

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Callie Mulcahy

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 Callie Mulcahy who's an Art and Design teacher at North High School in Worcester, Massachusetts. Today, Callie is going to share how she has intentionally used the UDL framework to provide her learners with the space to plan out their art and design projects. Hi, Callie, how are you?

CALLIE: Hi, Loui. I'm doing really well today. How are you?

LOUI: Oh, I'm good. It's finally sunny here, so I'm very happy.

CALLIE: I know. It's sunny here today too, which is great!

LOUI: Yeah, it makes a difference. It really does!

CALLIE: Finally, it's spring!

LOUI: Yes! So, can you share a bit about North High School?

CALLIE: Yeah so, North High School is one of five public high schools in Worcester, Mass. It has about, 1200 students. Usually, I have about 250 students a year, you know, throughout the year with all my classes, and I, I love working at North. You know, it's a great community. All the staff are really positive. And I love, I love the students I work with.

LOUI: So, tell us about your teaching background.

CALLIE: So, this is my third year of teaching, which is kind of crazy to think about, just because it's gone by so fast. So, I've only taught at North High School. And I kind of think of the beginning, the real beginning of my teaching experiences, when I went to RISDE, the Rhode Island School of Design, for my masters and I did some research about creating an art classroom that is inclusive to all students and thinks about you know the variability within learners, and after I got my master's, I started my first job at North High, and I've been here ever since.

LOUI: Nice. Okay so, every educator has to plan and teach using standards, and I bet there are a lot of educators out there that don't know about the art and design standards so can you share those and talk about how you've been using the UDL framework to meet those standards.

CALLIE: Yeah, so I think a common misconception and that is that art is all about creating, right? So, in art class, students are always creating art. And creating art is a really big part of it for sure, but as far as our Massachusetts framework, there is a creating, responding, presenting, and connecting standard, our anchor standard I should say and, you know, within those standards, or within those anchors, there's different standards that we have to reach. And so, with those, you know, I really think about how can students connect to art? How can students look at art and respond? And also, how can students, you know, present their work and revise it? So, it's definitely a process that we go through with each project. As far as the UDL standards, so I think this year is one of the first years that I've been really intentionally thinking about how to use UDL in combination with the Massachusetts frameworks. And this year, I feel like I'm really focusing on the action and expression. So, the "how" of UDL. And especially the varying the methods for response and navigation for students and supporting their planning and strategy development.

LOUI: Yeah. And then I understand that your district has just shifted to hybrid, so you've been teaching online for over a year. How did you use UDL to help you in that context?

CALLIE: Yeah so, since, you know, being remote at the beginning of the year, a lot of people would ask, you know, “How do you teach art. How do you teach art online?” And so, for me, you know, I knew a lot of my students didn't have the same access to supplies as they would if they were in my classroom. I didn't have the same access to supplies to teach them. So, I felt UDL really helped me because I could think about how to be, how to allow my students to be flexible in the ways that they were showing their knowledge to me, and meeting the standards. So, one big thing that I shifted in my practice this year was really having students focus on planning out their artworks and also giving them more options on how to do that. So before, in my first couple years, and this is kind of how I was taught growing up, in kind of, I think, the more traditional way of planning is, you know if you're going to make an artwork make a sketch, right? But in reality, you know, if I sat and thought about it, I'm like, “Okay, what is the goal that I have for my students. For them planning.” And I realized it was more that, you know, I want them to show artistic intent. I want them to show evidence that, you know, they're thinking about their artwork before making it. And so, I realized I'm like, I think they could do that, you know, without only doing a sketch. So, what I've done is I've expanded the options for them so when they're planning a project, they, they can still do a sketch if they want because that's definitely, you know, a very widely used way of planning for artists but they can also write out their idea, they can record their idea, do like a voice recording, or they can collect resource images that they find online or images they take themselves. And that also is great because then it leads to a conversation about plagiarism and you know, like, what you can use from resource images. And I think it's great because finally, you know, I've been doing this with one class since the new year. I'm seeing their, their planning, you know their plans when they submit them to me, be really a lot more robust and a lot more detailed, and some of them even are doing all three options to show me their planning which is great, too.

LOUI: That's awesome. I'm thinking about the fact that these are high school students, and they need to be at that level of planning and taking the time to think through things, and understanding how to use their time better within a larger project, so have you seen any kind of shifts there with any of the students?

CALLIE: Yeah, I think, for sure. So, I mean, when I first started teaching, you know, I kind of relied on what I was, what I was taught, right? And what I was used to and I think growing up a lot of times we were given projects that were very like step by step and everyone kind of made, essentially the same project. Obviously, each had its own flair depending on the person, but they all look the same in the end. So, with UDL and this new, you know, planning approach I have, I think I'm getting a lot more variety in what students are creating as well as, you know, having them plan it out I think the craftsmanship of their work is, is stronger just because they're thinking more intentionally about what they're creating before. And, I also, a big thing, I use a big resource I use is a kind of flowchart, it's called the Artistic Thinking Process. It was created by Melissa Purte. And so, it kind of goes through steps of having students find inspiration, then develop their work, which is the planning stage, and then creating their work, and then presenting and reflecting. And so, you know, I've even been thinking about, okay, how can I teach students how to find inspiration for their work, right? How do artists even come up with an idea, and then take the next step to plan?

LOUI: Yeah. The other thing I'm wondering about is, as, as, hopefully we all transition back into, you know, four walls, and classrooms again [laughter], I know that the art rooms that I grew up in and that I have visited always look so inviting, But then I've also learned over time that as you were describing, an art lesson can be pretty locked down, and with UDL it's helped you, you know, bring in that flexibility. Do you think that you're going to change the way you operate in that environment and how you have your students operate in your environment? Will that change when you get back into the four walls?

CALLIE: Yeah, for sure. Um, you know, even though this year has been really difficult, difficult for everyone in different ways, you know, I think it's taught me a lot and it's helped me become a better teacher. And even now that, so right now we are back to hybrid so I do have some students in my room. Um, and yeah, I think, the way you know I think about how students, you know, interact in the art room or even, you know, how they engage in projects is gonna be a lot different. Before we went remote, you know,

something, a project I was starting on in my class was having all the supplies kind of set up throughout the room for students to be able to grab themselves. You know, I've always kind of wanted to create an art room where students felt they could find the resources they need, you know, to, to do the projects they wanted to do, and me kind of be the guide and so, you know, I, it's gonna be interesting thinking about, you know, safety and whatnot. And, you know, combining that with my original ideas, but yeah, I think, you know, things will definitely change from how I was doing certain lessons before. And, you know, I think every year I kind of just learn new things and grow and, you know, apply that to my practice.

LOUI: Yeah, you were tapping into one thing I was thinking about in sustaining effort and persistence because you mentioned collaboration. And that, so possibly you'll maybe have the students collaborating differently or more often or something like that. Is that what you're thinking?

CALLIE: Yeah, one thing I've like shied away from in the past is have students do like group art projects so you know like two students like collaborate on one project. And that that is something that's always in the back of my head that I want to give as another option for students and also show them real life examples of, you know artists that do collaborate because that's definitely something that happens. So yeah, I think, you know, and I think that works really well for students, you know, for some students. And, so giving that option I think would also be an awesome idea.

LOUI: Yeah, I absolutely agree. I really appreciate having this conversation with you and I think that you have done an excellent job of (a) stepping into teaching, three years and you've spent the last year of it [laughter]

CALLIE: Yup!

LOUI: the COVID situation. So, oh my gosh, thank you. And it's been great to hear your personal growth in your adding in of Universal Design for Learning. And thank you for

articulating the standards so that more people can understand what goes on in the art room and there are drivers, right?

CALLIE: Yes! Exactly! Yes.

LOUI: Well, thank you so much for being a part of the podcast today, Callie.

CALLIE: You're welcome. Thank you for having me on. This has been a great experience.

LOUI: Oh, you're very 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 at my website, www.theUDLapproach.com/podcasts. 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.