UDL in 15 Minutes

With Kim Potter including audio descriptions

[The UDL in 15 Minutes logo followed by a headshot of Kim who is a white woman with shoulder length blond hair]

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 Kim Potter who is a middle school reading teacher at Newport Middle School in Newport, Pennsylvania. Today Kim is going to talk about how she lowered barriers for one student and how she invited other students to use those same supports. Hi, Kim, how are you?

KIM: Hi Loui. I'm excited to chat with you about UDL today!

LOUI: Oh, that's awesome. Thank you so much. Thanks. Hey, so first off, could you give us a little bit about your education teaching background? A little bit about your school?

KIM: Yes. I sure could! So, I received a degree in elementary education from Penn State and my Master's in reading education and my reading specialist certification from Bloomsburg University. Bloomsburg was really instrumental in shaping my beliefs as a reading teacher. I had a great experience and great professors there. And then later, I got my principal certification from Edinboro University. So, I've been teaching for 29 years in the same small Pennsylvania school. So, we're kind of a rural close-knit community. Our students are some of the best out there anywhere. They make coming to work every single day a joy for me.

LOUI: That's so awesome. So, I think you're gonna tell us a bit about the school too, right? [A screenshot of a Google map showing the 143 mile distance between Newport and Philadelphia]

KIM: Yes, I can. So, we have a high percentage, about 50 to 60% of our families are economically disadvantaged. We have a lot of kids, especially recently who are transient, moving around coming in and out of cyber school and back and forth. And we lately have had an increase in some chronically absent kiddos. So that's something that concerns me. A barrier that we're looking at trying to eliminate. So, I've been teaching sixth and seventh grade in a middle school for nine years. I found that middle school is my passion. I love teaching in the middle school. [A screenshot of the Newport District's homepage with an overhead shot of the school building] Prior to that, I did a bit of a stint as a literacy coach working with teachers in our district trying to improve Tier one instruction. That was not really my cup of tea. I worked as a Title I reading specialist in a targeted assistance reading program in grades K to three where we did pull out and push in with kids that needed extra help in reading, and my first teaching experience was as a first-grade teacher. So, I've really kind of made it from the beginning to to the middle here. I feel like I feel like I found my niche in middle school.

LOUI: Oh, that's so awesome. Well, there we are. I touch my heart with yours. Middle School, it rocks. I love that. So how did you get started with UDL then? [A screenshot of the Capital Area Intermediate Unit's homepage with 9 students of varying ethnicities standing with arms around each other's shoulders]

KIM: Well, I got started with UDL in coordination with training that was offered by our intermediate unit. I was immediately drawn to it. I feel like I'm kind of at the beginning of

my UDL journey, so to speak, but it's a mindset that really makes a lot of sense to me and that kind of meshes really well with my way of thinking. In the fall of 2020, our school was operating in person. A lot of the schools around us were operating virtually at that time because of COVID. So, I was fortunate to get a whole team of consultants from the IU kind of to be my special help group. So, that was kind of one positive for me that came out of COVID. Since we were the only school doing in-person instruction, I was able to garner a lot of their attention that school year to kind of get me going. So, they've been really instrumental. And helping me adopt a UDL mindset and incorporate UDL-aligned strategies into my instruction. I feel like I really have a great partnership with them. I'm doing a book club with them right now. They kind of send opportunities my way and continue to help me on my journey.

LOUI: Awesome.

KIM: So, that's really good. Well, I know you're going to share that story about lowering barriers for one of the learners, but you actually have something else that really intrigued me because you talked about how you have a time intensive curriculum that you're required to use and so that's kind of two barriers that you that you're working with. So, maybe let's start with the curriculum part so people can understand that piece. [A picture over the head of J showing his tablet screen and him using the text to speech reader]

KIM: Okay, yes. So, we have an online curriculum called Amplify ELA. It's not really bad I wouldn't say in its own right, but it was chosen with no input from teachers or reading specialists. And it really hasn't been ideal for our situation. We have 40-minute class periods. The lessons in it are intended to take 60 to 90 minutes, so even if we work

nonstop to cover all the standards we should cover, it's necessary to do four units. Even if we work nonstop, we're only able to complete three. So, it's really been a struggle. The social studies teachers have picked up some of our reading standards that we miss in that fourth unit. And we're really crunched for time. Also, in Amplify, because it's an online curriculum, every activity is tied to the others and so the kids will do something one day and then it'll pop up several lessons later, which makes it hard to eliminate things out of the curriculum. Students kind of have to do the work within the platform, or it gets kind of lost in the shuffle. So, giving kids alternate ways to do their work becomes a challenge. So, it's just it's been kind of hard with that curriculum to find ways to offer choice to my kids.

LOUI: Yeah, so this is gonna be so awesome for you to share. Because now you are going to talk about how you've lowered some barriers within that complex situation but then, you know, needing to meet the needs of that one student and how this expanded, so I'm excited to hear the story. Let's go!

KIM: All right. [A picture of the goals for the lesson written with "I can" statements] So, maybe just a quick little bit more background, and then I can jump into the story about that student. So, when I first started thinking about UDL and kind of working within that mindset, one of the first things we did was create student friendly goals based on the standards that go al ong with my lessons. And when I first started using those goals, one of the things I did was look for barriers to my students' success, which was what led me to this particular student. And I would say this story was one of my kind of a-ha moments that really showed me that UDL can work even in the framework that I'm dealing with. [A closer picture over the head of J showing him looking at his screen and

using the text to speech reader] So, I'm gonna call the student just J. That's his first initial just for confidentiality reasons here. But as I was learning about UDL and had J for the second year in a row, I have some students for both sixth and seventh grade, which is really nice for me I can get to know them very well. In sixth grade, J was very often absent from school. When he was in school, he was not very engaged. He had poor self-esteem, a severe lack of confidence. He had very poor grades across the board. Every time he had to do any kind of work independently, he would raise his hand for help, or he would just sit there and kind of zone out and fail to do his work. We had tried a lot of different things with him in sixth grade, but because he was absent so often and then COVID hit and we were all virtual for the second half of the school year, it just wasn't a good year for him. In seventh grade, when he came back to school, he was really trying to turn over a new leaf and get himself off to a better start. And at that point, my UDL mindset was just kind of starting to kick in as well. So, I looked at him and thought now here is a student that's really facing some severe barriers. And what could we do for him to try to find ways within the constraints of the curriculum we had to deal with, to make things more accessible. So that was kind of the groundwork to what was going on. We had started with J using speech to text extension towards the end of sixth grade to varying degrees of success. We often had to read to him in order for him to do work independently. He was decoding at a second to third grade level sitting in seventh grade. So, it was a big barrier to him to have to read our text. He told us that sometimes he would just fake read because it was embarrassing to always raise his hand and ask for help. He didn't like having us read to him in front of his classmates. Because our entire curriculum is online, we thought a text reader might give him access to the text

and eliminate some of the embarrassment he felt and always having to ask us for help. So that was our idea to try with J. We noticed that when we read to him, he was able to orally demonstrate actually really high level of comprehension when he could respond orally to our questions. So, we felt like if we could give him access to the text, he would be able to be successful and continue to grow his comprehension. He also is an orally answering questions showed that he had really high command of grade level vocabulary as well. So, so, we tried several different text reader extensions on his computer. He was instrumental in making the decisions. He was working right alongside myself and are the learning support teacher that he works with trying out different text readers and he ended up choosing one that highlighted text as he listened. So, he had tried, I think four or five different ones to settle on the one he liked the best. We helped him find inconspicuous headphones so that his classmates didn't even really realize that he was using the text reader. He could just slip it in and he kind of sat off to the side so that he was kind of out of the way and he was comfortable with using that right in the classroom. So, he is still actually my go to guy actually, just this morning I had a sixth grader that I was talking to about using a text reader and I said, "I have just the guy that can help you figure out how to learn this," and I go to J and he pops straight into my sixth-grade class and he'll work with other students to show them how it works. So, it's been a great confidence builder for him that way, too. So, at the point when he was first starting to use it, we were frequently checking in with him to see how he was doing. We noticed almost an immediate change in his attitude. He was much more engaged in class. He was much more successful at completing his work. He was getting things done a lot faster. Over time, we even noticed that his attendance was improving. He

was advocating for himself in other classes to use his text reader. He was telling us that he was fake reading a lot less in our class in other classes. He seemed more confident his grades improved. It was just an unbelievable change in this kid. And then we started noticing that he was even finding new ways of using the text reader. So, one day he was using his voice to text and he came all excited and he said, "I figured out that I can use the text reader to read my own writing. And when I listened to it helps me be able to make revisions to my writing." So, he was even finding ways to innovate on his use of this text reader, which I think is really cool. So, he was able to complete work that required reading much, much more efficiently and much more successfully. So, it was a pretty cool intervention that he was doing.

LOUI: Awesome!

KIM: Yeah, he even eventually started doing partner work. He would even get it out and show the other kids, "Hey, look what I can do!" He was kind of got to the point where he was eager to even kind of show it off. Which, which was good. I thought.

LOUI: Oh, awesome!

KIM: Yeah. And then a surprising thing happened. We were kind of worrying a little bit about his being able to read. I know in a lot of meetings that I'm in, when we talk about kids using a text reader, people say, "But it's reading class. You're not teaching them to read!" which was a little bit of a concern that we had, but we felt like because his encoding was at such a low level, there was no way he could possibly access our curriculum to grow his comprehension if he had to read this stuff on his own. So, his learning support teacher did progress monitoring on his accuracy and fluency. And we found over a little bit of time, he had kind of been stagnant in those scores. His accuracy

and fluency hadn't really been improving. And once he started to use the text to speech, and this could be completely coincidental, I don't know, but he made a big leap in his accuracy and fluency on his progress monitoring. Could be his confidence. I don't know. But it was exciting. His learning support teacher came running down the hall and she's like, "You're not going to believe this!" It's pretty cool, I think, that he was improving. I don't know if it's from watching the highlighted text or just being more confident, but it was another thing that happened for him. [J showing other students how to use the text to speech reader]

LOUI: Yeah, you know, I think the beauty of this is that, it just like you're saying, you know, we really wish we could parse that apart but this wasn't a research thing. And instead, what we're seeing is a kid that has just blossomed in his capabilities and his own feelings about himself. And just I can see like this glow around this kid in my head. I have no idea what this kid looks like…

KIM: Right!

LOUI: …I just see this glow and it's so exciting! Oh my gosh!

KIM: Yeah And, just how one little thing made such a big difference in him.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah, yea, yeah!

KIM: So, it really was an a-ha that this can work. And so, since then, he's introduced that to a lot of other kids. He's been instrumental in kind of spreading the word about the text reader and how it works. And really showed me that I need to embrace the idea of offering options to all students because it can be such a big difference maker. He's kind of my a-ha kiddo for UDL.

LOUI: Oh, that's just so wonderful! J's the kid that we're all going to look to and think of and be like, "Oh my gosh! This guy!" His accomplishments just really helped shift not only your thinking, but I'm sure a lot of other teachers thinking because of, of his results. Just having that kind of a leap in progress monitoring. I love that part of the story where he realized that he could use that to read his own text and listen to his own writing. And that helped him revise.

KIM: Right!

LOUI: I mean, that's a skill that we teach. We try to teach kids all the way along but a lot of kids don't pick that up till high school or even college where they start to read their stuff out loud. And here he picked it up on his own.

KIM: Right!

LOUI: Oh! There's just nowhere but up for him! This is incredible! What a beautiful story! [A headshot of Kimm Potter followed by video clips of www.theudlapproach.com followed by the UDL in 15 Minutes logo] Well, thank you so much, Kim. We definitely we've hit our 15 minutes I hate it because I can talk to you the longer but this is so wonderful, and I know people are gonna be thrilled to hear this. So, thanks for coming on!

KIM: Yes, thanks for letting me share his story.

LOUI: You're so welcome. So welcome [overtalking]

KIM: It might inspire someone else to give it a go.

LOUI: I certainly hope so! Yes! 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.