

UDL in 15 Minutes with Camille Wheeler Transcript

LOUI: Hello and welcome to this special UDL in 15 minutes where educators discuss their experiences with UDL. I'm Loui Lord Nelson, UDL author and leader. Today's episode is being recorded in front of a live studio audience at the UDL-IRN Summit in Orlando, Florida. I talking with Camille Wheeler who is a learning coach at Sunflower Elementary in Lawrence, Kansas. Today, Camille is going to share how she and fourth grade teachers in her school adopted "show what you know" to find out what their students really know. Hi Camille, how are you?

CAMILLE: Hello! I'm great, overwhelmed and extremely nervous.

LOUI: [laughter] I understand

CAMILLE: I know. I'm sorry.

LOUI: Well, thank you so much for coming on to this Network, Learn and Live, Learn, Live, and here at our first live UDL in 15 minutes. I really appreciate it. So, Camille and I found out something immediately that we have something in common, other than both loving UDL that we both moved to Lawrence, Kansas, about the same time. And, I was there for three years, she still lives there. And, she taught the daughter of one of my best friends who still lives in Lawrence, Kansas, so it's a really, really small world. As a friend of mine says, it's uncomfortably small if you're nefarious. [laughter] Alright, so. Okay, on the way back to UDL, would you describe Sunflower Elementary to the audience and what is the profile of the students that you serve?

CAMILLE: Okay, we're a K-5 elementary school. We have roughly 460 students. Maybe 40% free and reduced. Roughly 80% white, 20% other. We probably have three sections, roughly three or four sections at each grade level.

LOUI: And, you're a learning coach at Sunflower. Could you share what that job entails and how you weave in your passion for UDL?

CAMILLE: Absolutely. And I do have a passion for UDL. If I get tears, it's because I'm not kidding, I do, but it took me a while. You know, we would

hear about it and read about it, and it just, what clicked for me is when someone said, "Well, we're not changing the students we're changing the environment." And I was like, "Oh my gosh!" I knew that, but when someone told me that, it clicked. So, I could take that, along with the UDL guidelines, which I take with me everywhere, and help the teachers understand there's research behind it which we need to know, but we really want to know how to put it to practical and usable use in the classroom. So that's what I try to do. Take the guidelines, help them identify variables, and then what can we do to enhance the lessons?

LOUI: You know, I think what you just brought up, that what triggered for you was that not changing the child but changing the environment.

CAMILLE: Yes.

LOUI: We all have our different ways of coming into the framework and I addressed this a little bit this morning, but I think that's part of the complexity of sharing it with others. Because it's finding that right message, which is why I love doing the podcast because different people, of course share that message, but I'm always fascinated to hear what was the, what was the trigger for people and how they came into that. So, it's lovely to hear what yours was...

CAMILLE: Yes...

LOUI:...changing the environment.

CAMILLE: ..., it was. And you know it's something I think as educators we know. We're not going to change a student, but we have so many options to change the environment to benefit who they are.

LOUI: Right. And I think the other part of that message that you took in very quickly was that it's the barrier is within the environment the barrier is not within the learner.

CAMILLE: Right.

LOUI: And that's a little harder for people because once they start to dig into that aspect, it's like, "Whoa, what are you talking about? Because that kid brings this in with them!" And you're like, "You know, what we bring in

who we are as a person, but context, baby, right?”

CAMILLIE: We've had great conversations over the word barrier or variable, because people have their own perception of what that means.

LOUI: Right.

CAMILLE: So yeah, it's been great.

LOUI: Awesome, awesome. Ok. So now it's time for your story.

CAMILLE: Okay.

LOUI: People are going to love hearing what you have to say about those fourth-grade teachers and what they put together, so go ahead.

CAMILLE: All right, and now before I say that, I will say we have lots of grade levels that do great things at Sunflower.

[overtalking]

LOUI: Oh yes! We want to recognize that!

CAMILLE: And fourth grader is what we chose to talk about, but I had a couple teachers come to me and say, okay, we are teaching the standards in ELA. We have a resource that we use district wide. We have a weekly assessment that we give to check for student understanding, but we don't feel like we're getting the information from the students that they know. We know they know main idea but, we're not allowing them to give us all their information. I mean, how awesome is that,

LOUI: yes,

CAMILLE: ...that thought, right? So I pulled the Guidelines out and I'm like, "Hmm, let's see. Well that falls under Action and Expression." That's...so okay, so they identified their variable on their own. They knew this was the variable that was holding them back. So then we thought, okay, we teach the standard, we use the resource, how can we change the assessment? So, they designed a very, we had an original name for it, a "show what you know", because that's what they're doing, they're showing what they know.

LOUI: [laughter] Yes!

CAMILLE: And so, they provided options. Every week they, the kids get a planning page, well a brainstorming page first, a planning page, and then they choose to show how they, what they know about the information.

LOUI: Okay.

CAMILLE: The planning page and the brainstorming page stays the same every week.

Now just in the session before this, a lady came up and we we're talking about it and she said, "Well why don't you have an audio version of the planning stage and the brain, the brainstorming?" Right? It's a continuous learning process. I was like, oh my gosh that's such a good idea because right now it's all on paper.

LOUI: Right!

CAMILLE: So, when they first started it, they were very structured. And then as they went along, they released that control to the students. And that is amazing when you see fourth graders, they're learning main idea, they're getting that direct instruction, but then they take it upon themselves to plan out how they're going to show it. They brainstorm all the different ideas, then they plan it out. We've had iMovies. A lot of kids choose paper pencil, which I think is very interesting. We have, we use a platform called Seesaw so we have some students that present theirs through audio, because that's how they're most comfortable. The teachers are assessing the same information, they're just getting it a different way.

LOUI: Right! So, what came to mind was that as you were saying that the teachers were releasing that to the students slowly, to me, it was this perfect example of scaffolded learning,

CAMILLE: Yes!

LOUI: but not just for the students but also for the teachers, because they were learning to probably let go and move and shift from being the teacher to the facilitator. And so, they were taking on something new but they didn't

like jump into the 12-foot-deep end of the pool, they all just kind of waded in together.

CAMILLE: Yes, and that's a great point because when we bring up UDL it can be so overwhelming, like, oh my gosh, where do we start! So, at the very beginning, even with the fourth grade teachers we went through and we validated what they were already doing. So there, you know, the instruction with the, the ELA was wonderful! It was just the assessment part that, that they were having problems with, and we just have, I remember saying, we just have to try it. Honestly, are we going to get worse information than we, that we're getting now? Right?

LOUI: Right.

CAMILLE: What we're getting now isn't as effective as it could be. So we just tried it.

LOUI: And I think the other great thing about the example is, like you said, you all did a deep dive into Action & Expression looking for different ways they should show what they know, but inherently, it draws in other parts of the framework. And so, we speak about intentionality, we need to have intentionality in our use of the framework. But even with intentionality we still bump up against, right, so I'm thinking about all of the Engagement that is there because I'm assuming that there are learners who were either not previously successful on assessments or maybe they didn't finish projects. They didn't finish this kind of long-term work before, yet in this process, now they do. So, you've kept them engaged all the way through.

CAMILLE: Um-hm. Yes, so we were just talking about that. One of our ESC administrators was over at the office talking to the principal, and a fourth grade teacher came in with work from students who, they've had behavior issues, don't really get into ELA, whatever, and they did it and they produced something awesome! They knew main idea and details and you could tell by the product that they produced. It wasn't question/answer, it was a product they created, and the teacher was so excited, and to see her smile. You know, it was great.

LOUI: Yeah, and I think that's the other benefit to when you have a concentrated look at the framework, you have somebody with you who is acting as a learning coach. I mean your, your role is so valuable and I know

there are teachers, literally around the world that wish they had a coach in their environment that helped them along in, not only using the UDL framework, but also the expertise that you share. So could you talk a little bit about where your role sat with the creation of this idea?

CAMILLE: Well first of all, I, I felt like I gave them permission to do it...

LOUI: Yeah...

CAMILLE: ...and I didn't, but I felt like they just needed someone to say sure we can try it. We're doing what we need to do, we're just asking for it in a different way. And then we sat and planned. They implemented it. Sometimes I would go in with the Guidelines and observe a lesson. You know, I would show them what I saw and then we would meet probably once every two weeks and we would talk about if they weren't getting what they needed and that's not what can we do the change. I mean it's a constant. I mean it will never, never end.

LOUI: So, in your coaching roles, do you tend to take strategies and methods with you? Is it an interchange of ideas? Is it you're going and listening? I'm sure it varies, but can you kind of talk about that?

CAMILLE: Yeah, it does vary. I would say with UDL, once it clicked for me, I could take it to them and say, "Okay, this is what the UDL framework is. This is what I think we can do." So I was more direct with this approach just because it was so new.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah.

CAMILLE: And then once I felt like, okay, we, we're goin'. We, we have some buy in. Then I'm more of a listener and a guider and...

LOUI: Right, so when you're sharing your ideas do you do like, "Well, I want to tell you what this idea is, but this is where it came from, it's because it came from..."

CAMILLE: Um-hm.

LOUI: Okay.

CAMILLE: I do. Yes.

LOUI: Awesome.

CAMILLE: Our principal is buying us books, we've had person to person PD's, we've had podcasts that we listen to, and we do a lot of discussion,

LOUI: Great!

CAMILLE: ...and we do a lot of teacher shares. It's so organic because the fourth-grade teachers will share their successes and their mistakes and then other teachers are like, "Ah. We're hearing it from a teacher. Someone who does it."

LOUI: Okay. So with those teacher shares, could you describe what those look like? Are they always within grade-specific teams? Do you go school wide sharing?

CAMILLE: We've done a little bit of both.

LOUI: Okay.

CAMILLE: We, and I think the most productive was the school wide sharing. And I just think I could stand up and talk to them about it, you know, our principal can stand up and talk about it, and then the people in the back are like, "Yeah, well,..."

LOUI: Right.

CAMILLE: ...are you in a class of 30 kids?" Right? and that's fair. Um, when the teacher stand up, they stood up together, they explained their "show what you know," and why they did it, and where it came from, on the Guidelines, right, they were looking at Action & Expression, so that they could refer back to the guidelines...

LOUI: Right!

CAMILLE: ...and, and they shared. And we had a first-grade teacher that took what fourth grade teachers were doing and implemented it with first graders.

LOUI: Oh!

CAMILLE: See? How awesome is that?

LOUI: Yeah.

CAMILLE: Yeah.

LOUI: Oh that's brilliant. And it's so hard to share those but that's when I'm like, "Ah, if they wrote the lesson plans and there was a video recording of it and just the compare/contrast part about that that we use!"

CAMILLE: Well, and we have then had cross grade level shares where the first grade teacher has come to fourth grade and said okay this is what I did. And then they communicate and say, oh you know, try this, try that, or I've changed that. And I'm there, but a lot of times if they're talking and leading the discussion, I think that's more powerful than if I come in and tell them what to do or try to tell them what to do.

LOUI: I understand. I think Camille has done a fantastic job here at Live, up on the stage! Thank you so very much!

CAMILLE: Well thank you for having me because I love to share the process!

LOUI: Yeah.

CAMILLE: Yeah, I love to share our journey.

LOUI: Well, you've done a great job.

CAMILLE: Thank you.

LOUI: Alright 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 associated blog at my

website, www.theUDLapproach.com/media. And finally, you have a story to share about UDL implementation 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.