

UDL in 15 Minutes with  
Kim Potter and Shana Montgomery

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's a middle school reading teacher in Newport, Pennsylvania, and Shana Montgomery whose an educational consultant with the Capital Area Intermediate Unit. Today, Kim and Shana are going to share what their coaching sessions look like (hint: they don't always meet face-to-face), and how they built that coaching relationship. So, Kim and Shana, it's so great to talk to you. Thanks for being on today!

KIM: Hi Loui. I'm honored to be here to chat.

LOUI: Oh, thanks so much.

SHANA: Hi, Loui. It's great to be here with you guys.

LOUI: Oh, wonderful. Well, thank you to you both. So Kim, I'll start off with you. I'd love to have you share your education and teaching background as well as a bit about your middle school.

KIM: Okay! I have a degree in elementary education grades K to six, a master's in reading education and my reading specialist certification and principal certification grades K to 12 as well. I've taught first grade and now teach sixth and seventh grade reading. I've also worked as a reading specialist in a targeted assistance program in grades K to three. I did a short stint as a literacy coach grades K to 12 working to improve tier one instruction in our district, but found that I prefer to be in the frontlines teaching, got a position in the middle school, which I'm loving.

LOUI: Oh, that's awesome! That's awesome! And then, tell us a little bit about that middle school.

KIM: Okay, so I work at Newport School District in our middle school. I worked in the same small rural school district for all 29 years of my career. Our population here is about 50% economically disadvantaged. We have a lot of transient families and recently students coming in and out of cyber school, which has been a change for us in recent years. We've been fortunate to have in person instruction for most of last school year, but COVID has taken a noticeable toll on our attendance with kids in and out of quarantine and making changes in their schooling that they're attending. And we've seen some children's mental health issues along with that. Our middle school students are grouped by ability for all their core subjects, which is a tremendous disadvantage to our students. And that's one of the barriers I'm going to talk about in our story today.

LOUI: Yeah, okay, so 29 years, that's incredible. And you have this oh my gosh, depth of knowledge about reading and all your qualifications and then that stint as a literacy coach, but also thank you for sharing that you really wanted to be back in that classroom again, the frontlines that's so key! So Shana, can you also share a bit about Capital Area Intermediate Unit?

SHANA: Sure. So, I am a consultant for the Capitol Area Intermediate unit, or CAIU is we like to abbreviate it because it's very long to say, and we are one of 29 Intermediate units in Pennsylvania. So, the state of Pennsylvania is broken up into 29 regional areas, and each regional area has an intermediate unit. And the role of the intermediate unit is really to provide services to the districts in our region. We do a lot of different things. We provide curriculum services, direct students support, we support technology, so we do

lots of things. And my role is to provide training and consultation to teachers and school districts in our region in the area of inclusive practices. And that also includes universal design for learning.

LOUI: Awesome, awesome. And then, were you a teacher before this, then?

SHANA: I was. I was a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing. That's my formal training. So, I was a teacher here at the IU for about 10 years. I went to a separate Intermediate Unit in our state for a couple years and then I came back to IU 15, The Capitol area IU, and I was a teacher of the deaf again, and then I took this position as a consultant working with assistive technology originally, and now I work primarily with inclusive practices.

LOUI: Awesome, awesome. Okay, there's just so much knowledge on this podcast right now. It's very exciting. All right, let's just dive in - the coaching relationship. So most of those are based in districts. So the district has many internal coaches and there's this likelihood of already a relationship people know each other, but that's not how you guys met. And there's a bit of physical distance between you so can you talk about your coaching partnership, how it began, and then what that act of coaching looks like?

SHANA: Sure. So, our coaching partnership actually began about two years ago. It was the 19-20 school year and Kim's district had reached out to the IU for some support and co-teaching so we did some training and co teaching and then my colleague and I, Lisa, we support each of our co-teaching teams individually. So, Kim and her colleague, who's also named Kim, were one of my co-teaching teams. So that's how I met Kim and the year that we started doing co-teaching we were also starting up a series on

Universal Design for Learning which Kim came to. And so that's kind of how we developed our roll with what we're doing now together.

LOUI: Perfect. And like I said, you guys are not physically close to one another. Like the CIAU isn't right next door to Newport, Pennsylvania, it is?

SHANA: Right. So, our main office of the CIO is about 30 minutes from Newport, and then where I live, because I work primarily out of my home, is I live about 45 minutes from the CIAU. So for me to get to Kim on any given day is about an hour to an hour and 15-minute drive.

LOUI: Okay. So, you guys use a lot of technology in your relationship?

SHANA: Yep.

LOUI: Oh, that's awesome. Well, I think we're going to get to that more because you have a specific story that you guys wanted to share and I'd love to just open the door and let you start sharing that that talks about this coaching relationship and and how it's helped you Kim with your implementation of UDL.

KIM: Okay, so I was going to talk about one particular lesson that Shana and I worked together on. So, I had mentioned that my students are ability grouped, which is a barrier I feel for my kids, especially those placed in the lowest ability class, which is the one Shana ends up helping me a lot with the particular class is co-taught. We have an online curriculum that's very time consuming and not very flexible. In each lesson, which each lesson takes about two days' worth of time. The students have a writing activity they write in response to a prompt and must write for 12 minutes. There's a tremendous amount of variability among all my students, but especially that classroom full of students. So, some of them have great ideas for their writing, but struggle to put their

ideas down onto paper. Some of them can't get started, but once they get started can proceed successfully. Some cannot come up with a plan for organizing their ideas. Some don't have any ideas at all for the writing. So, in this particular lesson, the students were asked to write about an emotional experience they've had. They worked to show not tell their emotion. Our lesson goals up until that point had revolved around using descriptive details, sensory details, dialog, things like that. We knew that a group of our students would struggle with this assignment, so I emailed Shana, I always usually email her something like "help" and then ask her what I'm working on. She got right back to me with some ideas of things I might try and we kind of talked about what potential barriers would be. She had suggested using a video to show emotion, to be able to see how emotion looked as a kind of springboard for talking about it. We talked about brainstorming. Had some different ideas. So that's kind of how it goes usually when I'm trying to come up with ways to make my lessons more accessible. I email Shana for help and we go back and forth with each other. Sometimes in a Google Meet, sometimes just by email, sometimes in shared docs, trying to come up with ways to make my lessons more accessible for my students. In the end, I did end up finding a video that showed emotions and then the kids could then guess the emotion and talk about how they guessed the emotion based on what they were seeing. I posted it in Google Classroom and we looked at a few in class. I then left it there for the kids to watch later if they wanted to. I told the kids we would work together to brainstorm some language we might use to write about a time we felt an emotion. I gave the kids the option to go ahead with the writing or to work alone with a partner or in a small group to brainstorm how we might show different emotions in our writing. I told the kids they

could do their brainstorming however they wanted but suggested chart paper, regular paper, online, and a Docker slide or even in video. All the kids ended up participating in the brainstorming. Most worked in pairs and use chart paper, some work done Google Slides, a few worked independently. Shana was then able to actually come into my classroom the next day when we were doing the writing. We shared the brainstorming work the next day in class. Every student was able to write for the entire 12 minutes that day. Most of them were eager to share their writing when they were done, which is not always the case with that group. And they all used at least some showing details in their writing. So that's kind of one example of our teamwork that we do together to instill UDL friendly strategies into my classroom.

LOUI: That's awesome. So, when you guys are talking about these UDL friendly strategies, which I can hear them in there definitely, are you also having conversations like using the language of the framework like okay, how are we going to make sure these kids are engaged all the way through so they can, you know, sustain and maintain that effort and persistence of going through the writing process? Or do you just leave it at the strategy level at this point?

SHANA: I think we've done a little bit of both. I think we've really focused on a lot of different strategies. So we've kind of focused a lot of our conversations and our joint work in the engagement column of the UDL guidelines because we've really worked a lot in the last year on you know, making sure that we have clear goals because the the setup of the curriculum that Kim is using is it's spiraling. So, for each lesson, there's one, two, maybe three primary standards listed. And then there's this giant list of standards that are listed under as like secondary type standards were part of the lesson

might hit part of that standard. So, you know, we've spent a lot of time really teasing out, you know, let's make sure we have clear goals so that we can support that engagement. Let's make sure that the students understand the relevance of it. So we've, we've really focused in that one area of engagement and we've tried to use, those vocabulary that relate to UDL talking about what are the barriers and how can we design around that. So that has been something that has really kind of driven our work together. And it's been nice because since we aren't able to necessarily talk to each other in person or even via video every time, you know, I can type notes, we'd have a shared Google Doc and I might put a comment in and type a note to Kim or I might type something right in the doc and and your questions about that. So having that shared vocabulary has been really helpful.

LOUI: Yeah, yeah. And Kim, something I've reflected on is you have this depth of information in obviously reading and then I'm assuming also with the writing kind of usually pairs together, but you've just been, well brave. And also you've really modeled what it means to be student centered. Because you said, "Look, I recognize that I've got a lot of variability within a group of students that I'm not sure how to reach," and so then you've built this relationship with Shana. What was the first step or impetus that led you to say, "Yes, I want to learn about UDL. Yes. I think this is gonna benefit me even though I have all of this experience. And I really want to make sure that I'm going to reach these kids".

KIM: I think when I first heard about UDL, it kind of hit home with me. When I moved to the middle school after teaching first grade. In first grade, I had 15 students that I had all day long, and I felt like I was really able to meet the needs of my students. Coming to

the middle school and seeing 80 to 100 to 120 kids a day for only 40 minutes a piece, it was one of my biggest struggles, feeling like there was no way that I could meet the needs of all these kids. And UDL kind of gave me a way to look at my environment and what I'm teaching and offering choices and options to all my kids rather than trying to meet the needs of each individual student that I have. So I feel like it was kind of a path that I was on, but really gives me a good way to kind of frame what I'm thinking, if that makes sense.

LOUI: It does and it was brilliantly stated, and I really appreciate that because you stated what a lot of educators struggle with which is moving from the mindset of, "I have to do something different for every single student," versus recognizing that if you plan for that variability across the environment, and say, "Okay, I'm going to provide these options so that the kids can lump where they need to." And yes, we're going to have some significant differentiation at times for kids that have more significant needs, but for the most part, like you did within your writing project, having all those different ways to brainstorm and giving the kids the energy and the time for that process led them so perfectly into the stage where they could write for 12 minutes. That's a long time. That's a long time to write. Oh, this was so great. It was such a wonderful way to spend 15 minutes! I thank you both so much for this! Thank you for coming on the podcast.

SHANA: Thank you, Lou. It was nice to be here. I'm just so glad that I can support Kim and that people can hear her story about how wonderful things are going for her using UDL in her classroom.

KIM: Yeah, thank you. for having us.

LOUI: Oh, you're so you're so, so welcome. Thank you.



LOUI: 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 [www.theUDLapproach.com/podcasts](http://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](http://www.theUDLapproach.com). And thank you to everyone for your work revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to develop expert learners.