

Carrie Preston

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 Carrie Preston who is an intervention specialist who is co-teaching an Environmental Science course at the Ohio Hi-Point Career Center in Bellefontaine, Ohio. Today, Carrie is going to share how she designed a month-long unit where 12th grade students chose their own community issues to investigate and then offered solutions. Hi Carrie, how are you?

CARRIE: Great How are you?

LOUI: I'm wonderful, thank you so much. So, you've had a really varied background that has really informed your teaching. Can you share that background with us?

CARRIE: Sure. Well, I was an intervention specialist for about 16 years, mostly teaching English. I taught some other subjects as an intervention specialist and I had worked primarily with students with disabilities in resource classroom. I ended up moving into the general ed side and teaching high school English to juniors and seniors for about seven years. And then decided last year when a position came open in our district to go back to being an intervention specialist because I really did enjoy that and it helped me focus on some of the aspects of teaching that helped me address all learners. I mean I guess I worked on that a little bit in gen ed and was moving towards different ways to serve all students. But I thought being an intervention specialist would free me up even more to focus even more on that. So, here I am one year, as an intervention specialist again and co-teaching science this time.

LOUI: Perfect! And, can you describe the role of an intervention specialist because every state, you know, and even districts have different names for different jobs. So, if you can explain that so people would understand.

CARRIE: Sure, I have a license to teach students with disabilities. At my district it means I have a caseload of students whose IEPs I manage, monitor. I meet with those students. Last year, all of those students were students that I had in class. So, it was really easy to work with them check on grades, make sure they had everything that they needed to be successful and that their plans were being followed.

LOUI: Thank you. And how do you think that your varied career has impacted your beliefs related to UDL?

CARRIE: Having those two totally different experiences of being in the general education classroom and having typical students, and some students with individualized education plans, was really different than having just students with disabilities and it really helped me figure out how to meet all learners needs a lot better. I thought I did a pretty good job as an intervention specialist the first time around, but after I taught in general education, I learned that I can get a lot better. [laughter]

LOUI: Yeah [laughter]

CARRIE: So it's talking a lot about meeting all those students' needs.

LOUI: So when did you get started learning about UDL and starting to implement that?

CARRIE: Well, we had some formal training last year through our state support team, but I was starting to incorporate some UDL elements or aspects unknowingly. In my first go around as an intervention specialist, and I really wanted to provide ways for students to challenge themselves, to remove some barriers, I wanted to encourage them not to limit themselves. And as I got into general education, when I was teaching high school English, I saw there were a lot of students that didn't technically qualify as having a disability. And, you know, that's just a matter of numbers and where students fall. I feel like sometimes that's maybe not an exact science, but other students who needed other things as well but maybe they were small things but just differences in learners. And so when we got this training I really amped up my efforts and I could be a lot more deliberate about what I did and more informed about how I work to meet all learners' needs.

LOUI: And I love how you just said that because there are a lot of people that learn about UDL, and sometimes people will say, "Oh I'm already doing this," and either they'll drop it off their plate, or they won't take any time to dig into it more and a big part of it is what you just said, it's that deliberate, intentional piece of saying, "You know what? There are more students that could benefit from this," and then that bigger picture of "Where are we taking them when we provide these supports that lower barriers?" Well we're taking them toward becoming expert learners, that's where we're taking them! So, it's not so much the strategies and the methods and even sometimes the materials, it's

more about, "Where are we taking these students?" And I think about the story that you and I chatted about, and I think it's an excellent example, so if you don't mind, I'd love if we just dive right into that.

CARRIE: Sure. When we last talked, we talked about, I called it, I think, the most UDL unit I've created to date. And that unit was one, I have to mention, that I did do that towards the end of the year when some expectations for classroom rules and procedures were kind of set and like how we do things, what quality of work was expected. Those things were pretty well set and I had a good rapport with students. I probably wouldn't do this at the very, very beginning of the year because this unit was pretty free and open, but we really enjoyed it. I only got to do it two times before I switched back to being an intervention specialist. But the standard that we worked on was a writing standard and it was writing for a specific audience. And I wanted to keep it simple, but I wanted to give students a lot of choices and I wanted to make sure that we got that engagement piece in. That they were interested in what they were working on and that they would work with the people that they wanted to work with and produce a product that suited their skills and their audience needs. So, I just took those six questions that kind of measured whether they met the standard and presented those to students. Those were basically: Who is your target audience? What do they already know? What do they need to know? What method of communication would be most appropriate? So if they chose their peers, or let's say they chose the community and they created a PowerPoint, and they presented that in class, that may not be the best method of communication, so they had to think about the best way to actually get their message to their audience, what their design was like, whether that was appropriate for the age group, whether they included elements that would be important for that audience, and then they would, another engagement piece would be that self-assessment would be included. They decided their groups, they decided their topics. As a whole class we kind of brainstormed some local problems, some issues and they saw and that year we had a lot of anxiety and depression, there were some automobile accidents, and some really tragic things that happen that year and students were just really struggling to deal with those things. So that was a hot topic. Drug Abuse was a hot topic, domestic violence. One group of students identified a lack of manners in their

peers and they wanted to create a game board for use with the younger students hoping to affect some younger students and teach them about manners so that when they got to be their age then maybe they could see a difference in how students conduct themselves. So, they got to decide their groups, if they wanted to create a work contract they could. Students that really knew each other well and how they worked, some of them chose not to. Some of them chose to. I did a lot of group monitoring. Usually on a daily basis I would check with each group, "What have you done today? What's your next step? Who's doing what?" So, I really didn't have to do a lot of work myself but I did do a lot of monitoring and collaborating, and they, this was really student driven. So, the goal with those, you know beyond the standards, was to have a positive effect on their peers or their community. Whoever their target audience was and their end product can be anything they want so we got game boards, we ended up with a great public service announcement video. I was really blown away by it. I'm still blown away every time I look back at it. Unfortunately, there's some little prep things you need to do before you do some multimedia projects and we had some students that did filming, and they didn't get permission from, like, they did some filming in the cafeteria during lunch and we didn't have permissions for all of those students so we couldn't share that but it was amazing. They really did some high-quality work and they were multimedia and marketing students from our program. And I just felt like we covered a lot of the networks with this unit, students could use browser readers to access the content, they could look at videos to research their topic or to come up with ideas. They could use text if they wanted to. They could read text or magazine articles or research about their topics. There were many ways that they can take action on what they've learned or express what they learned. The end product could be anything and using those six questions as an assessment at the end and including the self-assessment, opened the door to any kind of project that wouldn't be appropriate that I didn't have to create 55 different rubrics or ways to grade it, and we didn't have to sit down and talk about you didn't have to spend all that time figuring out, "Okay what's your grade gonna look like how are we going to grade this?" The bottom line was if they were involved, and we repeated those questions throughout the project. And I would ask them, you know what does your audience need to know? Are you sure this is the best way to communicate?

Where are they going to see this the most? We had some social media pages even for some of those projects. And in the end, if they can answer those questions individually, that was the test. Go ahead.

LOUI: Did you give those questions to them, like on a checklist or anything or did they have those written on a board that they, so they constantly reflected on them? How did you help remind them of those questions as they went along?

CARRIE: They were on the board all the time. I would always ask them as I did our group checks, and they were on Schoology, we used Schoology to post materials and sometimes I would post tips or things that they could check out or different apps or things that they could use to create their end products for their projects, and we talked about them all the time. And I would remind them, "Remember, you individually, this is your grade even though we're working as a group. Your grade is based on your ability to answer these questions and prove that you made the right choices with your project.

That you and your group did it and to know why you made those choices." So, it really gave me a lot of freedom. And they were so excited. They said it was the most fun they had all year in class, and that's a good thing, I felt, especially at the end of the year to do because I had students who were in 12th grade and so they're thinking about graduating at the end of the year and sometimes they get their mind a little more focused on what's coming next and not so much, "Oh, we have to finish this!" [laughter]

LOUI: Oh, yeah [overtalking] you had them really hooked in there!

CARRIE: Yeah, they were really hooked, and it just convinced me that I need to do more of this not just at the end of the year, but more often throughout the school year

LOUI: Right..

CARRIE: ...because it was relevant. It was open ended. They could get and do things the way they needed to and the products were so superior to anything that they produced when I had 95% of the control in the past and I said this is what we're going to do, this is how you're going to do it.

LOUI: Right.

CARRIE: I just got such a better product from such a greater percentage of students.

LOUI: Well, we're bouncing right up against the end, but I have one question and maybe you can just answer really, really quickly. So, in the very beginning when they

were choosing their topics, did you have students who struggled with that, and how did you support them in identifying something that they would connect with and that relevancy would hold them all the way through?

CARRIE: When we first started, I just created a Google survey and I said, "Hey, get together, talk with your peers about problems and issues you see, and let's turn these in on the survey," and then we kind of talked as a group about what those might be. And if there were any questions, sometimes they would talk with people who plan to work in a group on a certain topic and that really, that really wasn't very complex. That went very smoothly and I felt like people settled into groups, pretty easily because they all had a lot of similar ideas around four or five of the a topics and they could go with whatever topic they were interested in if they had their own individual topic, I let them do that as well, so it worked. It worked out pretty well. I did have to help them with a little time management or some maybe functioning as a group. Sometimes I wouldn't support some groups. There I couldn't just say hands off, you know, that's, that's for you to figure out. I did provide some guidance, there were some students so there were still some supports and scaffolding in those areas, too.

LOUI: Oh, well Carrie this was fabulous. Thank you so much for sharing, and I'll probably be doing more connecting to the UDL framework in the associated blog just because we didn't take time because your story was so good I want to just let you keep going with it. So,

CARRIE: Thank you.

LOUI: Thank you so much for sharing. I really appreciate it.

CARRIE: Thank you for having me.

LOUI: Absolutely. So, for those listening to the podcast, you can find supplemental materials like an image montage with closed captioning, that montage with audio descriptions, a transcript and the associated blog I just mentioned at my website, www.theUDLapproach.com/media. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL had a pause for a second. 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 help in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.