



NOVAK EDUCATION

PLANNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT USING A UDL LENS



Intended Purpose of this Tool

Review the tables below to help you design professional learning experiences using the approach of a UDL practitioner. First, ensure there are firm goals for your session. Based on those goals, consider any barriers participants might face within the three UDL networks: Affective, Recognition, and Strategic. Then, figure out how to reduce or remove those barriers by offering options for participants in each area. Providing options and planning for variability allows learners to use their strengths and be self-directed, motivated, and resourceful.



Affective Network

Provide Multiple Means of Engagement

What barriers will your participants face as they engage? How can you plan to reduce these barriers?

Why is this important?

Engagement is at the root of all learning, whether you are a student or an adult learner. As you are developing learning experiences, consider how you are making explicit connections to the “why” of the content and give participants many options and opportunities for making these connections themselves. Expect participants to arrive at your session in a variety of places. Some will be excited and eager to participate, others may be upset or preoccupied, and some may be there because they are required to attend. As the presenter, you want to plan ahead for all of these possibilities and provide options for recruiting interest, sustaining effort, and self-regulating.

Potential Barriers	UDL Strategies	What would this look like in practice?
Goals of presentation aren't clear	At the beginning and throughout the session, be clear about what everyone should know or be able to do at the end of the session. Be prepared with language you can use if participants veer from overall goals (i.e., “That is an amazing question about standards, and we need to revisit that, but let’s select a single standard now so we can continue to learn about how to universally design an assessment.”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Design an activity around the goals of the session where everyone reflects on what they currently know and what they want to know. For example, when looking at the objectives, write a statement, draw a picture, or share how you feel about learning with someone.Use the concept of backward design and develop your exit ticket as soon as you outline your objectives to ensure your own clarity and focus for planning.

Potential Barriers	UDL Strategies	What would this look like in practice?
Lack of relevance	As a UDL practitioner, anticipate variability in your audience. Make sure to optimize voice and provide time for questions, feedback, and multiple ways for participants to connect authentically to the content. Be prepared to respond to the unique needs of participants, offering support to those who may require additional time to understand and apply the content to their specific situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get to know the needs of your learners before or at the start of the presentation. For example, send out an agenda ahead of time or begin the session with an opportunity for participants to share questions or provide feedback on what they hope to accomplish in the session. Carve out time throughout the presentation for feedback, questions, and meaning-making (i.e, Polls in Zoom, Thumbs-up, Thumbs down, Exit Tickets, Stop and Jot, Talk with a Partner, text a colleague, etc)
Stressed out or overwhelmed	Acknowledge and embrace feelings. Change is hard, and education is changing at an incredible pace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop norms that acknowledge discomfort and nonclosure. When you ask people to change, acknowledge that change is hard and share how they will be supported to enact changes. For example, is there instructional coaching available? Will they spiral back to discuss challenges in Professional Learning Communities? Change will not happen overnight, and educators need ongoing support to minimize feeling overwhelmed.
Disinterest or negativity	Sometimes PD is scheduled during less-than-ideal times and/or something within a school culture impacts PD. As educators, we have to acknowledge and name this and provide opportunities for participants to reframe their thinking and be open to opportunities for professional collaboration and growth. For example, “You may not want to be here, but it’s important that we create a learning culture for other learners.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a welcoming ritual to elicit participant temperature towards goals of PD (rating scale, mood meter, Zoom poll). If you learn that people are not in a great place for learning, attend to social-emotional needs and give options to reframe the session. “Okay, based on this feedback, I think it’s important we adjust. We can still work toward the same objectives, but would it be better for you to do A or B?” Encourage participants to reflect throughout: “When I first came in today, I thought....now I think.”
Distraction	Addressing distraction and variations in attention spans is important to promote effective learning. Encourage learners to engage in self-reflection and discover strategies to maintain focus. Also, develop a well-structured agenda that includes designated breaks. This ensures that participants know there will be scheduled moments for unplugging, checking their phones, incorporating movement, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide options for learners to reflect on what they need to do to stay focused and ask them to create goals for themselves (i.e., “I will keep my phone in my bag until the break; I will commit to taking notes to stay focused....”) Schedule “What I Need” breaks every hour for participants to attend to emails and phone calls, and use a timer to aid executive function.



Recognition Network

Provide Multiple Means of Representation

What barriers will your participants face with the way content is presented? How can you plan to reduce these barriers?

Why is this important?

Consider how all educators, regardless of how much background information they have, can be challenged and supported as they meet objectives. Some educators will have strong background knowledge, understand acronyms and vocabulary, and be able to organize their own learning. Other learners will need options and choices to build an understanding of concepts, activate background knowledge, and succinct explanations and exemplars of content under study. Having pathways for all individuals through design is critical.

Potential Barriers	UDL Strategies	What would this look like in practice?
Some learners will not have strong background knowledge of content under study	Addressing varying levels of background knowledge among learners is essential for an inclusive learning environment. Promote collaboration among participants, allowing them to work in teams or with partners to leverage each other's strengths and fill knowledge gaps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide options for participants to engage in pre-study to build background knowledge.• Provide tools with specific language and unpacked acronyms (i.e., MTSS, UDL, RTI, SDI).• Link a resource with FAQ/Vocabulary Document.• Use a parking lot where participants can post questions throughout the session and build in time for responding.
Providing too much information at once	To minimize the potential sense of overwhelm, begin by providing participants with a well-defined agenda with clear objectives and a well-defined structure. Additionally, break the session into smaller, more manageable chunks to simplify complex content and promote deeper learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To avoid overwhelming learners with too much information at once, start with a KWL chart for participants to reflect on what they know.• Throughout the session, provide breaks for reflection and encourage learners to update their charts with new information and questions. This helps pace their learning and prevents information overload.• Be flexible with timing based on participant needs. If a particular section generates a lot of questions or discussion, allocate extra time to ensure thorough exploration and understanding.

Potential Barriers	UDL Strategies	What would this look like in practice?
A single mode of presentation won't allow all learners to build comprehension	Explicit instruction is great, but it's not the only tool for learning. The same goes for watching videos, reading articles, participating in discussions, and/or exploring tools. In UDL, variety is not the same as choice. Build in time for self-differentiated learning where participants can decide how they will learn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may carve out 15-20 minutes for participants to attend a short presentation, read an article, OR watch a video. Note that no one is required to do all 3.
Overreliance on technology or clunky use of technology	Start by carefully selecting the appropriate tools for the purpose and objectives you want to accomplish during your session. Additionally, invest time familiarizing participants with the chosen tools before expecting them to engage with these technologies independently. Offer clear instructions, tutorials, or training sessions to ensure everyone feels confident using them. Remember that participants may have varying levels of tech proficiency, so offer additional support as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the appropriate tools for the purpose and objectives you want to accomplish. Spend time familiarizing participants with tools before asking them to engage with them. Limit the number of tools you ask participants to engage with. Before asking participants to explore digital tools, ensure a district firewall doesn't block them.
Over reliance on printed text	Instead of relying solely on printed text, ensure that your presentations and resources offer a variety of content formats. Include visuals, charts, multimedia tools, and other non-textual elements. This caters to learners who benefit from visual or interactive content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When sharing resources, don't only provide printed text. Consider videos, podcasts, charts, infographics, etc.... One simple strategy is to create a voice recording of an article and provide a QR code so educators can access it in hard copy, read it digitally, or listen while they walk or drive to pick up a coffee!



Strategic Network

Provide Multiple Means of Action & Expression

What barriers will your participants face when you ask them to process the content and demonstrate their thinking? How can you plan to reduce these barriers?

Why is this important?

Just as it is important to consider the multiple means of engagement and representation, you must also plan how educators will interact with, make sense of, and demonstrate their thinking about the content you share. There is variety in how people process the information they are taking in. Some prefer discussion, drawing, reflecting silently, designing a flow chart, using a laptop, pen and paper, etc. Consider how you can offer multiple means of expression through different methods and tools for responding and set intentional opportunities for adults to manage their learning trajectory.

Potential Barriers	UDL Strategies	What would this look like in practice?
Activities don't align with the firm goals of the session	Ensure that all activities are closely aligned with the firm goals of the session. Every activity and option should explicitly connect to the session objectives, and any flexibility provided should not deviate from the non-negotiable elements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear directions, scaffolds for participation, and opportunities for feedback to make required activities accessible and engaging for all participants. • For example, if the session's goal is reflection, participants may reflect in writing, through discussion, or by creating a multimedia artifact. However, if the goal is to share best practices, all participants must share their practices using a shared document, a gallery walk, or a similar method.
The session is overly focused on information sharing and doesn't result in active learning from participants	Provide frequent options for interactive and active engagement so educators are carrying the cognitive load of the session (Turn and Talk, Turn and Jot, engaging with materials, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As you think about designing your session, remember the 10-2 rule (a GLAD strategy). For every 10 minutes of presentation, ensure at least 2 minutes for reflection, sense-making, or application. This may include options to quietly reflect in a journal, converse with colleagues, post on social media, post questions to a parking lot, etc.
Participant voices are not heard because there are not safe and supportive opportunities for them to provide feedback	Ensure that participants have safe and supportive avenues to share their feedback. This becomes especially crucial for series with multiple sessions. Actively seek input from participants regarding what is effective in the sessions and how improvements can be made to enhance authenticity and relevance. You can initiate this process by using sentence starters like, "In the next session, it would be great if..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement exit tickets that prompt participants to provide feedback on whether the session's goals were achieved and how well their strengths and needs were addressed. • Review this feedback and use it to inform and adjust future sessions accordingly.

Potential Barriers	UDL Strategies	What would this look like in practice?
Expectations for collaborative work and/or whole group shareouts or conversations are not articulated or scaffolded	Provide a clear purpose for each activity as well as norms for participation within and among groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare norms and roles for share-outs so participants are prepared, and there is equity of voice within and among groups. • If expecting educators to participate in a protocol, discussion, or activity provide clear instructions, modeling, and necessary scaffolds to support effective work. • When possible, listen in on teams as they collaborate and select teams to share based on problems of practice and inventive solutions that the larger community would benefit from hearing.
Not enough time for deep reflection, expression, or creation	Different learners will vary in how long it takes to complete a task. As presenters, we must be flexible and empower learners to create their own strategies and timelines for completing any required work. As you plan your session, always allot more time than you think you'll need for Turn and Talks, collaboration, and task completion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for educators to apply what they learned to lesson design or authentic practice. For example, after sharing about a new instructional strategy, provide time for them to role-play with feedback, design a lesson incorporating that strategy, etc. • Ensure the time provided for educators to design is adequate and that tools are provided to support the development of resources such as checklists, rubrics, exemplars, and opportunities for feedback.
Over-scaffolding activities	Avoid excessive scaffolding during activities. While it's important to provide support and resources, allow participants to tap into their creativity and strengths in the learning process. Offer exemplars and tools, but be aware of when these resources might hinder rather than help.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always provide participants with the flexibility to complete the task that aligns with their understanding and preferences.
Only providing one modality for expression	Avoid limiting participants to a single mode of expression. Instead, offer them various ways to convey their thoughts, learning, and ideas, especially when a particular mode isn't directly related to the learning objective. For example, in a session on difficult conversations, conversations are essential, but make the purpose clear if there are no alternate expression options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When requesting educators to share a product, think about providing a choice board with different ways to express themselves, such as explaining to others, creating visuals, designing tables, etc. Additionally, encourage teams to propose alternative activities if they align better with their intended goals.

WHAT'S NEXT?



HOST A BOOK CLUB

Explore books and download [free book club guides](#)



DEVELOP EARLY ADOPTERS

Have a cohort of early adopters take [a facilitated course with a UDL expert, gaining actionable feedback](#) as they learn and try new practices.



PROVIDE OPTIONS

Provide staff with the option to [learn at their own pace by enrolling in one of our self-directed courses](#)

[Contact us](#) to find the right path for your team
Get your team on board - [Learn about PD options](#)





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