UDL in 15 Minutes with Gina Marchionda-Schneider

The transcript with audio descriptions

[The UDL in 15 Minutes logo followed by a photo of Gina, a white woman with shoulder length brown wavy hair, wearing a bright red top with a blue and grey necklace and matching earrings] LOUI: Hi everyone. This episode is part of a series with educators from the Fond du Lac School District in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. I've interviewed educators across administration, building coaches, and the classroom to help you gain some insights on the roles educators have when a district is implementing UDL. Enjoy!

[Music interlude

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 Gina Marchionda-Schneider who is a second-grade teacher at Lakeshore Elementary School in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Today, Gina is going to share a lesson she taught in May of 2020, the height of COVID lockdown, that brought together academics and social emotional learning using the digital learning environment and it was all planned using the UDL framework! Hi, Gina, how are you?

GINA: I'm doing very well, thank you.

LOUI: Oh, wonderful. It's so great to talk to you. Thank you for coming on. So, first off, could you please let us know about your education and teaching background.

GINA: Sure, I've been teaching for 29 years now. I started in Kiel. I did a year in Kiel Wisconsin, and the rest of my years, I've been with the Fond du Lac School District. I've taught first grade, I've taught multi age, grades one-two, but since 2004 I've been teaching second grade.

LOU: Wow. That's a lot of experience! and. And I just love hearing that you have brought UDL in after so many years and so much experience. That's really exciting. So, this lesson you taught in May of 2020, and that was at the height of the US lockdown. Students had been learning from home since March 17 and so many were struggling with social emotional issues like anxiety, but you wove together academics and social emotional learning, and saw some phenomenal results, and I'm really excited to unpack this with you. So, could you start by sharing the goal of the lesson and then how you wove in that social emotional piece? [A photo of Lakeshore Elementary School]

GINA: So the goal of our lesson was really to get children outside. That was our primary goal. My colleagues and I noticed that in general across the United States that children, their emotional health, was starting to flip a little bit and they weren't spending as much

time outside as they could. So, we decided to put our brains together and think how can we take academics and SEL, and these tech tools that they were using to create a lesson together and support that. So, we really focused on the social emotional aspect of getting them outside and exploring their yard and their neighborhood. And then our other goal was kind of a building goal that we had. We were talking about building vocabulary in our students. So, we used that goal of building vocabulary and having children go outside and get away from their screens and just enjoy nature.

LOUI: Nice. And you had all sorts of choice options throughout that lesson from what I understand, but one of the things they got to choose, was the platform that they used. So, talk about how you set them up for success when it came to that. That's a really complex choice for a second grader. [A power point slide with "ABC's of Nature and my neighborhood" to introduce the lesson]

GINA: Yes, it is. And I want to, I just want to say that throughout the year, I had a technology integration specialist to work with. They also showed up at the lesson that day when we introduced it along with other coach Shannon Schultz who really is a UDL expert in our district. So, the way that I'd have to say my team set them up for success was that over the course of the year, the children had learned different platforms along the way. So, for example, they were really good at Google Classroom by the time the pandemic hit. We were using that to use Google draw, we were using Seesaw all year long already, and they were pretty good with Google tools in general. So, we let them choose if they wanted to use Google Slides they could use Google Slides, and within Google Slides, they could use any tool in Google slides to show what they knew. For example, there's a lot of assistive tech in Google slides so they could use audio, they could use photo, they could use video GIFs, whatever they wanted to do to show what they knew. Now, the kids were also learning how to use Wii Video and that's where it gets interesting. We had a student choose to use Wii Video instead of Google slides. So, the kids knew that they could use whatever platform they had learned that year to show what they knew. And the other interesting part is that they knew how to take their work and download it and upload it and share it in Seesaw, which would go to our Seesaw blog and then they could talk to each other. [A screenshot of the table students filled in. They put the picture into one of the 6 cells and then wrote sentences using the word in the other 6 cells]

LOUI: So, these second graders are definitely really advanced with their knowledge of the technology. You also had a rubric that your students use to help them know you just what they were supposed to put on this technology, but then your students went beyond that, and they really exemplified being an expert learner. So how did they do that? Talk about that piece.

GINA: I think I could start with saying that when all of these platforms were introduced, we did them one at a time throughout the entire year. And along with that, we introduced executive functioning. So, when I would have one of my peers co-teaching with me, we would often say, you know, we're going to do this part, but this is how long it should take you. We kind of put parameters in for them. The first, next, then, last, but also made sure that the structure was loose enough that they knew that they didn't have to aim for perfection, just show us what you know. [Another screenshot of the table students used, but this time for the letter R]

LOUI: That's great! I love that guidance! I love that you gave them the time parameters, saying you know this is about how much time it should take, and we're not going for the perfection. I adore that! And I want to go back to kind of our original point here, which was to talk about this connection between social emotional learning, and academics, and technology, and UDL and just right there, that really encapsulates that support of their social emotional learning to help them work on those executive functions, and to see how they are using that part of themselves to impact their learning. Can you also talk a little bit more about the outdoor piece; what did you have them doing within this lesson? [A screenshot of a videoclip that showed a picture of a woodpile for the letter W]

GINA: So, the goal of this outdoor lesson was to use a digital dictionary that they were familiar with that I got from a wonderful tech mentor for me on social media, it's the Techie Teacher. So, they knew how to use the digital dictionary in Google slides so they were familiar with that. The next step was to look at their backyard, and their neighborhood, and connect a vocabulary word. So, for example, a lot of them discovered that they had a woodpile in common. So, under W they put woodpile. One of my students was obsessed with frogs, and so of course you could expect that he found a frog in his backyard, took a picture and put that under F for frogs. [A photo of a student pointing to a tiny frog perched on the edge of his laptop] They didn't have to go out and take pictures so let's say they thought of something in their yard but they couldn't find a picture of it, that wasn't a barrier. They could go find another picture online or a video. The other thing that we allowed them to do is if they had siblings at home, their sibling could help them. So they didn't have to do it alone. And I believe the other best part of this is a lot of my students decided to start collaborating together. I think they were using Messenger for Children, or they would FaceTime each other and get good ideas from each other. That happened a lot when they were doing their schoolwork. So they, they knew that they could still collaborate either with the people in their home or the people in our classrooms, but the goal was really to be outside and try to find 26 different things in their backyard that they could add to their digital dictionary. [A photo of a bird's nest for the letter N]

LOUI: I love this. I just love this connection. So, like you said, getting them outside but then this lovely collaborative piece that evolved, and came out of it. So that definitely supported their social emotional connections, especially during that lockdown period. And then also helping them work on that technology. So, they really were working toward that academic goal of building their vocabulary and seeing those connections with the 26 letters of the alphabet. That's, that's wonderful. That's just incredible. I think you had talked about, there was a particular student that really stood out with what he or she, I think was a he, chose to do with the technology. Can you dig into that a little bit more?

GINA: Yes, I have, I had a student who, at the end of kindergarten was dismissed from special education, and he decided that instead of using Google Slides, he wanted to really keep using Wii Video. He loved Wii Video. He wanted to do it that way. He just did it that way. He knew that he didn't even have to really ask me or ask my peers that I collaborate with. He just did it. And that really taught me a lot as a teacher that sometimes kids can tell us what they need. And when they tell us what they need and they know that they can use a different platform to show us those targets and those standards and their way, it's amazing what can happen. The student's project was absolutely phenomenal. It really was a projection of who he was as a person. And it was just so exciting to see what he showed us from his yard and his home. It really was so personal. So, I think what I learned from that as a teacher is we can really personalize learning when kids have choice. Even if they come up to us and say you know what, have you ever thought maybe we could do it this way? And being open to that. [A screenshot of Gina's class on Zoom]

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. And it demonstrates so clearly that you are open to it. And because the students are able to just come up and say that and the fact that the student just went with Wii Video, you have projected that in such a lovely way to your learner's to know, "Oh, I can just go ahead and do this. I don't even have to ask for permission. I have this flexibility," you know, in the, in the kid voice it's that I'm going to do this, but from the adult side we're like, this is so refreshing to see, because he knows what tools are around him, he knows what he is going to do best with, and he moved forward and that's exactly what we're going for with expert learners. Oh my gosh! I have one last question for you because you've been in the classroom for 29 years and I'm assuming UDL just came into your life within the last, I don't know, few years you can say how many, but what do you feel like has been a shift for you, and, and what was maybe the thing that brought you into it that made you go, "Oh this is different than what I was doing before!" [A screenshot of the ISTE.org website homepage]

GINA: I think a big shift for me was when I went to ISTE a few years back. I learned really that there were so many options for students to show what they know, that there was assistive technology out there, and that the students that I teach are digital age

learners. And that really spoke to me knowing that there are standards and goals for digital age learners so that they can grow into the people they need to be to work in a global society. That was the big aha for me, but I have to say I am one of the luckiest teachers around because I have such great instructional coaches around me. And I made a connection with not only just my technology instructional coaches but with the instructional coaches for academics. [A screenshot of the ISTE Educator Standards page followed by video clips of theudlapproach.com website and the UDL in 15 Minutes logo] And what we learned, especially through Shannon Schultz is that so many of the UDL concepts from ISTE are just what CAST uses. But it shows how to use the technology tools, the ed tech platform to reduce barriers. So, it was just this wonderful like, "Oh my gosh! I have these wonderful people in my district that I can collaborate with. And we can see what's in common and use both of these worlds to lift children and teach them how to be learners in this new age that we live in."

LOUI: Yeah, there are some fabulous people from CAST who have really been instrumental in their volunteerism within ISTE and really helped create that bridge so I will definitely share the resources to which you're referring that come from ISTE and there is a tight, tight connection between CAST and what they created with UDL guidelines and ISTE and their connection helping people connect educational technology and UDL. So that's, that's so great! And, it's wonderful to hear how you have had those connections within your world. So man, Gina! Thank you so much. This has been such a wonderful conversation. I really appreciate it and I understand school starts tomorrow so I know you're up to your ears with everything and I just really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

GINA: Thank you so much for this opportunity.

LOUI: Oh you're so 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. 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.