Did you add to that timeline?

JORDAN: For this one lesson I would say that it pretty much sticks almost right onto the same timeline we've done. Really, part of it is we've done a lot more background work and all the things leading up to it, but you know, on individual lessons like that is about the same time. [Students cutting out words from the newspaper to represent their story]

LOUI: Yeah, you know, so that was what I was thinking and, and what I love is that you talked about the fact you have students that are in that first percentile and you have students that are in the 99th percentile and they're working on this together but they're all working toward that same goal which is the compare and the contrast. So, you have flexible opportunities within the lesson, so they can all work toward that goal. And they're taking ownership of something which is one of those stories so everybody has a commitment to this. They they're, they're committed to their part of the lesson. That's just brilliant, I love it!

KAREN: Well that's what we've tried to do with all of our lessons as we as we tweak them we, we look at the what we have and we say there's some good things here, but how can we offer more choice, how can we give the kids more of a voice here? What can we add to it that will allow them to have more ownership? So, it's really minor things but that's impactful things at the same time. [Students using scissors and glue sticks to construct their story outline]

LOUI: Yeah, this is a question that we didn't talk about, but this just came to mind, what do you think makes your collaborative relationship so successful? Because you have gone into this, both of you with the mentality of, of lowering barriers and this tweaking idea, and then you talked about the mind shift change you've had, so maybe talk about what part do you have that allows you to collaborate so well? And then maybe talk a

little bit about that mind shift you've had. [A TV and music learning station with 4 desks, sticky notes, and a basket]

KAREN: What's been awesome for me is really trying to take labels away, and make it one classroom. And that's the same thing with Jordan and I, you know, we're both equal in the classroom. And I think that's a big change for a lot of schools. Where I don't know is that intervention specialists are always seen as equal and classrooms in the past, but we are equal, and the kids are all equal and we play up for that. Gear up for that. Plan for that.

LOUI: Yeah.

JORDAN: Right. There's just a lot of mutual respect, I think, between Karen and I. And I think we both have that mindset that we're both in this for the same thing. We both want our students to be successful. No matter who that student is. They're not my students, they're not her students, they're all of our students. They're all of our kids. [students at an envelope station folding paper]

LOUI: Yeah, so both of you have actually articulated some fabulous mindsets that are behind why you're such a successful collaborative team. What mindset do you think you've had a shift with when it comes to UDL? With, or how did UDL shift your mindset?

JORDAN: I think, for me, the mindset used to be is, why isn't this kid learning this topic or this or that? [Students sitting at laptops folding paper for a project] But now I look at it more through a lens, and I think Karen would agree with me, we more look at the lens as, what are we doing to keep that kid from learning it? You know, what kind of changes do we need to make so that kid can access the material in our classroom?

KAREN: Absolutely. That is definitely exactly what has changed so much for us is that look right there. What's wrong with our lesson that kids are not getting where they need to be?

LOUI: Yeah, you've shifted it back to, like, we talked about the curriculum, but you even shifted it on to yourselves as decision makers and as designers and I think that's really brave. For some people, and they would think of it as brave, and I think it is brave, because you're saying, I am the designer. And then I also think that it's modeling something for your students and that they're seeing that you're creating this environment for them and so they walk in, they're like, "Hey, I know I can learn here because we all have these same expectations. We're all going to move forward and I've got to put on my, my learning trousers here [laughter]. I gotta put on my learning clothes and my learning hat. That's just what the expectation is here!" That is so wonderful. I really appreciate you sharing this! We've definitely hit our 15 minutes and like I said, I've never done this with a set of teachers, with a pair of teachers, so thank you very much for being the people to kind of break that mold. This has been exciting. [Jordan Landis and Karen Keener followed by a clip showing the navigation of

theUDLapproach.com/media page and then the contact page followed by podcast host Loui Lord Nelson].

KAREN: Thank you for having us.

JORDAN: Yeah, thank you.

LOUI: You're very, very welcome. So, for those of you who are 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 the www.theUDLapproach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.