

Supporting Students with Empathy-Based Universal Design



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Choose a Student & Focus On What They Do Well

- Review your grade book and select a student currently struggling to be successful in your classroom.
- Reflect upon what this student is amazing at, what makes them unique, and what you appreciate about them.

Contemplate the Areas of Struggle

- Consider factors as to why the grade is what it is and/or what challenges the student is having that are preventing demonstration of mastery. Brainstorm why this student is performing at their current level. Are they struggling with the content or concepts? With work completion? Attendance? Connecting to the course or the classroom community?

Consider Context

- Are their mental health concerns?
- What is the student's home life like? Do they receive support from their parents or caregivers?
- What other, if any, school team members have or could help support the student?
- What else other than school might this student have going on? Sports? Clubs? Job? Other?
- Note, while some of these reasons may feel like they are out of our control, it is important to go into the UDL reflection considering any and all possible reasons.

Reflect on Barriers to Learning through the lens of UDL

- **Barriers to Engagement:** Engagement has two parts - getting students engaged and keeping students engaged. Was the student ever engaged? If so, what worked? What changed? When did it change? Why might it have changed? If not, what have you tried? How did the student respond?
- **Barriers to Learning:** Variability, both within and across students, lends itself to multiple ways of learning. Consider possible learning difficulties this student is having:
 - Think about a time when a student did have success. How was the learning pathway created then? Was there any choice? Was it directly from you? Small group? Other resources? What was the pathway/medium with which this student found success?
 - Think about a time when this student has struggled with the learning. What was the learning pathway in that situation? Was there any choice? Was it directly from you? Small group? Other resources? What was the pathway/medium with which this student found success?
- **Barriers to Demonstrate Learning:** While the firm goal might dictate the ultimate medium/choice of assessment (method standards), it doesn't always provide the medium (content standards) - especially across the course of a whole unit. Consider what pathways the student had to demonstrate their learning:
 - For formative work along the way, whether it was graded or not, were there options to demonstrate their progress?
 - What sort of feedback was given along the way?
 - For the summative assessment, what options, while staying true to the firm goal, were present?
 - What reassessment opportunities were available along the way? Did the student take advantage of these? If so, how did they help or not? If not, why not (you might not know for sure, that that is okay).

Collaborate & Converse

- Who else might you want to bring into the conversation before you jump into revising/redesigning the next unit? Consider: Department Chair or API, a course/grade-team member, a dean, social worker, counselor, family member or guardian, the student, and instructional coach, or someone else?

Pro-actively Remove Barriers

- Consider your next unit and attempt to uncover one of each type of barrier that you can remove if you make an adjustment(s). How can you remove a barrier to getting or staying engaged? How can you remove a barrier to doing the actual learning? How can you remove a barrier in demonstrating their learning (formative or summative)?
- Remember, what is necessary for some is good for all! Just because the barriers you are attempting to remove came out of this empathy activity and reflection doesn't mean all students cannot take advantage of your adjustments! That is the beauty of UDL.

