

UDL in 15 Minutes
Brett Boezeman and Kaity Day
Transcript

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. This episode is part of a special series about UDL implementation at Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation in Columbus, Indiana.

Today I'm talking with Kaity Day, the Principal of Schmitt Elementary and Brett Boezeman, Director of Operations. Today, Kaity and Brett are going to share the journey Schmitt Elementary staff have taken with UDL and how they've included students with more significant disabilities into the general education environment. Welcome Brett and Kaity!

BRETT: Hi Loui.

KAITY: Thank you! Thanks for having us.

LOUI: Oh, you're so welcome. So, before we get started talking about Schmitt can you each share a bit about your background in education and how you came about to learn about UDL.

BRETT: I'll start, Loui. So, I was the principal at Schmitt Elementary for 6 years. A wonderful experience that I had there and working backwards through my professional timeline. I was an assistant principal at a middle school in Columbus for 4 years prior to that and had come from Indianapolis before that in a couple different roles. I was an elementary school teacher, primarily focusing on math and science. And my first real job in life, so to speak, was a computer science teacher at a middle school at a large urban district in Indianapolis. So, my first exposure to UDL formally was when I came to BCSC in Columbus in about 2008 so I had the unique opportunity to kind of walk into that at the entry level with many other professionals in BCSC around that time. And it really had a great opportunity to learn and grow alongside of hundreds of other educators here in BCSC.

LOUI: Awesome! Thank you. So, anybody who's listened to this podcast for a while knows that I worked there at BCSC. We walked in the door the same year. I didn't realize that. That's so cool.

BRETT: Yeah, I think you're right. I think we did.

LOUI: Yeah! All right, Katie let's hear from you.

KAITY: Yes, hello I am Katie Day. My route to where I am now is a little bit different than Dr. Boezeman's. I started as a student in BCSC, then a student teacher. Went to IU and

then came back as a teacher. And taught at 3 different buildings, anywhere from k through 6. I taught kindergarten, third, fourth, and sixth and then came back to Schmitt. Schmitt was actually the school I taught at my very first year and then I was lucky enough to come back to Schmitt and work with Brett as an assistant principal for 4 years. And then this is my fifth year as principal at Schmitt so I've experienced UDL as a teacher and as an administrator. That's just been really cool and unique.

LOUI: Well, I mean like student and student teacher and teacher. That's you've got the whole package. It's awesome.

KAITY: Yes, yes.

LOUI: Well then, you're the perfect 1 to ask, can you give an overview of Schmitt's demographics?

KAITY: Absolutely, so we are a title one school. We service most of the downtown area of Columbus and we have about 650 students pre-k through sixth grade. 32% of our student population are students of color and we have about 70% of our students who are economically disadvantaged. About 11% English as a Language Learners, and about 18% of our student population are students with disabilities that get serviced with an IEP. So, we are a beautiful collection of many, many different students and families and backgrounds and kind of what makes us special here at Schmitt too. Previous to this year we were 2 schools in the county that serviced students with moderate to severe disabilities in our life skills programs. So that's something that kind of is unique about Schmitt's history in the last couple of years. We've expanded that to 4 different schools in the county this year, but that kind of made our experience unique as well.

LOUI: Thank you so much. It's a great background for everybody in the context. So, while my podcast overall focuses on the application of UDL I've asked the educators across BCSC to talk about how the framework has been used to include students with more significant disabilities. I just wanted to have a series on this because we know that the framework benefits all learners and we mean all. But there are a lot of educators and families and stakeholders that just don't fully understand the potential for and benefits of including students with significant disabilities in the general education setting. So, I'm turning to you guys and others to help tell this part of BCSC's UDL story. So, with that premise Brett, let's start with you. When were you the principal of Schmitt? I know you kind of told us that but, where was the building within their UDL journey?

BRETT: So, I started as a principal at Schmitt in 2012 and the building in the district was still at an introductory level at that point. So, it was interesting as I mentioned earlier, we had a chance to walk together through that journey as a building. So, when I was at Schmitt it was loaded with good teachers and still is today and it's a great opportunity. I mean, you know, it was full of teachers that wanted and really yearned for the best for kids and as Katie mentioned in her demographic overview, we had and still have a wide variety. A wide range of learners there identified disabilities or not. So, it's not uncommon in Schmitt to have students who are high ability high performing in the same

classroom with students who may have significant cognitive disabilities and anywhere in between so our teachers there were really interested in trying to teach in a way that would reach all of these kids in all of these ranges. And UDL was the framework in order to do that. So, we started very slowly walking through UDL and looking at individual principles and understanding what that looks like. And you know, taking small bites of the Apple in sections over the course of a semester or a year rather than trying to fool ourselves and becoming experts on the entire framework within a school year. But the catalyst was really our ability to use the framework, work slowly through it, and be able to have purposeful conversations within the lens of designing lessons to the margins to reach everybody. Rather than trying to come up with individual things for individual kids based on what their abilities or disabilities were.

LOUI: A powerful thing that you said in that was that you guys had purposeful conversations and so it sounds like it just wasn't training after training after training and maybe you were getting workshops and assistants there but having those purposeful conversations. Can you just give a little tiny bit of an example of something like that to just help people understand what does that mean?

BRETT: Well, it took me about three months to realize that I need to shut up and get out of the way with some of these folks. Because like we said, we had and still do have really talented teachers in that school so we would, as I mentioned, we would we would take 1 area, 1 principle of, of the guidelines and talk about it at a staff meeting for you know, five or eight minutes as a large group and then be able to share. Okay, what does this mean to you? What does it look like in a classroom? What could it look like in your classroom? And share those experiences and conversations around the table of a grade level or however were divided up at the time. And then follow up with some visits of colleagues visiting other classrooms. I would cover a class. Katie would cover a class. Whatever we have to do to get people in spaces. And we would have a large conversation about whatever it is that we're covering at the time, but really allow people to explore that develop that, ask questions, learn from each other, or reach out to other neighboring schools.

LOUI: Lovely. That's awesome. Thank you. And then Katie you came in as the assistant principal in 2014. Became the principal in 2018. So, then what's that journey looked like since then?

KAITY: Yeah, so I'm so glad Brett mentioned the instructional round piece towards the end of his answer. Another way our teachers just show how willing they are to learn and do better for kids. I mean they are always opening up their classrooms so that their colleagues, their teammates, and other schools can come in and learn from them and their instructional practices. And we still do that today. So, I think at first, I mean Brett opened the door at the end of his time here with teaching to a wide range of learners. And then we took off. You know it's been kind of challenging just with the last few years in education and training new teachers. But we've had all of our teachers on board to learn new ways we started looking specifically at the environment, and the physical environment first. But then in instructional barriers that we saw that we could eliminate

that really would help all students, lots of students, but specifically students with disabilities as well. So, we took off, that was the cool part about me following in Brett's footsteps although they were large, we had planned those professional developments, those staff meetings together and I knew where the building needed to go next. So, we kind of hit the ground running and again, kind of what he said we did several years ago. We still do our staff meetings that are 99% professional development, but a lot of that is teacher driven and teacher conversations and practical ways to focus on these guidelines in the classroom

LOUI: Yeah, I love conversations that we have about instructional barriers and kind of introducing that concept and getting teachers to think about that. When it came to including students with significant disabilities people often place the barrier in the student rather than in the environment. So, I'm just curious if you can recall any kind of conversations or training or instruction that was provided to teachers to help them make that shift and understand that that barrier is in the environment.

KAITY: Yeah, so that was kind of a collaborative process between our instructional coaches. We have had 2 of the best instructional coaches for the last several years, but really collaborating with our gen ed teachers, our specials teachers, our special education teachers. Um Louis sorry you have to repeat your question. So, one way we made that mindset shift was just to start looking at what specific things can we address, what's our lowest hanging fruit that we can address that would be great for any kid. One example, when we went to 1 to 1 Chromebooks, offering multiple ways to hear the text from the story that we're reading. So, you didn't have to have an IEP to be able to listen to a text read out loud to you. So, we started very small with just very little you know strategies and then that kind of snowballed and so now really when we are planning lessons and we're sitting down and developing pacing guys as teams we are considering all of those things first. It just becomes the first thing we think about which is really, really cool to see and is the best for kids.

LOUI: Yeah, that's awesome. That's Awesome. So, I'm bumping up against time but I really want to answer this question, so this podcast might just go a little bit longer because we know that like teaching in education, it's just never a straight road. There's bumps and barriers and I'm just curious of what kind of bumps or barriers your staff faced, specific to including students with more significant disabilities and then what was put in place to support the teachers. So, either of you can toss in.

KAITY: I just can't say enough, I mean, what Brett said he stole my line earlier actually, because my staff, they don't stop learning. Like I have the best set of teachers. I have new teachers. I have teachers who have taught 8, 10, 12 years but I have a lot of veteran teachers. They are reading things. They're learning themselves or sending me book links all the time so that they can have side book studies. We have teachers who are willing to learn which is the best. So, we've had tons of bumps along the road but they are always willing to ask for help and ask for more strategies. We have a great system in place that I jump into classrooms, our coaches jump into classrooms just to gather thoughts and put another extra set of eyes out there to find instructional practices

that work for all kids. So, we've had lots of bumps and it's not been a straight path. For sure. Um, but I think it's been so helpful that we have that collaborative mentality that we're all in this together and if my teacher across the hall doesn't know how to fix something we have someone in the building that is willing to help.

LOUI: Yeah, so and I completely agree that you've got a strong, strong staff and I love that both of you recognize that, but we also need to flip this and see both of you as leaders. So, Katie, what you have created or continued is that you've got an environment of learning because if you've got teachers who are eager to learn that means you've created an environment of learning. So, I just want any you know building leaders that are listening to take that. And then also you talked about that collaborative mentality. So that's an environment that you've created because you've got a collaborative school. You've got an environment where teachers do want to work with one another. They trust one another to learn from one another. That's huge and that takes leadership. So, I'm going to thank you for that and thank Brett for it too. And so, I know Brett had something to share also.

BRETT: In 30 seconds or less I'll expand on that and you've mentioned earlier Loui the environment. When we started on instructional rounds, we would make observations visits and observations of the environment only in the classroom. And through the lens of whatever. But in this case including those with motor or significant disabilities. So, are there any barriers, physical barriers, things in the classroom that could be modified or removed in order to make this more inclusive to whomever? And it was a little bit easier that way because you know that's different than, it's a little less obtrusive than coming in and having teachers evaluate teachers in their teaching. Nobody wants their baby to be called ugly so we would start with that and look at the actual learning space to get people comfortable giving feedback and bouncing ideas and visiting others and then that led into more deeper conversations down the road obviously.

LOUI: Awesome! So again, that's an example of that's a leadership choice and you chose to scaffold this and look for ways to make it approachable. Like you said nobody wants their baby called ugly. But you found a way to look at that physical, which is an entree to talking about UDL anyway because of universal design. So great examples. Thank you so much. Okay, thank you both for agreeing to talk with me. BCSC is so special to me and I'm really honored to be able to tell this part of your journey and just spread more about BCSC around the world. So, thank you both very much.

BRETT: Thanks Loui.

KAITY: Absolutely.

LOUI: You're very 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 theudlroach.com/podcasts. And finally, if you have a story to share about UDL implementation for UDL in 15 minutes contact me through theudlproach.com. And

thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.