

UDL in 15 Minutes
With Timmary Leary
Transcript

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 Timmary Leary, who's the Visual Arts Curriculum Liaison, and the AP Arts History teacher for the Worcester Public Schools in Worcester, Massachusetts. Today, Timmary is going to talk about the AP Art History course that she teaches in a real museum. Hi Timmary, how are you?

TIMMARY: I'm good, thank you.

LOUI: Wonderful. So, can you share a bit about your role as the AP Arts History teacher as well as the Visual Arts Curriculum Liaison?

TIMMARY: Yes, so I teach AP Art History, to all of our students the Worcester Public Schools. We have seven high schools, and every single student is able to join this class if they wish. It is taught at the Worcester Art Museum on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, from 4 to 6:30. And in addition to that role, I'm also the curriculum liaison in the Worcester Public Schools where I support and provide PD for 51 art teachers that we have in our department, and they teach to over 25,000 students in our department. So those are two of my roles in the Worcester Public Schools.

LOUI: Those are huge roles! That's a lot! Oh my gosh! So, can you tell us about your teaching background?

TIMMARY: I started teaching at Claremont Academy in 1999 and taught there, teaching art, for 15 years. So, I taught grade 7 - 8, 9,10,11,12 and AP Studio Art at that school for 15 years before I transitioned to my role as a Curriculum Liaison.

LOUI: Okay, is Clermont Academy part of the Worcester Public Schools?

TIMMARY: It is, yeah.

LOUI: Okay, got it. So, okay, just to get this out of the way, AP anything, feels really inaccessible to most students, just how it's presented. But you all have made some design changes because of UDL and what were those changes, specific to access to the course you teach?

TIMMARY: So we, in our course, have offered this class to all sophomores, juniors and seniors. Initially, we said it would be important for students to have a world history background, but we changed that prerequisite, because we really wanted an entry point for all students and we wanted to make sure that if a student wanted to come into the museum and make this space a learning environment for themselves, that this would be a great entry point for them. So, we have also shifted the trajectory of the course in terms of the timeline. So, AP College Board advises us to teach starting with Global Prehistory, and one of the shifts we have made in order to engage our students, initially is to start with, we start at the end, actually. We start with Global Contemporary, so we pull in the artists that students are seeing currently and the themes that they're seeing currently. So, we begin by talking about artworks that deal with gender identity, and racism, and topics that are specific to contemporary issues they're thinking about now. That's one shift that we have made to make sure that students feel welcome, they feel initially engaged, they feel like the course itself is addressing some of the things that they are dealing with themselves.

LOUI: Nice. And when you say all students, and I just want to help everybody understand this, this means students who have disabilities. This means students who are English learners. This means students who are gifted. This means any student can walk in and say, "I want to be a part of this course," correct?

TIMMARY: Absolutely. That has been one of the paramount things about this course is to really make sure that if any student in the Worcester Public Schools is interested in being in the museum, or learning about art, or learning about our visual history, that they have access. We even think about if students are not able to get to the class, so we provide bus passes for students. So, all the materials also are free. And this is to no expense of the student. We have pizza nights on Thursday night, so we're thinking about providing food to them as well, but any student from any high school, including the alternative high school. Actually, I've had students who have been expelled from one of the traditional high schools, and, you know, has moved into an alternative high school, and she remained in the class. So we build a community, the community is, is a large part of how students persevere through a very challenging course. And again, all students are welcome.

LOUI: That's fabulous. That's really fabulous. Okay, so an AP History course taught inside a community-based museum. My brain is exploding. So how did that relationship begin?

TIMMARY: So, the connection was made between, you know, what is a learning environment that is novel and unique and a part of our community, and how can connections be made between the content, and something that is really, you know, a primary source document, essentially. So, students are learning about these works through primary source documents. So, that connection, that kind of real-world experience of being in a museum and not only learning about the content, but also meeting all of the people that make a museum run. The students are able to connect with curators, they're able to meet with curatorial staff. Conservation Studio. Not only are they able to connect with the content, they're able to also meet the people that are in the museum. And this museum becomes a part of their own learning experience and who they are within the community.

LOUI: That's awesome. When I think about the number of students that you have taking this class, do you have to cap it so that you can meet their needs? Do you have others who are helping? How do you do that?

TIMMARY: This year, it's very exciting, we actually have grown in terms of the number of students that are interested in taking the course. So, we have about, we have over 140 applications this year. And one of the things that we do to engage more students is we actually have a TA, a teacher's assistant program. So, the students that have taken the course prior to this year, can become TPAs for the next year. So, we're trying to think about how a one-year course can become almost a two-year experience. So, our 140 students coming in this year, we're going to divide it up into two modules, and if it extends beyond that, or we could possibly be thinking about maybe three teachers teaching the course, which then leads to a lot of really lovely collaboration between the three teachers and how we could possibly think about maybe a seminar, or, you know, some way of connecting all of those kids and all of those teachers in the middle.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. So, I'm wondering, did this program exist before you started learning about UDL, or did this program emerge after you had been learning about UDL?

TIMMARY: So I learned about UDL about seven years ago. I have been teaching the class for 14 years, and I had this very interesting experience where I required all students to do image cards and image cards were something that were on a printed document, you know, they had to copy and paste an image, they had to write their notes on the side, they had to put these image cards inside of a three-ring binder, and I was really kind of rigid about that process, in part because that's how I learned about images, and our history. And I had this experience of one night I was looking down and the student was doodling and doodling and doodling, and I let it go, and then I came back about 15 minutes later, ready to reprimand her, and I looked down and I saw these beautiful sketches, and she looked up at me and she said this is how I learn. This is how I'm processing this information. I am sketching, as you are speaking and as we are talking. So, then I kind of looked into sketch noting. And that sparked something in me,

in terms of how can I give more options for students in terms of note taking. And that was kind of the start of the journey for me in terms of incorporating and leveraging UDL into my course. So, I made some small shifts and changes and then I saw how that rippled outward. And then did a lot more research into UDL. And so, each year I'm thinking about how I can incorporate more of the UDL principles into my teaching. But that was kind of a start for me. So, it's been a seven-year journey. And I really consider my art history class, almost like a UDL lab class for me and my students. And I've taken them along in the journey with me they know about UDL. I engage them in the conversation about how the class has transformed in so many ways but for me, that moment of watching that student, engage in this sketch noting process kind of triggered something in me that I needed to be offering more options in terms of comprehension with my students.

LOUI: Right, that's a really powerful story. It's awesome observation on your part and then just that eagerness on your side to learn more about how you could expand those options and opportunities for others and that's just that mindset that we're looking for when we talk to others about Universal Design for Learning. It's saying, oh my gosh just, if your mindset grows to understand how if we provide these options for our students to enter into the learning and then to show us and participate in the learning, it all goes so much better. So, I was also thinking about how with your students who come back as the TAs, you know, they've already been learning how to be expert learners within the AP course, how to be purposeful and motivated and resourceful and knowledgeable and strategic and goal directed. It's pretty clear that they have opportunities, but then you're giving them this additional opportunity to work on what I'm assuming are those skills. So how do you frame that job of being a TA so that your students are learning how to be expert learners while they're in that position?

TIMMARY: So, one of the things that we incorporate into our class is really thinking about how they are, and we kind of frame it in the sense of expert art historians. We think about how we engage in the material. How are we organizing ourselves? How are we thinking about time management? How are we thinking about our executive

functioning? Because the interesting part of the course is that it's on Tuesday and Thursday nights from 4:00 to 6:30 so students really have to think about their time management and what are they doing kind of on Wednesdays or on the weekends. So, one of the things that we focus on is like goal setting and thinking about like, "Okay. How do I remember information? How do I set goals for myself?" We incorporate that throughout the year. You know, we think about our study habits and study skills, and every single quarter I meet with students and we have goal setting sessions where students think about, you know, areas where they want to stretch, and they're assessing how they're doing along the way. So, at the end of the year, students reflect on that in an event that we call The Last Supper and they provide information to the incoming students about not only the content but what they've learned about themselves as learners. And so, then that marks a transition between them kind of ending their position, I guess as a, as a learner, and then they move into this TA position. And so, we frame that in terms of how can they continue to establish that culture that we love so much that we have. We have great relationships with one another, you know, we provide feedback to one another, but those TA's, I really truly believe that the TA's are the ones that set the tone and also make sure that students feel comfortable and that everybody is welcome in within this environment. So, I meet with the TA's in the summer, and I asked them, you know, "What are the important parts of this course for you? What are the things that you feel like you can take on?" So, some of those TAs actually present lessons, and some of them meet with students. Some of them run study sessions, but I kind of give that charge to them to think about like, what are the what are the ways that you have learned within this course and what do you want to take charge of the following year? Oftentimes what we do is we have a huddle at the beginning of the week, and all of the teams and myself meet. Initially, I run the huddle at the beginning of the year but then the TA's to take charge of that. And towards the end of the year, they are the ones that are kind of managing that conversation in terms of what the week looks like and the week will bring for them.

LOUI: That's a beautiful example of a scaffolded release, but what I'm also thinking is that you might just have an additional visitor on some Tuesday or Thursday evening

once flights are safe and I can come out because I would love to see this so much. I have really appreciated this conversation, it's been fabulous! You can just tell how empowered your students are and the fact that you all are providing that level of empowerment to any student that wants to participate is outstanding! It's wonderful! Thank you so much for this work, Timmary, and for your leadership. I really appreciate it.

TIMMARY: Thank you so much. I really enjoy talking about it and it's been great to make the connection back to UDL as being the transformational lens, and why this course has become so powerful for students.

LOUI: Thank you for articulating that that's awesome. So, for those of you 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 the www.UDLapproach.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.UDLapproach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.