UDL in 15 Minutes

Transcript – Christina Khatri

LOUI: Hello and welcome to UDL and 15 minutes where educators discuss their experiences with UDL. I'm Loui Lord Nelson, UDL author and leader. Today, I'm talking with Christina Khatri is a science teacher at Ocean View Junior High School in Oxnard, California. Today, Christina is going to share how she has started using UDL within a brand-new curriculum. Hi Christina, how are you?

CHRISTINA: I'm good, thank you.

LOUI: Wonderful. Can you tell us a little bit about Ocean View Junior High?

CHRISTINA: Yeah, it's a junior high school in Oxnard, California. It's the smallest population school district in Ventura County, but the largest landmass. It's a very large area with a lot of farmlands. A lot of English learners. Yeah, it's a smaller population so there's no High School.

LOUI: Ah, okay. That's really interesting. So, what about your teaching background. Have you always been a middle school teacher?

CHRISTINA: I have, I've always been a middle school teacher and I've always been at this school specifically. I started out in eighth grade, and then I did a combination of seventh and eighth grade. And now I do just seventh grade as well as a STEAM elective.

LOUI: Okay. And so then you've also always been a science teacher?

CHRISTINA: I have always been a science teacher. However, I also took a few years to get a Masters in history and thought about being a history professor.

LOUI: Oh, but I bet that informs your science teaching.

CHRISTINA: It does.

LOUI: So, you got started with UDL, and this is kind of your first year, well, with a definitely with a new science curriculum, so you've got a lot on your plate. How have you melded those two? How did you get started with UDL and how have you moved forward with this new science curriculum? [The UDL Guidelines graphic organizer followed by TOSA, Melissa Toland]

CHRISTINA: Well, last year we piloted Amplify, the new curriculum, and I got to experience a couple units of that. This year is our first year officially doing it. And I really wanted to implement some UDL especially like engagement as well as how that they could express themselves.

LOUI: So you wanted to really look at engagement and action and expression, it sounds like.

CHRISTINA: Yes, but I also really wanted to do assessment, as well. And, in the very beginning of the year I sat down with our TOSA that specializes in UDL and had her help walk me through it and sort of focus. And so, I'm focusing on doing a little bit of each and progressively making each of them better. But I have a lot of trouble focusing on just one, because it feels like they all bounce off of each other so much.

LOUI: Yeah, they do. One of the things that I talk about a lot is that the framework and anybody else does with the framework is that of course it's based on our brains and the brain is interconnected and so it totally makes sense that all these guidelines are so interconnected. So, when you start using one then you start seeing oh there's a reflection of another one in there and then it really becomes this intentional thing. So, before we go forward you use the acronym TOSA, and I know we have a lot of people who aren't from California, who will wonder what's that acronym mean?

CHRISTINA: Yeah, it's a teacher on special assignment. And so she was a teacher here, teaching English, and now she works at the district office and supports teachers throughout the three elementary schools and the middle school utilizing and implementing UDL.

LOUI: Oh sweet. Okay, so really specific to that. That's really nice. Alright, so do you have an example that you want to offer to us of how you started working with that curriculum and moving it forward. [A student's write-on tablet with warm-up work. It answers two questions using drawings and written words.]

CHRISTINA: The very first lesson we looked at was a reading one. So the students were supposed to write an answer to a warm up question, and then they're supposed to read an article and they're supposed to take some notes in a specific format, and then they're supposed to share their notes with each other in a specific format, and then they're supposed to answer some questions at the end. And, I've in the past had a lot of trouble getting students to really engage with it as well as. Not all of them want to have it read to them, not all of them want to do like a popcorn type of reading where they take turns, not all of them want to read by themselves. They need different types of support, so our TOSA basically walked me through some of the things and was like, "Well which ones are actually more important to you? Do you actually have to grade that warm up?" and I'm like, "No, of course not." So, then they can just talk, write, draw. And talk, write draw has become actually a basic thing that I implement to almost anything that I'm not specifically grading or need to see. They can choose to talk, write, or draw their answers to anything. And they have both paper or whiteboards that they can draw on. And then for the reading, we had options where we added in options of where to sit, so they could sit on the table or on the floor or something. And we had the option of them reading with a partner or they could read by themselves. And then they already have, like, an embedded audio version of the reading, but I also created a video of me reading and modeling how to take notes and stuff. And then I also invite some students up if

they choose to sit with me and I read to them and I help go over the notes and ask questions and show them how to go about that thought process.

LOUI: Awesome. So, the video that you talked about, so a video of you reading and then a video of you taking notes. Did you just kind of set your cell phone up or like the tablet camera? How did you do that?

CHRISTINA: Yeah, I sit my iPad just facing down onto a copy of the article, and I just literally wrote on it, annotated it. So I just have the iPad facing straight down. And it shows the page and it just has, it's like, I'm just doing it out loud. What I would do in my head. "Hmm, I wonder what this means? How could this be connected to that?" And I would write the question down for them, [A close up of the wall rubric with student input on what represents good and okay evidence.] or "I wonder what this word is?" and I circle it. And I can look it up and talk to them about that definition itself. So, following the guidelines that are in the curriculum of what they're supposed to be annotating, but modeling how that process happens.

LOUI: Okay, I love that so much for two reasons. So number one, the modeling, which really helps with not only in comprehension - your students understanding and comprehending we think about that guideline and, and being able to understand how you're taking this information and utilizing and connecting it in your own mind, and then on the paper. And then also you're just doing that demonstration of language and symbols because you're giving them the vocabulary and the symbols and your decoding right in front of them. But the other reason I love that example is because I think in our hyper-connected and video-laden society I think people think like their videos have to look so spectacular. [A close up of the wall rubric with student input on what represents okay and poor evidence.] And what you did was so straightforward which probably felt even better to your students because it's just like, okay kids, this is what we're doing here it is like there's no music there's no hyper or stuff to it.

CHRISTINA: Yeah.

LOUI: It's just straightforward. I think it's a wonderful model it's a really honest, true model I'm sure the attached to it well.

CHRISTINA: Yeah, I really enjoy it too and I noticed that a lot of the kids actually really do like getting read to them and that sort of led me into trying that and once in a while I'll actually bring in like a Dr Seuss book or something that's related like..

LOUI: Yeah!

CHRISTINA: Oh Say, Can You Say Dinosaurs? and I take them out onto the lawn and have storytime with them, and they enjoy it a lot.

LOUI: That's so awesome! SO that's like the recruiting interest corner. That's so cool. I love that you're getting them interested with Dr. Seuss and it's middle school! That's awesome. That's so good! So, I know you also have a visual guide that I think is there in the curriculum and they build on it, and then…

CHRISTINA: Yes!

LOUI: …you used UDL to think about that a little differently, so talk about that. [A student's visual model using pipe cleaner ends and buttons glued to paper to represent the Earth's surface shifting from magma to igneous rock.]

CHRISTINA: Yeah. So, every single unit has some type of visual model that the students have to complete. It's something that's mostly pre-done. The students draw in something or write something maybe add some arrows, but not very much most of it is already done that it's very straightforward. So, I wanted to figure out a way to make that something that had more options and people could do more in whatever method worked for them. But every time I was always going about it, it would seem like something that would take so much time and so much materials and where would you store it and this and that, and people do it at different paces. And I decided to use some advice from a

professional development day where plan with the students and asked them to come up with some of the choices, and so we did that. And the students came up with Google Slides and they were going to use fortnight or Minecraft to create some type of visual model. And then, with those ones I was just like, "Okay, show me how it works. I'm willing to try anything!" [A student's work using fuzz balls, googly eyes, and buttons along with crayons and markers to demonstrate the Earth's mantle and sedimentary rock.] But I also had another student that just really quickly in 15 minutes, created a multimedia art project where she used little fuzz balls and googly eyes and buttons, and she glued them in for the different layers of rocks on the paper. And she basically just drew the outline of the pre done model, [The work of three students using fuzz balls and specks of color in glue to show the Earth's mantle and the Earth's surface.] but she colored it in, she added a sample of sedimentary rock that was made up of different fuzz balls and she drew in the labels and everything. And then she went home that night and she made one for the igneous rock as well. Other students then, they found some chalk and they went outside and they drew some drawings of the model outside. [A student's model using chalk of the Earth's mantle and the surface with the rock types labeled.]
 I had a student that never speaks in class she never talks, and she saw the chalk, she got up she went outside, and she drew a beautiful model out there. I have another student that usually always just trying to draw and that's what we're trying to get her to engage in the activities in some way, and when she saw the chalk, it's funny because I'll offer her to draw stuff in class, but when she saw the chalk, she led her group out there and she started drawing a model and it was beautiful.

LOUI: They're sharing with you, their understanding and you can just see it right then and there, so that's that assessment piece you were talking about earlier, right?

CHRISTINA: Yeah, and that's one of the things is I changed the way I look about grading, and I'm spending a lot more time on just informal, formative assessments along the way. And I also realize it's not necessarily necessary for the students to finish the product for me to assess if they understand it. If they start a visual model and they can tell me where it's going to go, that's enough. Especially when it's a model that they're

going to be revising a few times so we're going to come back to it and add to it. I even have a group that's creating some type of expressive dance to represent the different cycles of the rock cycle. [A student's visual model using paint and markers of the Earth's mantle and also the Earth's surface made of sedimentary rock.]

LOUI: And this fact that you're doing the formative assessment along the way and even just having them stop their process as they're developing these models, and then helping them discern whether or not they're working toward and end product that will be something that would fit with what you're expecting, right? [It] would show what they really know or if they're heading the kind of the wrong direction in that well they got some misinformation, they got some things mixed up in their head, or what have you, but you're really bringing to life Carol Dweck's area of growth mindset because it's helping them learn that "not yet" type of philosophy. Yeah, so they're not stuck with, "Oh I don't have it right!" or "I want to be done!" And instead, they know that the expectation is, this is going to take a while, guys, we're going to be building on this and you're not done quite yet but you keep them going. That's wonderful. Have you watched your students respond to that differently than maybe they have in the past?

CHRISTINA: Oh, absolutely! And I have to say, I'm creating almost nothing officially. My official grades are literally like three or four things at the end of the unit. [A student placing a final cup at the top of a tower of clear, plastic cups.] I have been talking to them about this for the last quarter, since we made some of those changes, and they're all participating more than they used to. And they're not doing it for a grade. None of this is graded! None of these things that they have done are they grading. They know at the end that there's going to be a visual model that they have to create where they'll be graded on their understanding of the material as well as their ability to do a model. But what they're doing so far, they're doing because they're enjoying it and they're learning.

LOUI: Yeah! So you are also [laughter] It's just awesome! So with that growth mindset part, that sustaining effort and persistence, which you talk about right there in that

statement, not doing it for the grade, well, because they've internalize that even though with sustaining effort and persistence we're talking about, kind of, building that skill, but they've internalized this process so well that now they're, they're flipping into and you're helping them self-regulate and keeping themselves going with that self-assessment and that reflection. And, you're holding those expectations and beliefs of them to a level that okay they're going to move forward with this. [A students' visual model of sedimentary rock and igneous rock using markers]. So, I want to ask one more question because we're going to run out of time here shortly, but when you think about students who aren't successful within that traditional model of teacher delivery of information. You know that going down the middle. And we know that doesn't work and you've obviously shifted away from that. How have you watched those students' respond so maybe your students who have an English language is their second language or students with disabilities for students who have five fours.

CHRISTINA: I have seen a lot of students that are participating a lot more. Sometimes it's simply students that just don't think that they're good at science. They're afraid, or maybe it's a student that doesn't have the ability to do the homework at home, or whatever it is, and so they feel like once they're missing an assignment, they're like defeated. In this case, they're simply engaged and learning and they're trying to learn the skills, learn the information, and it's just a process of learning instead of that currency of trying to gain the points from doing this worksheet or that worksheet.

LOUI: Right. [Four students seated around a table working from a tablet and writing down answers] Oh, Christina this has been awesome! You have given so many great examples of, well, just from the end, the not doing it for the grade that's a huge statement right there…

CHRISTINA: It is!

LOUI:.. and then it backing it up into the fact that your students are now wanting to engage with the information because you're giving them supports from which they

choose. So whether it's the video supports or however they want to come into the reading, and then your talk, write, draw anything example, these are all wonderful ways that the students are coming into learning in that non-threatening way. You've really minimize those threats and distractions across this entire set of curriculum, so congratulations! [Christina Khatri holder her daughter]. And thank you so much for coming on as a guest!

CHRISTINA: Thank you so much for having me. I really enjoyed the talk.

LOUI: Absolutely! You're so welcome! [Podcast host Loui Lord Nelson, followed by Christina Khatri]
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