

UDL in 15 Minutes Transcript
With Brenny Kummer

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 at the [UDL approach.com](http://UDLapproach.com).

Hello, and welcome to UDL and 15 minutes for educators discuss their experiences with UDL I'm Loui Lord Nelson, UDL author and leader. Today, I'm talking with Brenny Kummer, who is a district technology coordinator for Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation in Columbus, Indiana. Today, Brenny is going to share how BCSC focused on the learner variability of teachers as they planned for and have continued to support distance learning. Hi Brenny! How are you?

BRENNY: I'm great Loui thanks for asking. How are you?

LOUI: I'm great, thank you so much! I'm good and it's a beautiful day out so I'm even better!

BRENNY: That always helps!

LOUI: I know! It's so good to talk to you. So first off, tell us about your background in education.

BRENNY: Of course. So, I am from Columbus, Indiana. I'm actually a product of my school system where I work now. I was a BCSC student and graduated 2011, went to Indiana University, secondary history major, and then I started. Interestingly, I came back to BCSC in Columbus, did my student teaching at a middle school, taught at a high school, and then did a couple years at a middle school again and now I am in instructional technology.

LOUI: Oh, so were you a big fan of technology in the classroom? Is that how you made that bridge?

BRENNY: Yes. Yeah, I was someone who was always really eager to try new ideas, given sometimes you know something new, sometimes they fall flat on your face, sometimes they don't, but I love technology and seeing how it can help inspire students and give them a voice and that's really what inspired me to be in the job I am now.

LOUI: Nice, nice. Okay, and then share some information about the tech department of BCSC and how it's guiding and connecting to UDL.

BRENNY: Yeah. I'm, I feel like we're in a very fortunate spot. I haven't really known any different, which is kind of a blessing, really, that Universal Design for Learning is our instructional framework. And the way that translates to the technology department is that it really guides every decision that we make, from what technology tools we put in the hands of our students, what hardware we mount on the walls, what software we use for assessments and our delivery of online lessons. UDL is really that goal that we're all in the rowboat towards all of us are rowing towards it together and it's all guiding us there. I feel pretty lucky that we have that, but it's also exciting because it really pushes our boundaries. UDL is an evolving journey and we're always trying to find how we can use technology in ways to better implement UDL. Because we use UDL to guide our decisions and plan what learning tools we want to use I feel like we're always evolving with the times. So actually, a few years ago, before I actually got in the classroom, there was a group of administrators, teachers and technology directors that got together in BCSC and they realized that we need a learning management system, one online learning management system. We had been using four or five at that point, and we needed to go one to one. And really the reason why they wanted to do that was because they realized that there were learning barriers and we didn't have a learning management system then we really weren't staying as true to UDL as we probably could. So that's really what created my position. My position helps support teachers in using technology to further UDL in their learning environment, and that's really guided, a

lot of the decisions that led to my role and what I continue to do.

LOUI: Nice. And, I think what's also interesting about your position and how BCSC has designed the tech department, because of this focus on UDL, you all are thinking about not only the technology devices, and like you said how it's mounted on the wall and how it's used, but how the teachers are going to be able to use it so that they can implement UDL in their environment. So, it's an interesting picture because you're always thinking of this instructional goal versus stopping off at the technology. And I think that's a unique way that BCSC has the tech department set up, I would say.

BRENNY: I would agree. It's really helpful having been a teacher to really kind of take that mindset and just tweak it slightly so that now my learners are my teachers, and how can I use technology to help them teach their students.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. And that's a perfect bridge to what I wanted to ask next because we're going to talk about teachers as learners and that's just so critical. So, UDL helps us understand learner variability and that everybody learns differently, and that context has a huge impact, and this whole emergency distance learning thing has been one heck of a context. And the teachers are the learners and so how did you all start even thinking about the barriers that the teachers would face?

BRENNY: There's definitely some planning and changes that had to happen. We are definitely in uncharted territory. I feel like that is something a lot of us have heard lately but it's so true this is so different. We could plan somewhat for this but there were definitely some things we had to consider and kind of think on our feet moving head but kind of taking a few steps back. When we went one to one with technology tools and decided to pick one learning management system, itsLearning, the state of Indiana had actually decided to utilize e-learning days but at that point it was really just for inclement weather, snow days so you don't have to add on days at the end of the school year. So, we had had a learning day a virtual learning day about three years ago now due to flooding, but up until that point it was lots of just planning. For us, it was making sure our

teachers had training on a learning management system so that they could see that it wasn't just another thing, it's something that helps their learning environment, and is connected to UDL because it's a place for our students to go and access lessons. It's another means of representation for them and there's a lot of tools and resources within our learning management system that can take your UDL practice a step further.

Because our teachers are really our learners in the technology department, we wanted to make sure that our teachers had PD opportunities that were also flexible and they had options. So, we have an online professional development learning course that teachers could go to any point anytime and participate in learning modules. There's slides, there's videos there. We have monthly district workshops and there's always sessions that focus on the bridge between educational technology and universal design for learning. So, we had a lot of planning up front, but now that we've found ourselves in this emergency e-learning situation, the planning upfront has been great, it's helped some of our teachers who were kind of already getting their feet wet with technology and they had some of those skills developed because of that training, but there was definitely some teachers that were overwhelmed with this new environment. I mean, I felt overwhelmed, being someone who was helping plan deliver all of this, so I totally understand that. So, we really had to rethink professional development and make sure that we were meeting our teachers' needs given these changes. So, we didn't also want to overwhelm them either, so that was a key thing is kind of figuring out what that balance is of not just sending emails every single day saying, "Here's a new tech tool! Here's something new! Here's what you should be doing!" It was giving our teachers a couple of resources they could fall back on showing them that we have that whole PD course where there's resources, they are selecting ones that were specific to e-learning and online lesson design, kind of putting those on the front page of that and making sure those are the ones that our teachers see as soon as they go online, but also making sure that we gave them PD that wasn't one size fits all. We had weekly updates that we send out, it's one email I send the whole week and it has two tech tips in it. One of them is geared towards our online learning management system and the other is an outside of our LMS tech tool that supports universal design for learning and I put examples in there, I explain how it connects to the framework, how you can use it in

your lessons, and then show some teachers in our district that are using those tools effectively.

LOUI: Nice!

BRENNY: We also have a few other things, too: a podcast study. I've been doing those throughout the whole school year, but I really kind of tweaked it this time since our teachers were still looking for learning and this one focused on online lesson design and using educational technology tools to further UDL.

LOUI: It's truly a menu of choices from which they can choose and go in. So, when we think about that concept of variability and everybody coming into it differently, and like you said, you all are already addressing that by recognizing that it's not a one size fits all. And as you're sending these things out, you are faced with the same thing that everybody else is which - we're sending it out into the digital world. It's not like you're doing any kind of face to face PD. Do you feel like that's changed anything? I'm realizing that that's probably how you all have sent things out, but I also know that BCSC does a lot of face to face PD, so has that impacted the tech department at all?

BRENNY: It has. A lot of the training a lot of my role is face to face PD, so it was really taking my PD model and flipping it on its head and trying to think how can I still reach these teachers and support them in their time of need. Especially given our circumstances right now, they need my support and my help, more than ever. So, we do have an online email that teachers could reach out to, given that's one form of representation, but our teachers could also call into our call hotline. And we could talk to them over the phone. We've also been using video conferences, so kind of have somewhat of a face to face interaction and I present my screen and I show teachers how to do things. So, while it's still not the same as a face to face training, we've really been trying to be creative and making sure teachers have different modalities to reach out to us and communicate and get help if they need it.

LOUI: Yeah. So, we are both in the same state and ours is a state that said, nobody's going back for the end of the school year we're all doing graduations virtually and all this, and we also don't have a definite plan for the fall yet. Have there been conversations about some ideas for the fall? Like, okay, let's say we are going to be back for some of the time, but we're going to do some online. Have there been those kind of conversations and how do those relate to UDL.

BRENNY: There's been a few, especially since last week was really when the Governor was announcing more plans for the future but didn't spend a whole lot of time talking about school year because it is still so unknown. For us, it's really been talking about how can we make sure that if we are going to be teaching remotely to kick off the next school year, how can we really make sure that we're meeting our students' needs. So, from a technology standpoint, it was making sure that we let our students keep their devices over the summer. We've never actually done that before. We always collect them at the end of the school year, but we're keeping those devices in our students' hands. And they still have access to our online learning management system as well so they can really check in with their teachers, even during the summer if they would like to. So, it was really, for us we've talked about how can we still make sure that students feel connected and supported by their teachers, even their last school year teachers as they move forward this summer, so that they have that social emotional support that might be lacking right now because they're not in their physical classrooms.

LOUI: Yeah, so we are at the very end, but I have one last question and I don't know you might not be able to abbreviate it but, I know you have helped with some specific outreach for students who have disabilities and who have some needs that are outside of even the general education classroom. So maybe they receive additional therapies. Can you talk about how you've helped bridge this gap, this digital gap that we're all experiencing a little bit.

BRENNY: Yeah, the first thing that I really try to do when I'm working with any teacher when it comes to planning online lessons is, it's initially kind of a mind shift because all

of us think immediately we think of a classroom we think of the physical environment, our whiteboard, our dry erase board, our desks, the way things are arranged, our students sitting at them, so I always try to think when I explain this to teachers that yes that's your learning environment, but your online courses are also a part of your learning environment, and we need to make sure that we use UDL when we design those spaces as well. So, just as in your physical classroom where you put a station for students to go and grab materials and you make it easy for students navigate to, when you design your online environment you want to make a clear path to get to your resources and any assistive tools, students might need there as well. So that can be reducing the number of clicks it takes to get to the lesson that day. It can be creating a clear image with video showing students this is where I want you to go, this is what you need to know for the day, this is your lesson goal. I was working with special education teachers and making sure that some of our students with significant intensive needs had lessons that really reach out to them and fit what they need to do. It was working with our teachers on that aspect and then brainstorming with them and trying to think of what are some ways that we can use technology and still provide options to students. So, no tech, low tech, high tech options. So specifically, I worked with a group of occupational therapists in our district, sitting down with those teachers using UDL as our talking point really helped both of us speak the same language, because they were very upfront and saying, "We're not super tech savvy. This makes us a little bit nervous." And I was saying, "I don't know a whole lot about your content, so I'm a little nervous about that piece!" And UDL really became that piece that brought us together. We could both see the connections, and I worked with them to design their online courses, and they've been using our learning management system to service their students. There's one example that I saw last week that was so exciting and made me want to be a part of that online class. It was an activity where the students could practice their typing skills because they were working on some fine motor skills, or they could practice drawing letters and shapes in flour or sugar or some other type of material at home. So, I thought that was a really creative way to still provide options to students and not in a super tech heavy way and that's something that I try to teach teachers as well as that UDL is not overloading people with technology. It's providing optimized options and

some of those aren't always online, even though online might be the way we have to deliver it because of e-learning, you can still provide options that are offline.

LOUI: Perfect. Beautiful. Well Brenny, this has been wonderful. It's been packed full of information.

BRENNY: The time really does fly! You we're not kidding when you told me!

LOUI: It does fly! It does! I want to thank you so much for being a guest and I can't wait to talk to you again in the future because I know things are just gonna keep blossoming and we'll probably be coming back and saying what's been changing what's been going on. Thank you for coming on today.

BRENNY: Thank you for this opportunity. It was so exciting to talk and I'm a fan. I've been listening to this podcast for a while, so this was a very exciting day.

LOUI: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you. 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, which is the UDL approach. COMM, forward slash media. Finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 minutes, contact me through the UDL approach, calm, and thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.