

UDL in 15 Minutes with Brandy Major and Lauren Holcombe
Transcript

LOUI: Hi there, Loui Lord Nelson here, host of UDL in 15 Minutes to remind you of my newest podcast UDL Research in 15 Minutes where researchers share their findings about the implementation, the impact, and in-depth investigations of the UDL framework. The first episode will air on July 29, 2020 and I'm excited to announce that it is with David Rose, co-founder of CAST and the original UDL Rockstar. You'll be able to link to this extended interview it at my website, www.theudlapproach.com under podcasts, or through the YouTube Channel, UDL Research in 15 Minutes, or the podcast source of your choice. But for now, here's UDL in 15 Minutes.

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 Brandy Major and Lauren Holcombe of Redlands High School in Redlands California. Today, Brandy and Lauren are going to share how they wove UDL into a unit on research for Lauren's freshman. Hello to you both! How are you?

BRANDY: Doing great, thanks! Just taking it day by day in this crazy world.

LOUI: Yeah [laughter], this is true!

LAUREN: It's, it's nice today we have some nice cool weather in California, so it's a good day.

LOUI: AH, wonderful, wonderful! Well, it's great to talk to you both. Thank you. So, first off, will you each share your background in education?

BRANDY: Okay, I guess I'll go ahead and start. I taught English for eight years, and then I became a high school teacher librarian, and I've done that for seven years.

LOUI: Okay. And that's Brandy, right?

BRANDY: Yes.

LOUI: Okay, how long have you been at Redlands high school?

BRANDY: I have been at Redlands High School for seven years as a teacher librarian.

LOUI: And then Lauren, what about you?

LAUREN: I have taught English for nine years, and all of them have been at Redlands High School.

LOUI: So you guys both from that area or did you move in?

LAUREN: I actually grew up in Redlands. I went to the rival high school, Redlands East Valley, and then I ended up getting hired at RHS and I had to, I had to earn that for a while because I went to the rival High School.

LOUI: [laughter] Awesome. What about you, Brandy?

BRANDY: I am actually an outsider, but my first teaching job was at Redlands East Valley where Lauren was actually a student. I was never her teacher, but we were there at the same time.

LOUI: Nice, nice. So, what's a good description of Redlands High School? What's the student body like? Size? That kind of stuff?

BRANDY: Well, Redlands High School has a really long and distinctive history. It's filled with a lot of pride and tradition. It was founded in 1891 and is the oldest public high school in the state of California still functioning on its original site.

LOUI: Oh my gosh!

BRANDY: Right? It's amazing. But we're also a school of innovative thinkers and learners. We earned the California Distinguished School Award last year for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Collaboration. We have a diverse student body with about 2,400 students grades 9 through 12.

LOUI: Wow! Oh my gosh! So, then are you guys in the same district as other high schools? Like the Redlands East Valley is that in the same district? Are you the sole High School for your district?

LAUREN: We are in the same district. We have three high schools, well technically four high schools. We have three high schools and then the continuation school in Redlands.

LOUI: Okay, so it's a lot of students across the district.

LAUREN: A lot of students, yes.

LOUI: Yeah, so that's a big deal to be recognized then as that school of excellence within that huge district. That's awesome. Okay, so I understand that you both worked together design a unit to help Lauren's freshmen learn how to research, and that you used the UDL framework to help you design it and I'd love it if you guys would talk about that.

LAUREN: Yeah, so teaching the research process is one of the most difficult tasks I think as an English teacher. It just consists of so many things. It consists of finding good research, finding good facts, incorporating MLA format, and then also teaching them how to organize all of that and put it into writing. And so, Brandy and I were at a Google cohort training where we learned about hyper docs and I looked at her and I said "We

need to do this for the research paper.” And then Brandy is probably the best librarian out there. She just like took it and ran with it and she did so much on this hyper doc to help my students. It's amazing.

LOUI: Nice. So then, either one of you, but as you guys were talking about the Google cohort training in this hyper doc idea, when did UDL come into your conversation? Was it an immediate, “Oh wow, this really aligns and we can use the framework with what we're doing!” How did that come about?

BRANDY: I think that hyper doc just naturally lent itself to UDL which worked very well with Lauren's students because they're very diverse. Did you want to speak about your students a little bit Lauren?

LAUREN: Yes, so I have about 35 students in a class. And it's a huge mix of students. I have English language learners; I usually have at least four to five. I have several students on IEP s and 504s who have different learning needs, and then I also have students who maybe should have taken honors but chose to take regular English who need that challenge a little bit, and so I was looking for a way when there's two of us, two adults and 35 students who are all going to move at a different pace to make that work a little bit better while we're in the library doing our research and so each of those students could kind of work at their own pace but still be successful.

LOUI: Nice. So talk about how you guys set that hyper doc up to do exactly what you just said, to help them know what direction they needed to go but give them that flexibility to pace as they needed to.

BRANDY: From the very beginning since the hyper doc is set up like a game board, they can move from square to square. And from that very first square, we went ahead and put in the topics, and what I did was I looked for resources that would help them with those topics. So, the first thing that I found was we have something called Discovery Education, and it has really short videos and clips. And so, Lauren's selected different topics on civil rights for the students to research, and I went ahead and included those little video links which they could click on, and they could watch them. They're super short, they can rewind them if they needed to they have closed captioning. So immediately, they're in, they're invested, if they need to rewind, they can go back on their own. If they're ready to jump ahead they can move on to the next one again giving them that flexibility.

LAUREN: And it was nice with those videos they could then choose a topic that they would be interested in instead of me just assigning them a topic. And then we also threw in a fifth option if they had received a B or higher on their last essay they were allowed to pick a topic of their own, as long as they got it approved by me, and it fit into the civil rights era that we were focusing on.

LOUI: Did you find that you had a higher level of student engagement with the process? Do you feel like you got better products? What were the outcomes of this?

LAUREN: The outcome was definitely better than I'm used to. We did the hyper doc, this is the second year we've done it. And just the change from the years before the hyper doc to the first year to the hyper doc, to what we made a few changes to the second year of the hyper doc has progressively gotten so much better, not just for us but for the students because they have so many resources they could work on at home. If they were lost if they were absent, they had all the tools they needed to catch up. If they had to wait on us to help them.

LOUI: Nice. Now, I love the fact that it's using this idea of the hyper doc, and that there are pieces and parts to it but then we also know that that's just something, a structure within the learning environment. So, like you were just talking about, essentially 'sustaining effort and persistence,' that students knew that they could keep themselves working even if they had a question, they could loop back to it but they would still move forward. So, even though the materials are there and that hyper doc is a great tool and strategy, what other things do you feel like you've done in your learning environment that are supporting your students in something like 'sustaining effort and persistence,' and that 'self-regulation' piece where they are setting their own goals and moving toward things.

BRANDY: I think one of the resources that we chose for them, again, we started with the DiscoveryEd. And in addition to that, I used our California State K through 12 online content databases, and they're super accurate and reliable resources that provide a massive amount of digital information, including newspaper articles, scholarly journals, magazines, books, so it's giving students, all of this information, which oftentimes when they do research is very overwhelming because they can't tell the difference yet between what's quality and what's not. So, allowing them to see quality sources and understanding what they look like was very helpful to them. And in addition to that, when they actually clicked, like one of the resources was Britannica. When they get to Britannica, they can actually self-select their reading level, and break it up and no one else has to know. So again, we're talking about them being able to change that on their own. And again, it just gives them that sense of being able to accomplish something at their own pace and at their own level. Physically at the time that Lauren was with us in the library, our library was set up so that they were sitting so they couldn't move, but now we're changing that. We're setting things up differently where students will be able to move to be more comfortable. To be in an atmosphere where they feel they can be most productive and make those positive choices for doing that. In addition to that, we also have the ProQuest library database in which students when they're looking at the articles, and some of them are scholarly journals and they can often be difficult for students, they have an option to click "Listen", and they can listen the long as they are reading, and again for us to set up the library in a way where they can actually be comfortable listening to that. So maybe not a traditional desk and chair as we normally do. We're trying to switch that up for them and give them the space to make those choices where they can learn in the best environment possible.

LOUI: What I adore that I'm hearing is that you guys not only are using and thinking

about the UDL framework in your design for your learners, that it's also becoming a point of reflection for you, and you're opening up opportunities to the students because now you're starting to feel more comfortable. You guys are, it's like you're all growing together. So, from this outside perspective it's really beautiful to see and hear about. Do you sense that? Have you felt that yourselves? Have you reflected on that?

LAUREN: I definitely think it's been really encouraging. I, you know, when we sat in this Google cohort training just the ability to have a tool that was going to be able to make the research process easier for my students and for the two of us in the library trying to help 35 students at once, we were really excited about it. And it's nice to work together because we get extra excited about new things we find that we can add to this to make it easier. It's just really nice to see students more confident in the library.

LOUI: Yeah. I think the other part of this that just was flowing into my brain that goes back to what I was just saying is that we know that tools that lend themselves to the framework, that allow for the flexibility, allow for the choice, allow for access, and help build rigor, and help the students reach the goal, that those are fabulous things to have, but a tool in-and-of itself does not replace the environment that's created by the lead instructors. So you guys had to create this environment and I'm hearing you talk about how you've expanded it not only with, with the seating and being able to sit where they're most comfortable, but then it also sounds like you're doing a lot of active promotion of these choices to the students, because if they aren't used to the fact that they can listen to an article, that maybe they wouldn't choose it because they would think, "Oh, that's the easy way out." So, did you have additional conversations with students did you need to encourage them to use these pieces of choice?

BRANDY:

Definitely. And one of the great things, too, about working with Lauren is she's not afraid to try new things. She's not afraid to go there. And that is definitely a model for her students saying "It's okay, we're going to try things we may fail, but we can try again." And it's such a great role model for them so when they see us, we might be a little nervous at the beginning trying something new and saying "Hey, we're gonna move around for this", but letting them see that that's okay. Letting them know that it's not the easy way out to listen to the article. It's adapting to you so you can be the best that you can possibly be. And all of us have these unique qualities, and all of us have different ways in which we can best share our voice, and to be able to promote that and model that is something that I really see in Lauren and her teaching, and that's what makes it so great to collaborate with her and her students, showing them that their voice is just as important. We are all teachers and students together in this.

LOUI: Oh, that's awesome. [overtalking]

LAUREN: You're so sweet, Brandy.

LOUI: [laughter] Well it's clear you guys have an incredibly wonderful, collaborative relationship, and I'm so appreciative that you were willing to take some time on a

beautiful day in California to talk with me for the UDL in 15 minutes. Thank you so, so much, and I know people are going to be really interested to see the related resources that will be in the YouTube photo montage along with this podcast so thank you so, so much!

BRANDY: Thank you.

LAUREN: Yeah. Thank you.

LOUI: You're welcome! So for those 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 and my website www.theUDLapproach.com/media. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 minutes, 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.