UDL-PLC’s: Instructional Barriers

LEARN
An important underlying assumption of UDL is that some curriculum materials put roadblocks in front of students just by the nature of how they are designed. Students have different learning pathways that can be supported or hindered by the curriculum materials you use in your classroom. Of course, this brings us back to the fundamental UDL concept of student choice because when students understand what works best for them AND they have the choice to use what works, they will likely be motivated to learn more. In this session, you’ll examine some instructional barriers for your students. In the next session, we’ll talk about some responses or solutions for common learning barriers.

Understanding the Concept of Learning Barriers
Classroom barriers can be categorized as institutional, internal, interpersonal, and instructional (see link). In this session, we will focus on identifying instructional barriers that affect students learning. Instructional barriers are the things that interfere with the active engagement of learning. In the next session, we’ll extend this work by focusing on technology tools that match specific learning needs. For now, your job is to think more deeply about how student needs can dictate the success of some learning strategies and tools and the failure of others. Notice again, that while we are talking about needs that students bring to the learning environment, we talk about the curriculum materials and strategies as the cause of failure, and not the student himself. So, we call these learning barriers or instructional barriers instead of “student needs.” This is important because your definition of the barrier will drive your solution.

Example 1: If you view a student’s poor writing response in class as due to his lack of motivation to write, then you will focus on strategies that will be motivating to him. Some solutions might be providing the student with a choice of topics to write about, providing a choice of tools to write with, or stimulating background knowledge and interest prior to writing.

If, however, you have missed the mark, and the student’s poor writing response is because he physically struggles with handwriting and finds writing laborious, all of those solutions could fail unless technology is explored as a possible support.

Likewise, if a student has recently lost a parent through death, divorce, or even incarceration, simply providing a choice of topics or access to technology may not be sufficient to overcome the emotional difficulties that are interfering with learning.

If you misdiagnose the problem, your solution is likely to be ineffective. Therefore, you need to be thoughtful about your assessment of the learning barriers that students face. This requires a diagnostic approach to teaching. It is not enough to know that a student is performing below grade-level without understanding why that is the case.

To learn more about personalizing learning as a way to eliminating barriers to learning, select the article listed under External Links.

Adapted from HIAT, Montgomery County Maryland Public Schools
EXTERNAL LINKS
Four Types of Barriers to Learning:
Paste this link into your browser:
https://mindstepsinc.com/2014/10/the-4-biggest-classroom-barriers-that-keep-your-students-from-being-motivated-to-learn/

Personalizing Learning, Eliminating Barriers to Learning for All Students
http://www.personalizelearning.com/2014/03/udl-for-all-learners.html

DISCUSS
Reflection And Discussion on Understanding Learning Barriers

1. Choose a student that you know or have known in the past. What learning barrier did that student encounter?— for what task? — under what conditions?

2. Under which kinds of instructional conditions did the student show less of an impact from that learning barrier?

3. How does the UDL framework address this student’s learning barriers?

Post your discussion about this student. Be sure to use an alias and avoid identifying information.

Response to Colleagues:
Choose a colleague to respond to. Consider the description of the student and the learning barriers.

- Is there another interpretation of the learning barrier that might be worth exploring?
- Do you have any insights for your colleague, or has your colleague’s description provided you with any insights?