

UDL in 15 minutes
Transcript - Dan Marsh

LOUI: In response to how most educators are delivering instruction right now, I'm hosting a special series of UDL and 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 Dan Marsh, who is a social studies teacher at North High School in Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation in Columbus, Indiana. Today, Dan is going to share how his background in designing online learning environments set him up for success during his migration to purely online teaching. Hi Dan How are you?

DAN: Loui, I'm doing really good. Glad that I can join you today.

LOUI: Thank you so much. It's so great to talk to you. So first off, would you please tell us about your teaching background?

DAN: Yeah, no problem. I'm a graduate from Indiana State University (go trees!). I spent a couple years teach at Pike High School up in Indianapolis before migrating back home to Columbus, where I ended up going and getting a master's degree from University Indianapolis in curriculum and instruction. Teaching has always been a passion of mine and really has been something I wanted to do since I was in sixth grade. I had a teacher who was a science and social studies teacher who just made things come to life and I really credit him for kind of pushing me in this direction. So, this year starts year number 16 in the classroom and it's been a great one and kind of a change in the crazy one here at the end of the year.

LOUI: Right! Now, you also have a background of E learning. So you've been in the classroom face to face, but you also have E learning background, right

DAN: Yes, correct. Well 10 years ago I got hooked up with a company called Indiana Online Academy, now simply just Indiana Online, and it's really designed around teaching summer school online, but they are also a yearlong program as well for kids who maybe their school doesn't offer certain classes. This last semester I taught three or four kids throughout the state of Indiana who wanted to take dual credit government through Ivy Tech and their school just didn't have that offer, so that was something that we could fill into and fill that void for a lot of schools across the state.

LOUI: Okay. And then you also used the E learning focus when you were with Pike, right?

DAN: Yeah, well that's how I kind of got into the Indiana Online is it's up through Pike Township and the PATINS grant so because of working at Pike I knew some people in that area already, and then when I moved back down to Columbus to start teaching there, I got involved in the PATINS grant with Kelly Culp, who I know you interviewed, and a couple other teachers. And thanks to that, it kind of gave me an opportunity to meet with some of the people on the ground floor when, when Indiana Online got rolling about 10 - 12 years ago. And then it's really just exploded since that point in time where we're offering numerous classes during the summer, thousands of students are taking courses, if not probably closer to 10,000 students across the state of Indiana take some online courses through the online.

LOUI: Okay. Now, and as you referenced in an earlier interview with Kelly who's there in Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation which is BCSC, for those who are listening, but she's also there and so you have all of this experience with E learning prior, is there a difference between how BCSC structures, or actually instructs their teachers to use the E learning platform in comparison?

DAN: I would definitely say yeah there's going to be, mainly just because the Indiana Online is a company that's been around, and that's their sole purpose is online education. So, from the groundwork of how things are developing over the past 10 years and online instruction is completely changing every single year, and the new tools that are out there are constantly making it a lot easier. From the Google Meet type ideas or the Zooms that now are out there are just one more piece and with BCSC not being the one who focuses in on online instruction, this is definitely something new for us. We've had the E learning opportunities for maybe four or five years now. We've only used them one other time prior to this coronavirus and that was two school years ago when we had some flooding days that took place in late April. So for a lot of teachers in our corporation, this online instruction is something pretty new. Especially when it is our sole method of instruction. We've had the itsLearning program for a couple years now, I honestly can't remember the exact year, and I know there are other teachers like myself and others who will utilize it as a secondary source providing information for the kids; PowerPoints, whatever it is, videos, discussion forums and that kind of stuff, but it's, it's a secondary tool. It's not our primary use. So now we're having to go from what our primary face to face traditional instruction is to an online world is definitely a big jump and a big change in a short window of time.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. So I also know that BCSC has a significant connection with Universal Design for Learning and in fact, Universal Design for Learning is the guiding practice for everyone. Everything is under that umbrella. And how has that been different also? So when you think about E learning in the other environments and then thinking about how E learning is intended to look because of that emphasis on UDL?

DAN: You know, I think for me, and thinking about my online instructional with the Indiana Online and then also with the instruction for North now with the whole E learning, you definitely do think about the UDL piece. I mean, what really clicked to me a couple years back when I was teaching was this idea that engagement piece, you know? And, and getting that engine started before they enter into the classroom. And when you're in an online setting, it definitely is different. You don't have everyone's attention when that bell rings. You're gonna have kids popping in at, you know, potentially 2 am to, you know, midnight, whatever it is, when they can find that time to work. So you've got to figure out how to utilize some of those tools. So for me, and using the online instruction, I'm definitely utilizing video segments for myself. You know I'm a very outgoing personal individual and that's really part of my classroom. And I think that's one of the big things I think about too, is the idea of of taking your traditional classroom setting and thinking about that as being part of who you are and you have to translate that into an online setting as well in order to get the kids really think about what what is going on and how to be really effective at what we're doing. It's tough. It's a different world, especially when you have been doing one thing one way for so long and now adjusting to this online setting. I would definitely say for me, even though I've been teaching for 10 years in the online environment, this sudden change to my primary role of education to the online world has definitely been interesting. It's been difficult in some fashions, especially as a teacher who also has kids at home, and try and help them guide through. And that's kind of a big piece and I think one of the things we got to keep in mind too is giving those breaks giving those changes. So going back to the idea of an online environment, you know, the kids are able to kind of come and go as they please. So it's not like you're going to provide that 25-30 minute lecture per se, and then activity onwards. They might be jumping around a little piece of piece so when I think about what I've done with the Indiana Online and also with my itsLearning pages for our E learning elements, is providing as many options as possible. I do have my PowerPoints up there, I do have reading activities up there. There is a plethora of things on YouTube, especially for government which is my primary area to teach, to help explain some concepts, court cases, Federalist Papers, things along such lines, and in four or five minute increments. I think those are some of the ideas we have to keep in mind with this online instruction is how do we give as much to our kids as possible without at the same time making it so overwhelming they're lost.

LOUI: Right. Yeah I know other teachers have talked about how it's challenging for their students to make choice in the online environment, but what I reflected on was, I think that the learners that come into this, having have practiced choice, they've practiced that in the brick and mortar classroom they've gotten used to, oh I need to choose this because this is my best way of learning right now, that probably is helping them transfer in the digital environment. Do you feel that, too?

DAN: Yeah, I would think so, for sure. I mean when the kids are gonna know what's gonna work best for them and I just got to give an example. My wife does one thing with her itsLearning page for assignments and I've done something a little bit different. And she kind of showed me her way and I thought it was going to work really well because it just seemed easier, but since my students haven't been taught that process, when they start getting on to it yesterday and today I was answering so many more questions about, "Well, how do we submit this now? This is different than the past." So trying to make something a little bit easier, what I thought might be actually became a lot more difficult. So, when you have that routine set up so well in your classroom setting you almost want to kind of keep it not change anything up too much because it might cause some problems. So I definitely agree though, as well that, that choice element the kids know what's going to help them the best and since I've been utilizing itsLearning in the online instruction, providing videos, providing those PowerPoint notes, providing the readings, those right there give those kids three options to get that information, and they're going to go to the ones that they are the most comfortable with. The same way they would have done so a traditional brick and mortar setting.

LOUI: Yeah, so what you were just linking to is talking about representation. So they're going to go and find, yeah, which tool is going to represent best. How are you using UDL to design your assessments or even anything within that action expression so like executive functions, any of that?

DAN: You know, I think one of the things that I continue to do is no different than I would in a traditional brick and mortar setting. You know, when it comes to providing the information, or the how they're going to show their knowledge, we do vocabulary my US history classes as well, and one of the big things I've always had them do is I want you to put into, you know, your own words as well as, you know, the true definition. But the endpoint of it trying to find a way to visualize that information and or to find video clips and things like that. So the kids are providing those opportunities as well to show, "Hey, this is how this applies to this piece." I think in some ways, it is a little more difficult in the online world to provide that choice per se, on how to explain what they know, because you don't want to overwhelm and provide so many chances but at the same time, you got to keep in mind what has worked in that classroom is also going to work

online. My youngest son, I was working on something today looking at Egypt and Mesopotamia, and the teacher did a great job with providing, you know, four different sources that they can go to to get the information, and then also, hey here's one way that you can show your understanding. Here's another way you can show your understanding. So, there's definitely some great things that are happening and we're doing, I think, an awesome job with this transition and BCSC from what I'm seeing.

LOUI: Oh, wonderful. That's awesome. One last question in our little snippet of time. I think about that independence of high schoolers and how important the structure of school is because maybe outside of school, some of them aren't so great with structuring their time. What ways are you helping them with that, that's kind of that executive function piece?

DAN: Yeah and I think one of the things that I really have done, and I, my heart hurts for these seniors and that's what I really teach a lot of the day. And one of the things I've really done with this group of kids is I've got on the Now Google Meets meetings at least every day at 2pm. They're not required for my kids, but they are an option for them to come and check out and just hang out. We do talk about the reading or the activity that we're looking at for that day's lesson. But I think by having some structural time where hey, I'm here at this point in time if you want to get on, get on. Let's have a conversation. And you know, if it's just you want to get on to see my face, that's fine. You know, and that's part of it, too. And, and I think for me, I look forward to those 2 PM meetings, just because I missed seeing my kids in the classroom. You, you definitely build a relationship with your students very, very differently in a brick and mortar setting than you do an online setting. But I will say this, one of the things that has made Indiana Online so successful is that there's actually a teacher who is licensed in those areas that is teaching that class and we try our best to build that relationship with our students in an online setting. I've never seen any of my online students in a face to face setting but I have met them through a digital world from day one of a summer school class and always start again here in early June with probably right around 100 kids taking, potentially, AP government, taking government, through that online setting and we definitely look at, hey let's get our face out there, let's get these kids to know that there's actually a real person there. And I think one of the things that we got to keep in mind with this online setting and this is something I talked about in our department meeting on Monday, was that if you can get your face out there to them and just remind them that there's a human being there to help you and constantly remind the students that hey, we're here to help, don't forget about us. It's a big thing and it actually makes us feel warm, you know? I had a student who I've been talking a bunch with the last couple days. He's one is asked a lot of questions about how the court works as that's what we're kind of studying right now, and I sent him a message back today just saying,

“Thanks for asking the questions, because it makes me feel like I'm still teaching and not just throwing things on the computer.” And I think that's one of the big things to keep in mind too, for us as educators, is that we still are reaching out to the kids and there's still that relationship piece that is being built that is so important in the educational world not just that content piece.

LOUI: Yeah, and I love that you pointed out the fact that he was helping you feel like the person, the educator that you are, and that's so important for multiple reasons! So it's important for him to hear that from you, it's important for you to hear it from him. It's just beautiful. That's great.

DAN: That's one of the things I really love about the online meetings I've been doing with the kids. It just gives me time to say hi to them again and and see how they're doing. Yes, we spend about 5-10 minutes on instruction, but most of it is just how their days are going, how they're doing with work, what are they keeping themselves busy with, as well as hey we got kids who are getting ready go to college and they're now talking about, hey we got our roommates and that kind of stuff. And I think that's part of that classroom environment too, is just being real with them and, and building that relationship because it's a huge piece of what we do in the classroom.

LOUI: Brilliant. Well, Dan, I really appreciate this. We have definitely come to our 15 minutes so thank you so so much.

DAN: Thanks Loui, it was good to do this!

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.theUDLapproach.com/media. And 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.