

Transcript of Jessie Sherman talks about UDL, arts integration, and project-based learning

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 Jessie Sherman who teaches in Baltimore Maryland at City Neighbors Charter School, a school that focuses on project-based learning and arts integration. She's going to share how she implements UDL in her second grade classroom. More specifically, Jessie's going to share how she used her knowledge of UDL to design a fully accessible project that integrated the Arts. Hi Jessie how are you?

JESSIE: I'm great! Thanks so much for having me.

LOUI: Oh, you're very welcome! Go ahead and share with us your teaching background.

JESSIE: Sure! So this is my fourth year teaching in Baltimore City. It's my third at City Neighbors Charter School. Before that I was assistant teaching in Washington DC while I was getting my master's at American University and I was working at an elementary school called Horace Mann Elementary. And all my experience has been centered around early childhood from 1st through 3rd grade, specific, and second grade is where I've been for the most amount of time as I said about four years and then third three years as the second grade teacher at City Neighbors. Something I just want, you know, let the listeners know about is a little bit about our school because I do think we're sort of unique. As you said, we're very arts integrated, we're project-based as well, and then we serve a very diverse population of students and so the diversity is definitely you know with race and also socio economics, but it's also an ability because we have a lot of students that have IEPs and so our special education students make up about 25% of the school. We don't have a high number of ESOL students. It's just we're still getting a lot of students from the neighborhood and our neighborhood just doesn't have that population of students. But, you know, my

specific class is about 24 students. We always try to make it half boy half girl, that's part of our charter, and then you know as I said, about a fourth of the class that I have in my classroom is special needs of some sort.

LOUI: And then there's one class per grade level right?

JESSIE: Yes. So our school, there's only one second grade I'm the only second grade teacher and that's all the way from kindergarten to eighth grade.

LOUI: Okay, then I also understand that you're relatively new to UDL, so share a bit about how you came to know about UDL.

JESSIE: Sure! So this is actually my, I guess, going on to second year but it's the beginning of the school year so I just say one year of experience [laughter] because it's definitely a lot to get into. So, I had, you know, our school is having, facing some challenges meeting the needs of some of these students that either had IEPs or just like weren't interested in the curriculum that we were giving them and so we sought out the help of Lisa Carey who works for Kennedy Krieger. And that is a place that, among other things, they specialize in special education needs. And she came in to consult with us just to help us plan and we went we met bi-weekly as a teacher cohort. And we read a book on Universal Design for Learning, but we also kind of talked in real-time about some problems we were facing and the students in our classroom that we're having you know self-regulation issues, issues just with how can they access this curriculum, if is this you know too much how can I scaffold. and how can I make it more accessible. And Lisa was really helpful in figuring out how can we plan with UDL in mind either for lessons or all-out unit plans or projects.

LOUI: Yeah, she's a fabulous advocate to have in your corner and informer! She's just got a lot going on! She's awesome!

JESSIE: Right, she's so great. I mean there were numerous times that we would talk the day you know one day and then the next day she'd have actual resources or actual things I could use with my students so it was really helpful. Yeah.

LOUI: I'm gonna let the listeners know that the Kennedy Krieger Institute website is wonderfully thick with information. It's one of my favorite places to visit, but I like to go to www.kennedykrieger.org, forward slash stories and you can also search for Universal Design for Learning when you click on the magnifying glass icon and you'll get a ton of information. So with that, let's dig into your UDL story because you have a specific project you wanted to share with us.

JESSIE: Yeah! I'm so excited to tell everybody about this project because it gets me excited about my school. Just the way that we plan, but it also gets me excited about UDL because it definitely changed my practice as a teacher. And so just to give a little background, when we do projects we always start with a question, and so a lot of times that question is brought out from student interest and in my case in my second-grade classroom in the beginning of the year we had, I had just recently acquired a baby bearded dragon through a grant. And so as you can imagine for second graders that was the biggest best thing that has ever happened, um. LOUI: What was the name, what's the name of the dragon?

JESSIE: Rocky Cutie Dragon

LOUI: Okay! Rocky Cutie! Awesome!

JESSIE: Rocky Cutie was quite the dragon and the students were obsessed, so we created this project that was called the reptile museum. And essentially the overarching goal of this project was for the students to become reptile experts. So they needed to know about habitat, they needed to know about how could this animal survive, and they, you know, I forgot to say our question, so the question was how do we care for our bearded dragon? And so within that, they're learning about the habitats, and types of animals, that, types of plants and food and water that the animals need. In addition to that, they were also required to have some sort of informational text alongside of their project and a product. Some sort of way to showcase their knowledge that wasn't just the writing piece. So, sort of where I talk to Lisa, and when we started to plan thinking about UDL, she was reminding me of giving the students choice in really any place that you can. That makes sense

and so when I had decided about the project this I decided to give the students choice in choosing a reptile. And as you can imagine, you know students, a lot of students wanted to choose bearded dragons because that was what was right in front of us. That was something that we could, you know, touch and see and sketch. And so we had a lot of students studying bearded dragons, but we also had students that were studying snakes because that was of interest to them. And we had students studying sea turtles because they liked the ocean, so we ended up having a wide array of reptiles in our reptile museum which was really nice to see because I don't think I would have thought if I had assigned animals I don't think I would have thought of the various types that they came up with. In addition to that, when we had the writing paper, Lisa was really helpful. Before, I only had a couple of types of writing paper for the students to use, but she talked to me a lot about how you know some students have trouble, you know, using a smaller line. So to provide different types of writing paper where the lines are larger, some have more places for illustrations, some have no places for illustrations, and sort of like just to make sure that that limitation wasn't there for some students if they, you know, so that they get, again, have the choice of what they want their project to look like and what they want the product to look like. And as I said before, you know, with our students and a lot of them having some sorts of you know special needs a lot of that was, you know, fine-motor, sometimes self-regulation, and sometimes executive functioning, so we tried to figure out how could we create products for these students that would still let them showcase their knowledge. And so one of those things was we had a drawing expert come in. And part of our school is, a part of the mission of our school is to have visiting artists, so we had a visiting artist come in to teach us drawing, but I realized that students with fine motor skills are really not able to showcase the most... all that they knew just using paper and pencil. And so we added in watercolor so that it went from a fine motor to a gross motor demand and they were able to show and draw and, you know, create this great product of the reptile using watercolor, which some for some students was really helpful. And even we went further to provide sculpture as an option so students could use clay. And so again, that fine motor demand goes away and it becomes gross motor. And a lot of students, you know, if you have clay that's something that's a big hit usually, and so, yeah, so students are choosing that but they were also choosing to do, you know, the regular

drawing as well. And the last thing in product that we gave as an option was paper cutting which sort of brings in the tactile and those kinesthetic learners where they really need to be hands-on. So they paper, what they were able to paper cut their reptile, and then I asked that they make sure that the reptile could move in some way. So whether that was pushing on the back and it sort of hopped if that was a way that their reptile moved or if it was a snake weaving its head, they saw how to figure out how can they manipulate the paper and cut it in a way that would make that work, which was really awesome to see because a lot of students created some pretty awesome paper cut reptiles.

LOUI: Well, and it sounds like, so when you're talking about choice, an important thing to point out with Universal Design for Learning, you, you had all of these different options and, and it sounds like many of them were definitely directed by when you were thinking about barriers, but then these options were made available to all the students, correct?

JESSIE: Right, everyone was allowed to have these at their fingertips, and to do more than one.

LOUI: So they could just, they really did have open choice. And was this one of the changes? Because you talked about earlier that it, this was, it changed your practice. Is this one of the changes that occurred?

JESSIE: Yes, because I would say that as a person I do like things to not fit in a box, but it's sort of you know, I like to let students know what's expected. I like for there to be parameters. And so it was easier for me to say, "This is what I need you to do. It should look exactly like this." And it, you know, it's sort of like, which is definitely what you have to do because when that happened, you know, one kid that I wasn't thinking about, as you said, like maybe I didn't know that they were just gonna be great at watercolor because I never gave them that chance to see. And so it's just interesting because you think about some of the kids that you're not reaching but then you end up reaching someone that you didn't think you were gonna reach. So it's really it was really interesting in that way and I definitely had to let go of some control, but it ended up I think the kids took ownership over what

they created because it was more coming from them instead of me forcing it into them. You know?

LOUI: Yeah,

yeah! And then one other question, so how did you help them know when they had completed. When they, okay, that you know they were working, like you said they were working on the paper project and they had to be able to move it, or you know, when they were working with the clay or the watercolors, how did they know they had reached a point of completion? That they knew, "Okay I'm ready to have this examined by the teacher. I'm ready to get some feedback, even if it's not the final feedback, but I'm ready to show somebody." JESSIE: Right so we had with the writing piece with watercolor, we had little rubrics. So we always have a sort of, you know, arts integrated rubric that we have to change because we all, you know, by project to project, but we always have to have something we're assessing in the arts and something we're assessing in the academics or content area. So, they had they knew that, you know, my paper cutting project had to have these three things and if it didn't have those three things they needed to go back and revise it. And then we also visited a museum to see other exhibits. So how other museums are laid out and we took pictures of those, and we put them alongside our exhibit to see if that was something that would really be in a museum.

LOUI: Fabulous!

JESSIE: Yeah.

LOUI: Well, we could keep talking for a long time, but we are bumping up against our 15 minutes and this always happens!

JESSIE: I know! [overtalking]

LOUI: But I know I'm gonna be coming back to you. So for those of you who are listening to podcast, you can find supplemental materials like an image montage with closed captioning in that montage audio description, and a transcript, and an associated blog at my website which is The UDL Approach dot com forward slash

media, but I want to say thank you so much, Jessie! This was awesome! You just did a fabulous job of painting this picture for us. I can tell you're kind of in an arts integration school because you're used to doing this! So thank you so much!

JESSIE: Yeah, no problem! Thank you so much for having me!

LOUI: Sure! And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 minutes, you can contact me through The UDL Approach dot com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.