

UDL in 15 Minutes Transcript

Carla-Ann Brown

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 Carla-Ann Brown, a sixth grade World Cultures teacher at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School at the University of Florida. Today, Carla-Ann is going to share how she uses backward planning and UDL to design units that are inclusive as well as culturally sustaining. Hi Carla-Ann! How are you?

CARLA-ANN: I'm doing great! How are you?

LOUI: I'm fabulous Thank you so much. So, can you share a bit about P.K. Yonge?

CARLA-ANN: So, P.K. Yonge is a Developmental Research School that's associated with the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida, and it is a public, public research school so the student population of P. K. Yonge is required by law to match the economic and racial demographics of the state of Florida. So, it's really interesting how our student population is diverse because it's intentionally diverse because we have to match the demographics of the state of Florida. So, when the demographics of the state of Florida change, our student demographics change as well. And based on the status of a research school of choice with an application process tied to a lot of a lottery system and legislative requirements, our students come from over 30 surrounding cities and towns in Florida. And so, it's really interesting that we're not a neighborhood school and our students are coming from all over the county.

LOUI: That is amazing. So, do you guys do buses? Do parents drive? Is it a mix?

CARLA-ANN: We do not have a bus system, so our parents, when they're applying to their students, they're applying with the knowledge that they are required to provide transportation to their students to and from school.

LOUI: Okay. So, it's a lottery system. How do parents get to know about P.K. Yonge to even put their child's name into the lottery?

CARLA-ANN: I'm not a parent, but I've heard that it is broadcasted. So we have, like, open houses at in the summertime for Kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade. Those are the three grades where we accept students. So, if a student leaves during the school year, or in one of those other sub years, then they will fill that spot but our three major years are Kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade year where we accept the most number of students. And so, it's publicized in the county as well as throughout the state because of our attachment to the University of Florida.

LOUI: Okay. That's really interesting. So, go ahead and tell us about your teaching background.

CARLA-ANN: So, I graduated, I'm a south Florida, to girl so I came to Gainesville in 2008, and I graduated from the University of Florida College of Education Pro-Teach Program which was a five-year program where I graduated with my master's. I taught at Terwilliger Elementary, that was my first place of employment which was a Title I school where the majority of the students were students of color from predominantly low-income neighborhoods. And I taught at Terwilliger for three years. And then, in 2016 I wanted to change a pace, so I applied for a position at P. K. Yonge and I got accepted to teach sixth grade World Cultures and I've been in that position, this is my fourth year as the World Cultures teacher for sixth graders.

LOUI: Wow, that's awesome! That's awesome! Well, you and I had been talking about backwards planning, and it's a really popular strategy for lesson and unit planning with UDL, but I love that you're going to offer your specific example. So take us through that and how you got started and the first steps you take.

CARLA-ANN: Okay, so for my class, there is not a set curriculum that I follow. So

fortunately, all of the teachers at P. K. Yonge, we have a lot of autonomy to create the classes and the curriculum how we want as long as they meet the standards for that grade for the state of Florida. So for me, I was able and I had the privilege of creating the units that I wanted to teach. And so, for each unit I start by thinking about the essential question, the objectives and the goals for the unit as a whole. So, what I want the students to be able to accomplish or demonstrate by the end of the unit. And then my next step is thinking about how much time I'm going to spend on that unit. So, in a regular school year, pre COVID, most of my units lasted about two to three months and I had about five units for the entire school year. But now with COVID and our curriculum changing, so now I have a semester to teach half of the sixth graders and then spring semester I teach the other half my units crunched a little bit. So I had to spend a lot of time rethinking how much time I wanted to spend on each unit. And then after I map the time out, I then think about the individual lessons and investigation that the students are going to be engaged in. And then the last thing, I craft each lesson thinking about the goals of that lesson, what the students are going to get engaged in, and how I can make sure to provide access at all various stages of learning in that lesson. So, thinking about the three parts of UDL, so with Engagement, I think about how do I want to recruit the interest and sustain the interest of my students while making sure to provide information from diverse perspectives through Representation. And then with Action and Expression, I try to ensure that student voice is present, especially in a history class, and I try to offer as many diverse modes of assessment, and understanding, whether it's completing a project, writing a short response or an essay, creating some kind of visual or creative presentation to share their understanding, etc.

LOUI: So how did you blend these? Did you learn about backward planning first? Did you learn about UDL first? How did you come about merging these two things?

CARLA-ANN: So I learned about backwards planning first. I think that's always been the way that I've created my units. Because of my type A personality I try to see and map out the big picture and then go smaller picture. And then I started, once I started at P. K., I started research and diving into my passion of culturally sustaining pedagogy. And

in one of my classes I had the opportunity to work with a co-teacher of mine, Blake Beckett, and her interest and passion was UDL. And so, as we were looking over our assignments because we were peer editing buddies, we started seeing so many similarities and so many ties between UDL and CSP, and we started understanding the fact that you can't really achieve one without the other. And so, I think through my papers, through my research, I was able to work on my craft of ensuring that my classroom was as equitable as possible, as well as accessible for all students.

LOUI: Nice. And I totally agree with you when one needs the other thing. Culturally sustaining pedagogy and, and Universal Design for Learning, they both pair so beautifully.

CARLA-ANN: Absolutely.

LOUI: Yeah, so I want to chat about that just a little bit more. So you were talking about how you use the principle of Representation to bring in the other the examples and obviously the Representations of, but I'm assuming you also think about those things, even within Engagement because I'm thinking about how different individuals, different cultures, when we think about self-regulation, it's, it's different for different families for different cultures, and how do you tap into that? How do you bring that into your classroom?

CARLA-ANN: So, oftentimes I found with history, it's almost always provided from the perspective of the dominant group member whether it's gender, whether it's race, religion, etc. So with my curriculum, I tried really hard to frame learning by offering resources to the students that valued the perspectives of individuals who are more often silenced or forgotten in history. And through that I found that it takes a lot more time finding resources from these perspectives compared to the dominant perspectives in society, especially with history curriculum. So in order to achieve what I wanted to achieve and find the resources that I wanted, I had to rely on articles, video, and audio clips and other resources like pictures, newspapers, and I was even able to incorporate

some of the background and experience of my families. So for example, we had a project where, as the culminating project, it was a unit on immigrants and the immigrant experience. I had the students interview immigrants. And so I had to find about 50 immigrants because I wanted my kids in as small a group as possible, 50 immigrants in our area that would be willing to share their story with my students. And so, I opened it up to P. K. faculty I opened it up to UF faculty, and I opened it up to the parents. So I sent out these letters where I explained the project and I asked for volunteers who were immigrants to the United States who would be willing to come in during school hours, because I wanted the kids to record their experience and share why they moved, what their experience was like, etc. And I felt that with that project, because I got a lot of parent volunteers, I think more than half of the people who were interviewed were parents or families, members of family or friends of the family. And I found that that created a stronger tie between what was happening in my class and the families of the students who were in my class.

LOUI: Nice. Yeah, so then there was a natural draw and connection there so you didn't have to maybe push so hard for those things. Yeah, yeah. I think that's a tough thing for teachers who are just getting started with UDL they look at some of these things and they feel like they have to, like the word I used, they have to push it they, they have to figure things out instead of turning to these natural supports like you did, which is to the natural support links directly to what the students know and is a part of who they are and their experiences, that's wonderful. It's beautiful. It's perfect.

CARLA-ANN: Or they look at UDL and some of like the examples and the framework and become so overwhelmed because they think that they have to accomplish all of it at one time...

LOUI: Right!

CARLA-ANN: ...instead of looking in pieces and looking at, okay, how can I gauge the interest of my kids? Let me start with this one lesson or let me start with this one unit. Instead of looking at all of their lessons and all of their units and I think that's what overwhelms a lot of people is they want to start too big instead of starting super small.

LOUI: Yeah, I agree, I agree, I always say, you know, choose a checkpoint for goodness sakes, I mean just start really, really small and you'll be okay. So, I just have one last question because that's probably all we'll have time for. When it comes to getting your students within our COVID environments connected in and digging in as deeply as you have in the past when it was face to face, how have you shifted within the online or the distance learning setting and using UDL to help your students dig in just as far as you did when you were face to face?

CARLA-ANN: I felt like that is like one of the biggest challenges with teachers right now is trying to be as engaging as possible. So I found that I'm relying less on heavy reading. Because when we're in person, then we would read it together, dive in together. But now I'm relying more on audio clips or video clips, and so they might watch that on their own and during their independent time on the days that we're not Zooming and then on the days that we do Zoom, that's when we dive in and we engage together and I put them in groups so that they can talk, research, write notes, etc. So it's almost like the flip of what I was doing before. So like our Zoom time is spent diving into what they might have already gotten a taste of during their independent time.

LOUI: Yeah, that's what I love is that you recognize that the richness in learning is still there within those audio clips and those video clips. It's what you've cultivated. You know the content, you know they're getting that and they can bring in that information and sew it together with what they're comprehending through the text. And I just...that's beautiful. It's wonderful. Well, I really appreciate your time thank you so much Carla-Ann this has been a fabulous conversation.

CARLA-ANN: Thank you. I've had a lot of fun sharing my experience, and I hope someone else can take from what I've learned and what I'm trying to do, or accomplish in my class.

LOUI: Oh, thank you, and I'm positive they will. 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 at my website, which is [www dot the www.theUDLapproach.com/media](http://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.