UDL in 15 Minutes

With Shannon Schultz

Audio transcription

[The UDL in 15 Minutes logo followed by a photo of Shannon, her husband, and two grown sons in their red and black pajamas and robes for a Christmas photo]

LOUI: Hi everyone. This episode is part of a series with educators from the Fond du Lac School District in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. I've interviewed educators across administration, building coaches, and the classroom to help you gain some insights on the roles educators have when a district is implementing UDL. Enjoy!

[Introduction music]

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 Shannon Schultz, who's a special education instructional coach in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Today, Shannon is going to talk about the district's UDL Readiness Rubric and the use of data in classrooms. Hi Shannon, it's good to see you.

SHANNON: Hi, thank you for having me.

LOUI: So first off, can you tell us about your education and teaching background? [The Fond du Lac homepage with kindergarten children listening to a story]

SHANNON: Sure. I just completed my 23rd year and as an educator…

LOUI: Wow!

SHANNON… I've spent 14 of those years in the special education, integrated type teacher position, and then moved into the instructional coaching capacity in 2011.

Initially when I moved into that instructional coaching capacity, we were assigned as coaches based on, I would say areas of specialties. So, my quote "area of specialty" was autism. So, I supported teachers who served our students identified with autism. As time went on, we morphed into cross categorical roles, and more inclusive roles. So, I became known as what's now a special education instructional coach with my emphasis really being on UDL.

LOUI: Nice, nice. So, when I talked with Katie Moder, she mentioned that the district's readiness rubric, focused on UDL. And I'd love it if you could give some background to that rubric like how and why that was created. [A digital poster sharing the basics of UDL in a colorful way]

SHANNON: Sure. So, to give you a very brief background on how did we even get this UDL stuff in Fond du Lac, it was back in the spring of 2016. Two members from CAST organization came to Wisconsin and trained the 20 largest school districts are members from the 20 largest school districts on UDL. Originally Fond du Lac did not make the cut so to speak, as we were not one of the largest 20 districts within the state. However, due to a community not being ready to commit, we then got to enter into that training, which has taken us through this time today. So originally, as I said, we were two of us from our district were trained by two CAST members. And at that time, it was our responsibility to bring back our learning to our district level coaching team, and administrators for the curriculum and the people services departments. From there, we participated in Wisconsin's Department of Public Instructions, what they call trials. So, if you implement UDL, you have a starting point, you implement, then how did your students end. And we progressed in this way for I would say the first two school years

that we were working on the grant work of UDL implementation. [The Fond du Lac Readiness Rubric] And about, well, it was in the spring, then of 2017 we thought to ourselves, "Okay. How can we streamline this? How can we make decisions that are just, oh, I think that school A will be great to work with our work on UDL implementation?" So, instead of just making decisions that were just gut-based decisions I would say, we created what we call our UDL Readiness Rubric. And on that rubric, we have four categories. We have the category of principals' support. Then what we have is listed, evidence of their commitment, such as, are they willing to designate professional development time out side of the school day? Will they participate in that professional development with their staff? Will they designate their PLC time and PLC meaning Professional Learning Community, some schools may call it grade level collaboration? Are the principals willing to designate that PLC time to reviewing their data, discussing their instruction, and as well as students Response to Instruction? And, how are they willing to hold their staff accountable for this implementation? So, from there then we broke that into, okay, Four points would indicate all four commitments are in place, three points, three, two, and then one. Fine, then we have the next category would be what we would describe as teacher support. And again, we described what commitments by the teachers of the buildings. So, one commitment would be our general education teachers believe that an inclusive environment is what is best for all students. Another commitment, would be our special education teachers believe that an inclusive environment is what is best for all students. Another would be teachers understand that a one size fits all lesson plan is not an option in 21st century classrooms. And then finally, teachers are willing to explore and implement new

strategies to support student learning. And again, we just, we made those, the scale being okay all four commitments are in place, three, two and one. We then wanted to look at teacher retention. In Wisconsin, in 2011, we saw a shift in our state level educational policy, which, since 2011 has led to a declining number of teachers, meaning, students who are going into college to become teachers as well as teachers who are leaving the profession. So, one of the things we wanted to make sure, when we were looking at this Readiness Rubric is, does a particular school have, and then again, we broke it down into the four quadrants, four points, three, two and 90-100% of their teachers are returning teachers. Then the three-point category would be 80 to 89. Our concern was, is that if a building has been undergoing staff turnover that, that lends itself to issues in which they would not be able to take on this new learning so we felt that was important as indicated in the rubric. And then finally, we have what we describe as other building initiatives. I can definitely describe this further as we talk about professional development. We want to make sure that staff understand that UDL isn't one more thing that they're adding to their plate. We want them to see that it's really, it's about a framework that brings all of the great things that they're doing, but it brings UDL to the forefront so then they're mindful planning around those barriers to student achievement, and addressing them, so that when those students enter that classroom, "Oh, the barriers have been removed and we can move forward with high student engagement and student learning." Some of our schools, for example, maybe had been participating in trauma sensitive training. Other schools were involved in other initiatives so we wanted to make sure that when we worked with a school, that UDL was their priority. So that they could move forward with that professional development and

working with the instructional coaching team to grow that knowledge and skills and implementation. [A digital poster with You're invited to 3 Things Thursday as a bite-sized PD offering]

LOUI: Nice. First of all, really love the fact that in the course of speaking with several people now from Fond du Lac every single one of you have said UDL isn't one more thing. This is definitely a theme that you all have said and I think it's wonderful because that is the message that those of us who are passionate about UDL and are helping to spread that message talk about. It's a framework. Everything fits with and connects to UDL and then with other with other structures and frameworks and features so that's just so key and so important. I absolutely love this Readiness Rubric and how you all thought through the principal's supports, teachers support, teacher retention, because that is so key, and then those other building initiatives and recognizing that there has to be that conscious connection. That's so absolutely so valuable. So I know that you constructed this rubric from experiences, and also you have some experiences that came from using the rubric, could you talk about both of those?

SHANNON: Sure. So, I would say that prior to using the rubric, as I as I shared, we were making decisions on, on instructional coach collaboration with a building, with a principal, based on, I guess what I would describe as, "Oh, do you have a good relationship with this staff or this principal?" And, "Yeah, I do. I think this will be great!" But we weren't really looking into all four of those pieces. And what we found then is that when we didn't look at all four of those pieces, our implementation just didn't go as well as, as it could have. And I, so I would describe that as our own learning curve that over time since we began this implementation to where we are at present, we've

improved so much by just being more clear with, "Yes you are ready." Or "No, you might want to have what we call a sprinkling maybe being okay your instructional coaches will provide just a very brief overview of UDL before we take that deeper dive into what UDL actually is." [Four teachers seated on the floor in discussion] And so, I guess I would say that the rubric has really helped to clarify with all stakeholders whether, again the principal, the staff, even us as coaches, this is what this really means and entails. As we began using the rubric and as we worked through the implementation process, one success story, and I would describe that as being during the 2019-2020 school year, pre COVID, we had began working with Chegwin School, and they had met the criteria on the rubric, their principal was on board, staff was on board. We had monthly professional development. We were highly invested within their grade level PLCs. Things went amazing until March of 2020 when we were all sent home. So, what did we learn from that? Well, we learned we don't like living through a pandemic. What we also learned is that, okay, we knew we had unfinished business. We had this great pathway. We were working and, and growing as edge as an educational community at check one school, so we knew we had to pick up where we left off. So, what we did that is then when 2020 2021 when that new school year arrived, we re-committed ourselves with that school with that leadership with that staff to pick up where we left off, reviewing beginning in September and again, working through those PD sessions each month. Of course, the 2020-2021 school year dealt us a number of challenges as related to the pandemic; however, we found that by implementing UDL the previous school year and then continuing our work during that 20 2021 school year, our staff felt so much more confident in their ability to navigate a hybrid learning environment in which some

students were physically at school while some students were at home, to a full transition back in which all of our students returned to our schools in February of 2021. And again, to have that background with UDL the previous school year, and then pick up knowing COVID dealt us something the world wasn't prepared for, and we learned how valuable UDL is, and it taught us to, this isn't a one year and done deal, you really have to be committed year after year. Yes, a school may not need as much of us, us being the coaches, as a first-year implementation school; however, we can't just leave a school, check it off and you're done. We are still committed we are still looking at our grade level team meetings with the database lens we are still providing those options for our professional development outside of the school day, etc. [Four teachers seated around a table with laptops open and discussing the application of the UDL guidelines]

LOUI: Well, I love that you just said database lens, because that's really good segue for my question! So with the database question that I have, I know that you collect data at the classroom and school and district level, but can you talk a little bit about the classroom level, and how those data are used in relation to this UDL framework work that you're doing.

SHANNON: Absolutely. So, each of our schools have what we call our PLC time. So, we have committed as a district to engaging in grade level, collaboration, each week. So, one day of the week it is focused on literacy and another day it is focused on math. So, each grade level team consists of the general education, the classroom teachers, as well as any special educators or teachers of English language learners, or any other specialists that might be invested with students at that grade level. So, each of the grade level teams meet, like I said once a week, once for literacy and once for math.

During those meetings, a team leader at the grade level, facilitates the discussion based on Rick DuFour's PLC questions. One, what do we want our students to know? So, during that portion of the discussion, we talk about where we are within the math unit and or the literacy unit of study. Okay, so one, what do we want our students to learn? We identify the standard that we're going to focus on within that weekly timeframe okay during this week, we will work on the standard of identifying character traits. Okay, then we talk about DuFour's question number two, how will we know they know? So, we talked about, okay, we know we want our students to be proficient at this standard. Ultimately, how are we going to measure that? And this is where our UDL implementation work has really helped us to grow as we measure our students learning. In the past we might have said, "Okay, here's a piece of paper and a pencil and, and write down everything you know about this character from this story." No, we now know that some kids if you stick a pencil and paper in front of them, they might look at you with doing this "I'm not doing this," type of look. So, our UDL implementation with this, with schools and those particular educators that allows us to see that, you know what, there is more than one way to measure whether a student knows what we want them to know. So our common formative assessments have morphed from simply paper pencil to, to kids recording on a Flipgrid, from kids who are, who enjoy drawing to they may create an illustration, and then share with their teacher. "Oh, I drew this because I wanted you to see that the character is such, in such a way." Okay, so once again that first question being, what do we want our students to know? The second being, how will we know if they know? Third, what do we do if they don't know? Okay, now that's a little bit on the, on the reactive side we might think; however, our reality is that we may not

get 100% proficient on that first try. So, what we come back to the table and say okay, each of those classroom teachers would indicate okay, I had X number of X percent of students who were proficient. Oh, this percent, we might describe them as a proficiency of two. Their approaching it they just still need that little bit of teacher support. And then this number or this percent of students are at a proficiency level of a level one, meaning they need a lot of teacher support yet. So again, the creativity that teachers bring to the table when they've worked and learned and understand UDL allows us to say, "Have you thought about trying this? Have you tried thought about trying that?" So, we can then, even though it may seem reactive, like I said that's a reality is not everyone achieves that proficiency level that we might want on the first try. So, we can then say, "Oh, but I tried this, why don't you try that?"

LOUI: Well, that's how formative is defined right it's iterative, right?

SHANNON Right!

LOUI: You guys are living it! It's perfect!

SHANNON: Yes, and then that fourth question and boy, as this as a special educator, this has been a learning curve for me. What are we doing for our students who already know. And the beautiful thing when you have this grade level or this team-based collaboration is, we can then take a look at those who have established that proficiency level that we want and maybe are progressing beyond. Okay, so what's the next step that we might want to take those little friends to? So again, it's having been trained in UDL it's that those staff, those teachers, those specialists that are able to bring all that background knowledge that they have to work together collaboratively for all kids. [A

collection of five pictures, four showing teachers learning together and one is a word cloud of their thoughts about their impressions of the UDL guidelines]

LOUI: Oh, this is brilliant. I really appreciate how you have used the Rick DuFour questions and intertwined UDL in that conversation. And thank you for expressing that so clearly about how you've linked those two together, because you've got four great questions that have helped probably millions of PLC teams over the years, but then you all are using the framework to even dig deeper into how you're going to respond to those answers that you're digging up by asking those questions and how you're going to respond via instructionally, so it's just brilliant. It's brilliant. [A close-up selfie of Shannon with her youngest son followed by video captures of www.theudlapproach.com followed by the UDL in 15 Minutes logo] Well, we have definitely hit our 15 minutes. It is so good. This has been so great Shannon, thank you so much!

SHANNON: I want to keep going!

LOUI: I know! I know!

SHANNON: No, I'm just kidding

LOUI: I think it's great and I would love to keep going with you too, but, but we'll stop here for our listeners' pleasure! But we might be coming back again, so I want to thank you! Really, I just really want to express my thanks to when I reached out and you said yes. Thank you.

SHANNON: Thank you for the opportunity to share what the Fond du Lac Schools are doing, because we are really excited and we're proud of our work and, and we love to share it with others.

LOUI: Wonderful, wonderful. 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 www.theUDLapproach.com/podcasts. 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.