UDL in 15 Minutes Transcript
Susanne Geise

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 Susanne Geise, who's a high school English teacher at Lehman Catholic High School in Sydney, Ohio. Today, Susanne is going to share how students input helped her design a cool project-based lesson called Shark Tank. Hi Susanne How are you, good how are you. I'm great. Thank you very much. It's a little warm over here in Indiana but otherwise it's pretty good. Can you share a bit about Lehman Catholic High School?

SUSANNE: Sure, yes. It's very warm in Ohio, too. So, Lehman Catholic High Schools is a private school that serves students from several cities and the surrounding communities, so students drive, you know, some of them quite a bit, to come to school here. And we are the northern most Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Most of the other Catholic schools are in the Dayton area. And we're fairly small compared to most public schools. I would say, we have around 40 to 50 students per grade level.

LOUI: Is it an inclusive school?

SUSANNE: Yes, absolutely. We have an intervention specialist. She and I worked very closely together this year and we do our best to meet the needs of all of our students.

LOUI: Perfect. And then, go ahead and tell us about your background.

SUSANNE: Okay, sure. So, my family moved to America when I was five years old and I started kindergarten not speaking any English at all. And that's just a powerful part of my educational background because it showed me from a really early age how significant teachers are and what an impact they can have on their students. And so, once I was in high school, I knew that I wanted to teach that age level, and I loved the gift of language and reading and writing and so I decided to pursue undergrad at the Cedarville, University. And that was, you know, a huge blessing to be able to attend there. And then I started teaching at Kenton High School. Well, I had one year in Dayton at a private school and then I started teaching at Kenton High School, which is a larger city school. And while I was there, I had the opportunity to get my master's degree in rhetoric and writing which really helped me learn a lot more about being an effective teacher of rhetoric and writing. I taught there for six years, and then got married and moved and needed a job closer to home and so I taught a year here at Lehman Catholic High School. And this spring when the whole COVID shutdown happened, I was on State Support Team Six's website and they have book studies, and one of those was Engage the Brain by Allison Posey. And so that was really probably my first formal introduction to UDL. And I worked a lot with Sherry Smith who had been my co teacher at Kenton, so that was a really cool connection as well. And then next year, I'll be teaching freshmen at Wapakoneta High School, and I'll be working with a co-teacher

again and so I think the UDL principles will be extremely helpful in the co-teaching environment as well.

LOUI: Oh, absolutely. Oh, that's fantastic. You have a very rich background!

SUSANNE: Yes, absolutely.

LOUI: So, you said you've been with high school all the way through, then. Have you taught freshmen through seniors or just freshmen and sophomores?

SUSANNE: My first year was at East Dayton Christian High School. I was the high school English teacher and so I taught grades 9,10, 11 and 12. I taught German one, two, and three. And I also taught speech and writing, and comp, and drama, and foods so they got a lot of classes out of me at East Dayton Christian School.

LOUI: [laughter] Wow! You like, have a sign above you, "Will come. Will teach!"

SUSANNE: [laughter] Yeah, absolutely.

LOUI: That's awesome. So, I understand that you're gonna talk about a pre COVID project that your sophomores actually helped design, and that focused on what, the ethos, pathos, and logos and can you share that with us?

SUSANNE: Yeah, absolutely. So I have the most experience teaching freshmen and so I have a well-designed unit that I use with my freshmen to introduce them to ethos, pathos, and logos and I didn't want to just repeat what I was doing with the freshmen with the sophomores, and so I really wanted to include them with the whole design of that unit. And so I asked them if they had any prior background experience and they did not. And they were really curious to learn more. And so, you know, I introduced them to the concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos, the rhetorical triangle. We talked about advertising techniques. We also talked about the importance of speaker, audience, message, context, and purpose. And from there, the students asked if they could do more hands-on project. Their English teacher here last year was really creative and did a lot of hands on work with them as freshmen and I think they were kind of missing that component a little bit. And so I had a couple students who finished an assignment earlier and so I said alright let's brainstorm together. And from that, the Shark Tank project was born. It was a television show that I love watching and most of them were familiar with it, too, so there was that relevancy to them. And we worked on the guidelines together which I have those pulled up and can share those a little bit later, but basically the students worked in small groups to design creative solutions for common problems and needs, and COVID-19 was definitely on their mind already. It was already in the news quite a bit. And some of my students even created companies and products designed to help stop the spread of COVID-19, you know, like a vaccination company or pharmaceutical company. They went to a doctor's office and shot a video there that was, you know, very well done and so you can tell that that was on their mind but you know they also typical high school students they were thinking

about athletics and how hard it is to get up in the morning. And so they were very creative and practical with their product designs. One group made of mascara remover because wipes don't work very well, and other group made an alarm clock system that uses aroma therapy. So, it was just really rewarding to see how creative all the students and groups were in terms of actual requirements…, so, they had to collaborate with one to two partners, but I did end up having larger groups of about four students, and they had to design a creative product or business to help solve realistic problems and set a price. I know on Shark Tank that's always a really important component of how much does your product cost to produce, and how much do you sell, and what's your profit margins, and so there's definitely a mathematical component. There's a lot of opportunities for cross curricular collaboration with this project as well. And then they had to use appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos to persuade the audience to support the product or company. I also wanted them to use two advertising techniques; could be bribery like a coupon or patriotism, things of that nature, just to really get into the mindset of a marketing specialist. And then they had to create a visual representation of the project and this is where the most variability occurred. Students made videos, presentation slides, posters. Some of them even 3D printed prototypes of their product and, again, lots of cross curricular collaboration. They would go upstairs to the STEM lab and use those printers and that was really exciting, too. And I was so happy every single group got to present their sales pitch and interact with the class, and the students in the class were able to be the Sharks and kind of give that critical feedback. And we finished this right before schools shut down in March, and so I know in asking students what their favorite part of the third quarter was a lot of them said they loved the Shark Tank project. And I think because there was so much flexibility, and also because it was such a creative project and it really the ideas came from them and it was truly a collaborative effort with my students.

LOUI: So, a couple of things came to mind. First of all, I'm like, oh my gosh I wish I could have been there in the middle of all that because it sounded so cool! But I was thinking about the support of their executive functions because this was a big project. Yeah, setting those goals and being able to move themselves through that, but just the amount of information. And then the other thing I was thinking about was comprehension because it was on both ends. So first, they had to really think deeply about their product that they were creating and get that background information. But then on the other side, I'm interested in the kind of supports you gave them so they could be effective Sharks. So,

SUSANNE: [overtalking] yeah

LOUI: …I guess talk about executive functioning, and then also how could they be effective Sharks?

SUSANNE: Absolutely. Those are both really great points. I have some of the books that I've done have dealt a lot with executive functioning so I'm glad I did those book studies so that I know what you're talking about with that! So, in working with a couple of students who had their work finished early I created an assignment sheet, then it listed

out their goals and their steps. And some of the steps said deliver creative, engaging sales pitch that is three to five minutes long, perhaps include a product demonstration. Be prepared to answer questions about your product and business and provide feedback to your peers' presentations, using a scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. And I ended up modifying that scale a little bit because it was kind of going to be too complicated to do that for every single presentation. And then I also created a rubric. So every student had access to this handout here that kind of guided them step by step through the project, but I'll admit, this was my first time doing this project with students. So I was very flexible on the time side of things, and I just communicated with them. You know, I made sure on the rubric it says, work together well and use your time wisely. And as long as they were using class time wisely and working together well, I was happy to give them, you know, a couple days. I know we met in the computer lab a few days, we met in the regular classroom a few days, students worked on the project over the weekend as well you know the ones that shot videos on their own time with their own resources. So I really wanted to give each group enough time so that, and access to resources so they could be successful with this so I would say they worked at, at least a week between designing and creating and presenting it, you know this might have been a one to two week project from project initiation to completion. And then I think what really helped the students present feedback was their familiarity with the TV show. They, some of my students were especially aggressive in the feedback they provided in terms of how much does this cost and how are you making it, and how practical is this? And then I also guided the class and saying now you know how did this group use ethos did this project appeal to your sense of ethics or did they use pathos? Did you have an emotional connection to their story or to this project? One group did a babysitting slash driving service was like Uber for kids, and that group especially was, you know, the class could relate to their parents having to drive them from point A to point B and what if the parents are busy at work and can't quite get home on time and, but how safe would it be, you know, would you really trust your children to this Uber type driver? And I remember just a discussion around that product was very lively. And in terms of ranking, you know, how effectively did this group use logical appeals to sell their product or how effectively did this group, use the advertising techniques? So I think in the end I was the one who filled out the rubric and kind of rate at that in terms of grade and points, but the whole class was able to provide verbal feedback as well.

LOUI: Nice. So, I have two other little questions because we're getting close to the end, but you use the phrase use your time wisely. How...did they already come into this project with that being defined in your class and how do you guys define it? If you did, and then also I'm curious to hear whether or not you showed examples of Shark Tank for students who maybe hadn't seen it before.

SUSANNE: So at our school, any video we show has to have prior approval by the administration, so I did not show Shark Tank videos in class, but you know, students were familiar with the show and could have looked up videos on their own time if they wanted to watch additional video examples. And then, in terms of using time wisely: so you know at this point were three fourths of the way through the school year and I know my students and I know that they enjoy working together they enjoy having some

flexibility in how they use their class time. And so, you know, will you have some groups that maybe goof off a little bit here and there, but you know that's why the teacher is there. That's why I can come alongside them and listen to what they're saying and try to understand is this a conversation that needs to happen and then how can I guide them back to the task at hand.

LOUI: Nice. Yeah, so using that physical and verbal presence to help guide them but just being there and they know that you're going to be among them, it does help. A lot.

SUSANNE: [overtalking] Absolutely. Yes,

LOUI: [laughing] Keep them on track. Absolutely! So it sounds like you are gonna want to do this again next year, so what's one or two things that you think you're going to update when you do this again?

SUSANNE: Oh, that's a great question. I did this with sophomores and next year I will be teaching freshmen. So I really have to know my students first to see if this is a project that they could handle if they have the maturity and the resources, you know a lot will depend on if we're working from home or from school or, you know, blended learning or what the situation is there. But what I learned from this project is that students really like hands on work and it's important that we as teachers, continue to take risks and continue to design new projects with our students in mind. You know, we can't just pull things out of the filing cabinet and do them over and over again. We can continually tweak and improve. And so, if my students next year are those hands on learners who, you know, want those creative opportunities and if Shark Tank is relevant to them as well then this is a project that I might do with them again and I might come up with something new for the students I have next year. So those are my thoughts at the moment.

LOUI: Perfect. Oh, well thank you so much Susanne. This was a great story to share I know that people are going to be maybe inspired to do their own little Shark Tank activity/class that's great. Thank you so much.

SUSANNE: Yes, and thank you so much for the opportunity to share my story and share a little bit about this project and really it's all kudos to the students because they were the ones who wanted this project and advocated for it.

LOUI: Oh fabulous, fabulous. Well, for those 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 www.theUDLapproach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL, and making it our goal to develop expert learners.