

UDL in 15 Minutes with Catherine Hill Transcript

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.

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 Catherine Hill, who's an English teacher at Wellington High School in Wellington, New Zealand. Today Catherine is going to share how she has grown with UDL and how it influenced the design of her distance learning lessons. Hi Catherine, how are you?

CATHERINE: I'm well thank you. And we've just had the exciting news that we're coming out of lockdown in New Zealand and school starts on Monday.

LOUI: Oh, that's so wonderful! Well, congratulations!

CATHERINE: I'm hoping that it will run smoothly from this time on.

LOUI: Yes!

CATHERINE: The move back to school won't see a whole lot of new cases, but it will be lovely to be meeting up with more people than just the three in my house.

LOUI: Yes, I'm sure! Well, I know the world will be watching with positive anticipation. So first off, can you tell us about your background and education?

CATHERINE: Yes, I am someone who came to teaching later. I trained as a teacher when my youngest daughter started school herself. At that time, I had to decide what I do when I grew up. I was in my late thirties and I realized that what I'd done most was teaching at university through an early childhood, a cooperative play center that I'd been involved in. And so I decided to become a teacher at that point. And before that I'd done a lot of study. And I've been teaching now, this is my 15th year of teaching, and I have been at the same school for that whole time.

LOUI: Wow. Oh, that's a wonderful legacy. I bet a lot of people look to you for advice and guidance because of that.

CATHERINE: Yes and no [laughter]. You become part of the furniture, but the fit for me with the school is really strong. My children have both been through the school, and I have had a lot of wonderful opportunities while I've been teaching there so I have been able to keep developing in those 15 years.

LOUI: Oh, that's fabulous. Well can you share some information about Wellington high

school with us?

CATHERINE: So, Wellington High School is a coed school, which in our area is unusual. There are two in Wellington. And we are a school of about 1,200 students and non-uniform, which is another big thing that makes us different in Wellington or New Zealand really. There are a lot of uniform schools. And we are also on the fringe of the Wellington CBD [central business district]

LOUI: So high school there, is it great nine through 12?

CATHERINE: Yes, right. Well for us it's grade nine through to thirteen. So, we, it's five years of secondary school. It's a secondary school.

LOUI: Okay. Okay.

CATHERINE: We're known for being an innovative school, I think. So we had bring your own devices started 10 years ago. And we have also an integrated junior school program so for years nine and 10, the core set with the English, science, maths, and social studies teachers will work together with the same group of students and aim to collaborate, if not integrate in curriculum.

LOUI: And is Wellington an inclusive school for students with disabilities?

CATHERINE: Yes, it is. We have a special needs unit at the school, and we are a magnet school for students with, students are different in lots of needs, but especially students who are dyslexic or have extra learning needs. In our area, we seem to attract a lot of students with greater need.

LOUI: Okay, so we have an obvious purpose to our conversation and that's about UDL. So, what steps have you taken with your own learning about UDL? How did you get started?

CATHERINE: Well I got started with UDL in a very informal way. I have a friend, Lynne Silcock who works for CORE Education, which is a professional development provider in Wellington, though they provide professional development across New Zealand. And she's been working with UDL for a while, but has been out of a classroom for a long time (she was a teacher), so she asked if she could come and have a look at my classes. And then through my discussion with her, I became really interested in UDL and I was able to share my interest with other teachers at my school, so there was a sort of informal take up of UDL that made some difference to the school. And when I'm thinking about the longevity of those differences, some of them stood us in good stead for the online platform of teaching over the last seven weeks, but my interest in UDL is more a personal one than a school wide initiative.

LOUI: So you mentioned that some of those things put you in a good place for what became emergency distance learning for most of us. So, what are some of those things

that really stuck out?

CATHERINE: So, we've been a BYOD school for ten years, and one of the first things, that really obvious thing, that Lynne noticed at our school was that teachers were offering different ways into our Google, which is what we were using, Google Classroom or Google Docs, and students are really having to get their head around so many different ways of organizing themselves from different teachers. And one of the just is such a simple but a major thing that made the information we're sharing with students more accessible was just in our teams to have the same platform, the same way and for all those students in all these subjects. And then I think the whole school has adopted that as we've gone into the emergency distance learning, and Google Classroom has been our point of entry and all the teachers are sharing their work through Google classroom, but this is something that the school has been doing in smaller groups for maybe the last five or six years. That's one of the things. Another one is because we're making more of the devices that students have had. So really making sure that all our students know that there are facilities for recording their voices for text to speech on Google Docs that they have access to. So, one of the things that I do, fortunately, at the beginning of the year, is some sort of playful activities around text to speech, and students recording themselves with my junior classes as they've come into the school, so that everyone knows that that's available to them. And it doesn't matter who they are, it's I'm not just stating that for the ones I think will need it. Because, over the last five years I've realized that often the students who use the technology are not the ones that I might have initially expected would.

LOUI: Yeah, I would absolutely agree with that one! That is a, that's a worldwide phenomenon! Fabulous! So, it does sound like much of this flipped over into what you were using during the emergency distance learning. But then, what are some other ways that you've been using the framework to design your online lessons?

CATHERINE: So, one of the main things for me has been being aware that students are spending a lot of time in front of a screen. So, offering lots of different ways of showing learning. And I've had some really wonderful drawings that students have done, and then they've just taken a photo of it and shared it with me. And I did think about the teaching I was doing as well. I was lucky, I suppose, with my junior class that I had been looking at how writing can help you visualize a scene. And we'd been reading passages about our local area. These students have just started secondary school. So, we had been doing a place-based unit around the area that the school is on and looking at descriptions of their to writing, and then being able to present that visually, and vice versa, has been a lovely way to develop different ways of showing, learning, over this time.

LOUI: Fabulous. So many times, when we think about expression and communication (there in action & expression) because we're in the brick and mortar setting, so many people are pushed towards the technology end but you're saying that you flipped that. You came back into the pen and paper type variety and of course using technology to take a picture of it but giving your students that time away from the screen which I agree

is really beneficial. I think we all need that don't we?

CATHERINE: Right, and it was interesting how many students picked that up. I had some beautiful artworks done, but generally the students enjoyed the writing, and so I had also a lot of poetry and some more sort of diary entries that students did. They were showing their thoughts about the soldiers from New Zealand who had fought in wars overseas, because we had a Anzac Day, which is an a memorial. My biggest learning over this time, and I've just loved it, is Loom, which is just a way of me videoing myself as I'm teaching with a slideshow or a document in front of me. And we read some poetry and I was able to look at that poetry on a Google hangout with the students and we discussed it and I got their ideas, but after that time, I sat down and I recorded myself talking about the ideas of the poetry or unpacking, I suppose, the poetry to make it more easily understood. And I uploaded that onto Google Classroom. Because we're aware that some of the students aren't able to be online at the times that I'm giving classes. They've got other siblings at home who require the device the computer or maybe they just have other requirements from their family at that time. So, making learning available to students who aren't able to be there, synchronously, and these are new words that I've learned asynchronous and synchronous...[laughter]

LOUI: Yes! [laughter]

CATHERINE: and I really hope that that's something that I can take back into my teaching when I'm at school from next week.

LOUI: Oh, wow, that's just amazing. So, earlier you had talked about how there's been an informal spread of universal design for learning in your building. And then you've had a little bit of a hand in that. But are there plans are there thoughts of how you might make that spread a little bit more formalized?

CATHERINE: We've just become part of a community of learning with five primary schools in our area, and an intermediate school which is for eleven and twelve year olds, and we're not sure how that would fit with grades, for us it's years seven and eight. And we've been sharing the teaching we're doing, and how we're managing teaching online across all those different ages, but we also have three challenges, and one of them is including inclusive learning. Another one is wellbeing, and the third one is more of a future focus. And I've been trying to get my head around, what is the way forward for schools with all different needs. And we have the lack of having Chrissy Butler from CORE education working alongside us. And I'm thinking that offering across the schools more formal UDL training may well be a good approach for us.

LOUI: Wonderful. Well, we have definitely bumped up against our 15 minutes. It always goes so quickly but I want to thank you so much. This has been really rich, sharing, and it's been wonderful to hear how you've grown with it and how you guys are going to take some, some steps forward with UDL! And, and congratulations again on the opportunity to go back to face to face teaching, that's very exciting!

CATHERINE: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to share.

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. 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.