UDL in 15 Minutes

Transcript – Kelley Culp

LOUI: In response to how most educators are delivering instruction right now, I'm hosting a special series of UDL in 15 minutes episodes where I'll interview educators about their use of UDL to design online learning experiences. If you want to share your experiences, contact me via my website, www.theUDLapproach.com

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 Kelly Culp, who's an English teacher at North High School in Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation in Columbus, Indiana. Today, Kelly is going to share how she uses UDL to design her online learning environment. Hi Kelly. How are you?

KELLEY: Hi Loui! It's so good to be with you!

LOUI: Oh, thank you so much. It's so great to talk with you, too. So first off, can you tell us about your teaching background?

KELLEY: Certainly. I have been in the English classroom for the last 16 years. Prior to that I took kind of an odd path to get to education. I went to law school, graduated from law school, and decided that was definitely not the right path for me. [laughter] And then I started substitute teaching and realized that was where I was supposed to be all along. So that was an interesting experiment in finding what was really right for me.

LOUI: And that is interesting! And then, and you didn't go like the Poli-Sci or social studies route. You went the English route.

KELLEY" Well, my undergrad is in literature, I have a BA in literature, and so it made sense.

LOUI: Ah, okay. Yeah, that does make sense. Well, I'm so glad you found teaching because you're awesome.

KELLEY: Thank you.

LOUI: You're welcome! So, okay. Just so everybody out there knows, the name of the district, it gets shortened to BCSC because otherwise it's just really a mouthful.

KELLEY: Yes. Yes, it is.

LOUI: So, can you share a little bit about the BCSC student population?

KELLEY: I am mostly well acquainted with the North population specifically, although that is a pretty good reflection of the corporation as a whole. At North we have about

2,000 students, and we're about 32% free and reduced and about 9% ESL. So, we have quite a variety of students, and I believe the district is a little higher in both of those percentages, but we're a pretty good reflection.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. So, switching to this concept of the online learning, BCSC is a little ahead of the curve when it comes to eLearning. When did you guys start talking about this?

KELLEY: We've been talking about eLearning for probably the last four to five years, and we started really hyping it up over the last three years, and being encouraged to try it. And then we had three eLearning days right in a row for flood days and that was a real jump right in and get your feet wet because we hadn't really done it yet. And we learned a lot from those three days, I gotta say that was really kind of helpful to have that as a background.

LOUI: Yes! Those three days were really invaluable! Did you guys have time to go back and do some reflection? Did you do that in your departments, how did that work?

KELLEY: I was really, really curious, so I did it with my students at the end of every day. That was their last little piece with me was to give me some sort of reflection on what their day had been like, what they felt the workload was like, and just what they were feeling. And asking that was invaluable.

LOUI: Right.

KELLEY: I learned so much from my students that way.

LOUI: And so, I know we're jumping the gun because that's so much a part about UDL, so I've just got to say, okay everybody that's part of… that's definitely a part of recruiting interest, and keeping their effort and persistence going is hearing their voice and making them feel, right, a part of this. But I think that sometimes teachers stop short of that, because they think that students are just going to complain.

KELLEY: Right, and...

LOUI: And, so how did you structure that and then and how did you get yourself around that?

KELLEY: Well, one of the things that I did was I encouraged them through our learning management system, our LMS, to use the audio or video recording function. And it was only going to go to me nobody else was going to see it. And sometimes when you ask kids to talk versus typing it out or writing it out, they're more apt to speak freely, but also to not go down that complaining road. They were definitely willing to say, "I felt like I had too much work to do in all of my classes", but they also said some really good positive things about the, the distance learning what they were getting from it.

LOUI: Nice. That's really, it's an excellent, excellent suggestion. So you're helping them

with that action and expression and expressing themselves by using those different medias. That's fabulous. So, okay, we'll just do the formal jump over here because you came wonderfully prepared to talk about how you essentially started small with all of this with your own connection of UDL and online learning, so talk about that.

KELLEY: With UDL starting small is the way to go.

LOUI: Yes!

KELLEY: If you try to jump in feet first into all of it, it's gonna be overwhelming and you're just gonna throw up your hands. But starting small picking one part of the guideline to really focus in on is a great way to introduce it into your online learning, especially when I was thinking about my plans for next week with my students. We are getting ready to read Act Three of Hamlet. Well, we can't really read it together anymore.

LOUI: Right.

KELLEY: So, the biggest thing you want to look at is the goal. What is your goal. What are you hoping to get from whatever it is you're doing? And for me, did it matter if they physically were reading the text or if they were watching or listening? It really didn't. What we're looking for is character development, and language some, but also analysis. And so, if that means they're watching a word for word translation/play, that's gonna get them the same thing than sitting there reading the text on their own.

LOUI: Right. So, when it came to you deciding what you're going to do in relationship to your goal, how did you go about finding resources? Did you feel like you were in this flood or did you have a strategy around that?

KELLEY: I'm always on the lookout for resources and I just keep a little file of things that that could help me, which is always a good thing, but if you don't have that, there are so many different places that you can go to find that. I find that I get some of the best recommendations for resources through my PLNs on Twitter. I have several that I follow. One is very English based, and that gets me a lot of content, and then a UDL based group of friends and that gets me a lot of resources as well. I've also, just over the course of the last two weeks, joined two Facebook groups that are content specific, and the amount of ideas and collaboration that is going on on those is mind blowing to me.

LOUI: Teachers are always collaborating. We're always sharing. We're always excited to say, "This works so well!" or even "This, this didn't work so well!" But this level of information sharing, but the way it's being shared is amazing to me, because it's like everybody understands that there is heightened stress and heightened confusion and how can we share these just in an in a more effective way than just dumping them. I'm just noticing that people are attaching more comments or more about how they're using it rather than just saying, "this is great.: Are you seeing this thing.

KELLEY: I think it's also helpful that they might share a tool and then say, "I used it in this particular situation." So you have a better sense of not just that it's a good tool to use but how you could use it.

LOUI: Right, right. So, we talked about, already, how you definitely engage the students by getting their voice. And then, so, in the beginning and then also the action expression so they could use the video and audio to share what they're talking about. And then this representation part of them being able to watch a video that's giving the script word for word that's, same as if they were going to read that out loud in class. So, what are some other ways that you have thought about that bigger concept of variability when you're thinking about the learners and developing that online environment?

KELLEY: A couple of things come to mind. The first is more on the teacher side of things. We need to think about complete accessibility because our kids don't all have the same tools that all the same ways. So maybe instead of giving them a link to an outside source, you download that and also give it as a PDF, so that they have that option. Maybe if they're sharing a device at home, that's the easier way for them to access something. Using tools like Grackle, when you do a slideshow helps you to look for those accessibility pieces. Using closed captions if you're doing a video is really helpful for students. It's helpful for me as a learner sometimes to be able to look at the captions if I can't hear clearly. Those are just some real basic accessibility things that I always try to include when I'm getting ready to put something together.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. And I also know, just from our previous conversations, that you are really cognizant that there are learners who aren't comfortable with online learning, and so we can never make that assumption "Oh this is the digital age. They're the digital generation." But you recognize that some of the students weren't going to be comfortable coming on to that learning management system and navigating around it. So, you talked about making some of your own videos, actually.

KELLEY: Yeah, I think that's maybe one of the things that I like the best about online learning. Not that I like watching a video of myself. [laughter] But really, let's be honest, I find that if I record for my students what it is I want them to do for our task for that day or what the goals are, or my expectations, I can spell that out pretty clearly for them, but they also can see the expression on my face, they can hear the tone of my voice. I also provide a transcript of that so that they can read the words instead of having to go back and watch the video over and over again, but that just gives them one more resource of here's really what we're doing this is the clear picture that you need to focus on. And the other thing that I've started doing is putting expected time. So, what I expect it will take them to complete that task or activity.

LOUI: Nice

KELLEY: That way they know if they're spending way too much time on something maybe they're putting more effort in than what I really want them to. Or if they got it

done in five minutes and it says a 20-minute task, maybe they know they need to go back and work a little bit harder to dig in further.

LOUI: Right. So I'll first go back to that video. When we think about the representation, right, you're helping them just comprehend the system, you're helping them comprehend how this LMS works and where they fit with it, how to use it, how they're going to do the assignment, but then I think about this major connection you're doing because right now, one of the other things that we're hearing from teachers, all over the place is, "I miss my students, I miss them!"

KELLEY: Absolutely.

LOUI: Yeah. "I miss being with them." And we know that they miss being with you. And by doing that video of yourself, you're giving some of that connection to them and it's just, it's beautiful and I think it fits in recruiting interest but even that, oh gosh, it's deeper! I mean this is going right to that brainstem!

KELLEY: Right, right. They really like it when our dog Fin gets in the view. They think that's fantastic. I really try to get him to sit still, but he doesn't.

LOUI: [laughter] Oh, but it's brilliant, I love it, I love it. And then as you were talking about the expected amount of time and helping the students really think about where they are strategically within an assignment. So you're, you're supporting their executive functioning, by doing this. At the same time, you know, you're going to have learners who may need a little bit of extra time, but it's building the relationship with them right that…

KELLEY: Right

LOUI: If you do need a little extra but this isn't saying you have to be done in 15 minutes, but if you find yourself, as you said, if you find yourself working on this for 30 minutes, then hey, let's talk.

KELLEY: Right!

LOUI: You know, you know, okay, there's, there's something beyond here that you're putting in possibly, or maybe you're struggling with a concept and this is a great time to contact me and say, "Hey, I'm still doing this and it's 30 minutes later."

KELLEY: Yeah. I mean, even with my own children. This week, they've been doing eLearning they've called it at home learning for their Corporation. And there have been a couple of times when both of my kids have said, "I don't really understand this." And immediately I'm like, have you emailed your teacher to ask them?

LOUI: Right, right. [laughter] Let's do some empowerment exercises! [laughter] Oh, that's awesome. Well Kelley we have definitely bumped up against our 15 minutes and I

know we could keep going forever. This has been so helpful. Thank you so much. I think you've given some wonderful guiding help to those who are listening and hopefully it'll get passed along to others. Thank you so much.

KELLEY: Well thank you for having me. This has just been a fun little bright spot in our week.

LOUI: Oh, you're welcome, you're 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.theUDL approach.com/media. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 minutes, contact me through www.theUDL approach.com. And thanks to everyone for your work and revolutionizing education through UDL, and making it our goal to develop expert learners.