

UDL in 15 Minutes  
With Bartola Mavric  
Episode 147 – The 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. Today, I'm talking with Bartola Mavric, the head of student support in the British International School of Istanbul. Bartola is going to share the long-term commitment they have to UDL and the changes they've shifted in their mindsets and approaches. Welcome, Bartola.

BARTOLA:

Hello, hi. Thank you very much for having me today.

LOUI:

Oh, you're so welcome. So, let's just dive right in. Tell us about your background in education and how you were introduced to UDL.

BARTOLA:

Well, I come from a multidisciplinary background in education and currently, as you said, I'm working as a student support lead. I was first introduced to UDL through a friend who is also a teacher, who mentioned it to me, which sparked my interest to explore it further. Immediately I thought, okay, this is something I need to learn more about. Later, during my master's in special education, I had a chance to deepen my understanding and it really clicked. That was it. Since then, it's become more than just part of my work. It's something I care about and I feel passionate about.

LOUI:

Oh, excellent. Excellent. Thank you. So, your school's been working with UDL for about a year and a half, and now you're at a point where teachers have learned a bit about UDL, like some helpful tools and strategies, but they've also learned about the UDL Mindsets. So, let's start with the structure you've been using for training and the resources you've provided.

BARTOLA:

Yes, so over the past year and a half, we have tried to approach UDL in a very practical and gradual way. Everything was done step by step. We started with whole school

training to build a shared understanding, but we were careful not to overload stuff. Instead, we focused first on area of engagement so teachers could really connect with it and try things in their own classrooms. From there, the key has been to follow up. After the initial training that we did in August, we had smaller meetings and check-ins where teachers could share what they actually tried, what worked and what didn't. That reflection piece has been really important in making it real rather than just the theoretical part. We also introduced a kind of toolbox which is a simple ready-to-use strategies that teachers could pick up and apply straight away in their classrooms. The idea was to keep it flexible and supportive so teachers could adapt UDL in a way that fits their classrooms rather than feeling it's another initiative they have to follow strictly.

LOUI:

Yeah. I love that you started off by saying you were careful not to overload your staff and that you focused in on just one thing, which in this case happened to be engagement. And then you have this reflection process and then you have the toolbox. And I just wanted to reiterate those four things for people who, in the field, are working with UDL and helping introduce it to their staff and to hear how you all have approached it because that's been part of your success recipe. And I really do agree that that reflection piece is the critical part of learning and activating UDL. Also, as we said, you had the conversations about the UDL Mindsets, so I'd love to hear how you introduced them, and then later we're going to talk about the toolbox. Everybody, you don't have to worry. We're going to talk about the toolbox!

BARTOLA:

Okay, so let's start with the mindsets. So, to be honest, at the start, we focused more on strategies and tools, but we quickly realized that without the mindsets behind that, it doesn't really stick. So, we shift the conversation towards the why, that big why, understanding the learners and removing barriers for them. We introduced the mindset through discussions and real classroom reflections and honestly that's where the biggest shift happened. What's been really powerful is how open and engaged the teachers have been from the beginning. So, for example before we started, before we introduced the initiative in the school, over 60% of staff said they felt ready and open for this change. From our follow-up surveys, you can see that shift clearly. Teachers are talking about choosing tools based on student needs, mood and motivation, using pre-assessments to identify gaps and giving students more options in how they learn. One teacher even shared that the student said, "Hey, I used to find maths really difficult, but now I get it!" which really captures the impact. This is exactly what we were looking for. I think that's something the team should be really proud of because this has been a shared journey. We see this as a team approach and as a huge team work.

LOUI:

Yeah, so based on what the teachers and students shared, then what are your next steps?

BARTOLA:

Well, thank you for asking that. That's exactly what we are working on at the moment. So based on what teachers and students share with us, and we are still collecting the data, it's always about the data. Our next steps are about building on what's already working, really. So, we started mainly in primary school, and now we are slowly extending into secondary school taking small steps but the impact is already visible and this is what motivates us even more. A key focus is continuing to develop the UDL Mindsets. We all believe this is something that we have to continue working on, not just on strategies, keeping that focus on learning variability and removing barriers for them. We are also going to continue supporting teachers through targeted CPD and sharing good practice. We have also seen a really positive impact from changes to the physical environment in the classrooms, so we'll keep developing this. Looking at different flexible seating, and giving students more choice in how they learn. And importantly, we will keep listening to both teachers and students to guide what comes next. So, this is a big part of our project.

LOUI:

Yeah, so I heard in there that the focus of continuing to develop those UDL mindsets and not just the strategy and really that focus on the learner variability, the removing barriers. You also used one acronym which was CPD could you spell that out for us?

BARTOLA:

So, it's continuous professional development in our project. So far this year, we offer three CPDs in our school, and this is something that it's going to develop and continue next year. So, at the end of each academic year, we sit down as a team. We look at our previous project and CPD done in that year, we analyze that, and according to that, we decide what we need to do and what we think will help teachers and students in the next year. And then according to that we organize training for upcoming academic year.

LOUI:

Ah, excellent. Thank you. Everyone has their own acronyms. And so, it's always interesting to hear what the acronyms are and what they mean. But it sounds like with continuous professional development, there's that inherent message of "this is iterative." This is going to grow. This is going to be a reflective process. So, it sounds like it's a perfect marriage with your school and the internal language and UDL. So that's great.

That's great! Okay, so I know you've been focusing on the principle of engagement, but I wonder about shifting and thinking about that top row of the guidelines next. You've introduced the mindsets to help the teachers understand what should drive their use of UDL, and now they can focus on making their classroom and lessons more accessible, which is what that top row was all about. What do you think of that idea and what steps have you already taken that would help teachers adopt strategies and resources related to those top three guidelines?

BARTOLA:

Thank you for bringing this up because this was a big question for us in the past two months when we were trying to think about our next step. So I think that's a really natural next step, as you suggested. So, we started with engagement because it felt the most accessible. But now that mindset is there, it makes sense to expand further and make learning even more accessible for all students. In many ways, this is about bringing UDL more into the planning process, thinking about all three principles from the start.

LOUI:

Mm-hmm.

BARTOLA:

What's really positive is that teachers are already doing a lot of this. We are seeing more use of visuals, breaking things into manageable steps, offering different ways to access content and using pre-assessment to plan ahead. The next step is really about building on that, making those connections to UDL more visible and intentional, and continuing to share practical strategies and ideas. So, as we said in our CPDs, what we did this year, and we believe that something that we're going to keep next year, is to meet with teachers and keep sharing all those ideas and help each other to build on them. As always, we will take it step by step and keeping it manageable and meaningful with the mindset at the center.

LOUI:

Excellent. Excellent. You know, I agree with you, obviously, because I suggested it. That sounds very self-serving. But yeah, that top row, most of us look at the guidelines and of course we see the columns, but understanding that there's that organization that is inherent to the guidelines and that that top row is making learning accessible for every single learner. So, it helps teachers who may not be as accustomed to thinking about accessibility of students with disabilities and thinking about those steps that we need to take, but then also at the same time thinking about accessibility and reminding ourselves that learners, all learners need those moments of welcoming and belonging

and that happens when we have the right resources in front of us as learners and when we have the right resources that help us express ourselves. I call that top row the welcome mat like, you know, in the US, we have doormats, many of us do, at our front door. And it's a place where you can put a welcoming message to guests. And so I always think of that top row as a welcoming mat here in the US. I don't know if that would be a same type of analogy in Istanbul. What would be a great analogy for the welcoming?

BARTOLA:

If we think about that, I like the way you explained that, and I think we can compare our toolboxes with the doormat because each classroom has a toolbox with different tools inside that students are introduced to. Teachers talk about those. At present you will find headphones, pastel color highlighters, story cubes, different word banks, you will also find a dictionary as we have a lot of additional language speakers, they do need some help. So what we can see now is that students go alone, they already know they can go to the toolbox, they take something that helps them and go and sit down.

LOUI:

Yeah.

BARTOLA:

And this is what we believe it helps them in the classroom, as you mentioned, it gives them the way of belonging..

LOUI:

Yeah, yeah.

BARTOLA:

and welcoming. So thank you for mentioning a doorstep because I think we can compare that to our toolboxes.

LOUI:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think so, too. And as you all expand, as you said earlier, into that secondary setting and discovering what tools, because these are physical, these are your items that students can go and pick up and choose on their own. And what will those be in the secondary environment and it might not even be in the secondary

environment that they literally pull something out of the box, but maybe there might be a list of ideas that they can remind themselves of and say, oh that's a resource I have available to me.

BARTOLA:

Exactly.

LOUI:

I'm going to go now use that.

BARTOLA:

So the idea is to have tools for students available all the time, tools that will help them to succeed.

LOUI:

Yeah, yeah, exactly. Exactly. Well, this has been wonderful, Bartola. Thank you so much, and for mentioning, and reiterating how important it is for us to really reflect on mindsets, our beliefs, our attitudes and to understand where we stand with them and bring those into the conversation so that we can engage with the UDL framework even more deeply and intentionally. So I really appreciate the conversation. Thank you so much.

BARTOLA:

Thank you so much for having me and thank you so much for your advice and this discussion. I can't wait to share this podcast with my colleagues. I'm sure we're going to find some ideas for our future work in UDL.

LOUI:

Ah, excellent. Thank you so much.

BARTOLA:

Thank you.

LOUI:

Yeah. So for those listening to this podcast, you can find supplemental materials like images, a transcript, and an associated blog at my website, which is [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, you can contact me through [www.theudlapproach.com](http://www.theudlapproach.com) And thanks to everyone for your work in revolutionizing education through UDL and making it our goal to design for learner agency.