PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The Barrier Is in the Design

Three Professional Learning Routines for Your Next Staff Meeting or UDL PLC

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At a Glance

What it is

Three short professional learning routines about one idea: the barrier is in the design, not in the learner.

Who it is for

Staff meetings, leadership teams and UDL PLCs. No prior knowledge of UDL is needed.

What you need

The slides and 10 to 20 minutes.

What to do

1. Choose one routine.
2. Show the slides it names.
3. End with the Companion Table slide.

This resource has three professional learning routines for your next staff meeting, leadership team meeting or UDL professional learning community (PLC). Each routine needs little preparation and no prior knowledge of UDL.

> **Source:** CAST (2024a). CAST Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0. Retrieved from https://udlguidelines.cast.org. The principle, guideline and consideration names on this page are CAST's own words. The UDL Guidelines are © CAST.

The Shift

“One of the tenets of UDL is that barriers live in designs, not in students” (The IRIS Center, n.d.). Instead of asking what is wrong with a learner, we ask: what are the barriers to learning, and how can we reduce them? We keep asking that question each time we decide how learning experiences are structured, sequenced and supported.

Reaching ALL Learners



This resource focuses on the fourth idea. Barriers exist in the design of learning experiences and the environment, not the learner.

About this sample. This sample has one example from a collection of 20 barrier examples, with three professional learning routines for your next staff meeting or UDL PLC. The full collection is available to schools and learning organisations that work with me. To ask about it, email me.

View the slides in Canva

Reaching ALL Learners

Three Starting Points

Everybody deserves a choice, especially when we are learning about UDL. Choose one of these three routines for your next meeting. Each one opens an honest discussion about barriers to learning and what they mean for the learners in your school or institution. The starting point is always the design, never the individual.

The three professional learning routines at a glance

Routine	Time	Slides to show	How people work
1 We've All Been in This Room	10 minutes or more	Slide 1 only	Think alone, then talk with a partner
2 The Missing Piece	20 minutes or more	Slides 1, 2 and 3, one per group	Three groups
3 Two Truths and a Redesign	15 minutes or more	Slides 1, 2 and 3	Think alone, talk with a partner, then share with the whole group

Ready-to-Use Slides

Five accessible slides to use with any routine. They open in PowerPoint, Keynote and Google Slides.

Download the slides PowerPoint, 5 slides

1 We've All Been in This Room

10 minutes or more

Professional learning intention

To open the conversation about design barriers by grounding it in our own experience as learners, before looking at classrooms.

As you begin

Show the Barrier Example slide only (Slide 1).

Invitation to the group

> Before we look at classrooms, let's start here: when have you experienced this barrier yourself as a learner, in a meeting, a training, or a lecture? Take two minutes to think or jot something down, then share with a partner.

2 The Missing Piece

20 minutes or more

Professional learning intention

To deepen understanding of how the three elements of the resource connect, by reasoning from one piece toward the others before anything is revealed.

As you begin

Divide into three groups, with one slide for each group: Barrier Example (Slide 1), Barrier Clue Examples (Slide 2), and Possibilities (Slide 3).

Invitation to the group

> Your group has one piece of the puzzle. Spend five minutes: what do you think the missing pieces might be?

- **Group one:** what might learners do if this were the barrier?
- **Group two:** given these clues and possibilities, what is the barrier?
- **Group three:** given this barrier and these clues, what would you design?

3 Two Truths and a Redesign

15 minutes or more

Professional learning intention

To build on what your school is already doing well before identifying where a design change could make a difference, keeping the conversation asset-first.

As you begin

Show Slides 1, 2 and 3.

Invitation to the group

> Take two minutes on your own to identify two things your school is already doing well in relation to this barrier, and one thing you would redesign if you could. Share your two truths and your redesign with a partner, then we'll collect one redesign idea from each pair.

After Any Routine

Show the Companion Table slide (Slide 4) to connect the conversation to the UDL Guidelines and Considerations.

The Barrier Example

The barrier example from the slides, with its companion table.

Slides 1 to 3: The Barrier Is in the Design

1 Barrier Example	2 Barrier Clue Examples (Context Matters)	3 Possibilities for Reducing Barriers through Design
Explanations that deliver information to learners in extended blocks without pauses (in class).	You may observe learners who... • ...find it challenging to stay engaged or lose focus during lengthy explanations, suggesting the design may not yet build in enough variation or pause. • ...retain only the first or last point shared, possibly reflecting that they find it challenging to hold multiple pieces of information at once and the design provided no structured pause to consolidate. • ...show visible disengagement within two to three minutes of uninterrupted verbal delivery, which may reflect that they find sustained focus challenging and the design builds in no variation. • ...become disconnected from the content when it is only accessible through the language of instruction and the design offers no pause point or alternative entry.	• Segment instruction into shorter units and find ways to build a deliberate pause into each segment, treating consolidation as structural rather than optional. • Explore ways to offer multiple consolidation options during each pause, such as writing, talking to a partner, sketching, or sitting quietly, so that every learner can process in a way that works for them. • Create a visual or physical signal that marks the pause point, such as a projected timer, a verbal cue, or a physical gesture, so every learner knows the pause is coming and can prepare to use it. • Invite learners to use the pause in any language or form that works for them, making explicit that multilingual consolidation and non-verbal representation are valid and valued options in this design. • Use each pause point as an opportunity to reconnect every learner to the meaning and purpose of the learning goal, offering a brief written or spoken prompt that names where the current content sits within the larger picture of what is being learned and why.

4 Slide 4: Companion Table: UDL Guidelines and Considerations

Reaching ALL Learners

This table names the UDL Guidelines and Considerations that inform the possibilities for reducing this barrier. Each consideration links to its page on the CAST UDL Guidelines website.

Barrier Example	Engagement	Representation	Action & Expression
Explanations that deliver information to learners in extended blocks without pauses (in class).	**Design Options for Sustaining Effort & Persistence (8)** • Clarify the meaning and purpose of goals (8.1) **Design Options for Emotional Capacity (9)** • Promote individual and collective reflection (9.3)	**Design Options for Language & Symbols (2)** • Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects (2.3) **Design Options for Building Knowledge (3)** • Connect prior knowledge to new learning (3.1)	**Design Options for Expression & Communication (5)** • Use multiple media for communication (5.1)

References

CAST (2024a). CAST Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 3.0. Retrieved from https://udlguidelines.cast.org

The IRIS Center. (n.d.). *Page 2: Addressing barriers*. In *Universal Design for Learning: Designing learning experiences that engage and challenge all students*. Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/udl/cresource/q1/p02/

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