

A Facilitator's Guide to UDL Journey Mapping

With a Focus on English Learners and Dually
Identified Students



Introduction to Journey Mapping for Multilingual Learners

Imagine experiencing a lesson as if you were a multilingual learner—navigating new content while juggling language demands. Journey Mapping makes this possible. It's a collaborative process that turns the student experience into a visual story, helping educators notice where learning feels smooth and where potential barriers arise. By mapping the lesson from start to finish, we uncover patterns of engagement, pinpoint barriers, and design options that make instruction more inclusive and effective.

This approach is grounded in two key beliefs: 1) barriers live in the design, not in the individual, and 2) the process must center on the learner. When we empathize with the learner experience, we gain insights that go beyond theory—insights that drive real change in classrooms.

The purpose of Journey Mapping for Multilingual Learners is simple yet powerful: to create a clear picture of how multilingual learners experience a lesson, anticipate language demands, and highlight moments of engagement. These maps become catalysts for designing lessons that affirm students' identities, build on their strengths, and open doors to deeper learning.

The goal of the guide is to assist you, your colleagues, and/or your students through each step of the journey mapping process. This guide will offer you the structure and tips needed to seamlessly incorporate journey mapping into your practice.

Step One: Determine Roles

Although a journey map can be completed individually—using learner feedback or learner profiles—journey mapping as a team can make the protocol more powerful and extend its impact across your team's instruction. If you are to complete it as a team, use the roles below:

1. **Facilitator** (1 person): Guides the teacher (or someone knowledgeable about the design) to describe the process and the materials used. And then guides the teacher through describing the moments of engagement and identification of barriers. Be sure to ask *why* during the exploration of low engagement moments to identify barriers.
2. **Teacher** (1 person): Is guided by the facilitator to describe the activities, high engagement, and engagement challenges associated with the design.
3. **Sticky Note Writer** (1 person): At each point on the journey map, the sticky note writer records concisely what the teacher reports on a sticky note. One sticky note per idea--move fast!
4. **Process Observers** (2+ people): Watch the interactions of the facilitator and the teacher as they map the lesson. Preparing for the next step, think about how a learner might engage in the lesson. Ask clarifying questions when activities seem unclear.

Step Two: Gather the Necessary Materials

You will need:

- Sticky notes in different colors (approximately 15 of each color)
- A large whiteboard, large roll of craft/butcher paper, or a large printout of the Journey Map template
- Whiteboard markers (if using a whiteboard) or regular markers
- Dot stickers of different colors
- [The UDL Guidelines](#)

Step Three: Review the Guiding Questions

On the back of the Journey Map, you will find a series of questions. You can think of these as a reflective planning tool. They are not a checklist, but rather a primer to help you keep multilingual learners centered as you work through the protocol.

- Who are the learners in this classroom and what are their English proficiency levels? (e.g., English Learner (EL), Long-Term English Learner (LTEL), Dually Identified (multilingual learner who has been identified as having a disability), Newcomer (student who was born outside of the U.S. and has recently moved to the U.S. and is still learning English))?
- How does this lesson build on what students already know in English and in their home language?
- What key vocabulary related to content and academic language function(s) is essential and how will I make sure students understand it?
- What tools to support comprehension and organizing information will be available?
- What opportunities exist for students to use and make connections to their home language?

- How are students' cultural and linguistic identities being validated and affirmed?

Step Four: Journey Mapping

This step helps us to understand the learner's experience of the lesson in each moment—where they thrive and where they may encounter barriers. By identifying engagement highs and lows, we uncover patterns that reveal how design choices impact engagement, access, and learner agency.

List activities and materials (10 minutes)

1. Identify the content and language goals of the lesson.
2. Describe the activities of the lesson. Be as specific as possible, listing each discrete activity. (For example, "Students divide into pairs to discuss the goals of the lesson.")
3. For each activity, be sure to note the materials necessary.
4. Use one color of sticky notes for the activities and another color for the materials.

Determine language demands (10-15 minutes)

This step makes the invisible work of language visible. The goal is to anticipate what students must do with language at each moment of the lesson and to surface where the language demands—rather than content—may become a barrier to engagement or understanding. By naming specific language demands, teams are better positioned to design intentional supports that expand access for multilingual learners.

To deepen analysis, this protocol distinguishes language domains as the linguistic skills required for receptive and expressive modes of communication that are used in academic language development. While listening and reading are considered receptive modes of communication, speaking and writing are considered expressive modes of communication.

For multilingual students to access content and develop their language skills at the same time, it is essential that they actively participate in all four language domains. This approach helps them build proficiency in both subject matter and language.

1. Identify Required Language Skills

For each activity listed, identify which of the four language domains are required for students to successfully engage:

Listening – following oral directions, listening to explanations, participating in discussions

Speaking – answering questions, discussing ideas, presenting thinking

Reading – interpreting prompts, texts, visuals with written language, or digital media

Writing – taking notes, completing tasks, explaining reasoning, producing written responses

As you mark the required domains, consider not just whether a skill is used, but how complex the language use is and how many domains students are expected to use at once. For example, casual partner talk places different demands on learners than asking students to create a collaborative poster using academic vocabulary and sentence structures.

2. Name the Specific Language Work

For each language domain identified, push the team to be concrete by asking:

- What vocabulary or language functions must students understand or use? (For example, are students asked to describe, compare, contrast, sequence, etc.?)
- Are students expected to use academic language, informal language, or both?

- Are students processing language in real time (e.g., oral directions) or with opportunities to revisit it (e.g., written instructions)?
- Does the task require students to comprehend or produce language beyond their current proficiency level?
- What opportunities exist for students to use their home language?

This detail helps teams move beyond broad labels (e.g., “speaking”) toward a clearer picture of the cognitive/linguistic load of the task.

3. Identify Existing Scaffolds

Next, document any scaffolds already embedded in the lesson that support language access and comprehension, such as:

- Visuals, diagrams, anchor charts, or models
- Written directions paired with oral explanations
- Sentence frames or discussion stems
- Word banks or glossaries
- Opportunities for rehearsal or partner talk
- Strategic use of students’ home languages

Be explicit—if a scaffold is not intentionally designed, it should not be assumed. Making current supports visible allows teams to assess whether they are sufficient, redundant, or unevenly distributed across the lesson.

4. Look for Mismatches and Pressure Points

Finally, ask the team to notice where language demands outpace support and potentially create a barrier:

- Where are students expected to listen, read, speak, or write without scaffolds?
- Which activities require multiple language domains at once?

- Which learners might experience cognitive overload due to language complexity?

These pressure points often correspond to later “low engagement” moments on the journey map and provide a strong starting place for identifying barriers in the lesson design.

Identify students to follow (5 minutes)

Think of the learners who will participate in this lesson. Are there students who you imagine might encounter barriers when pursuing the goals? Identify those whose experiences you plan to map.

Identify and annotate highs and lows (10 minutes)

1. Choose Students

Each team member selects a student to represent. Assign each person a different color dot to track their learner’s perspective.

2. Mark Highs and Lows

On the journey map, note where you imagine the students experience their highest and lowest points in relation to whether their goals are being met or are engaged in the pursuit of a goal. Place a dot high on the productive engagement lane when the design serves them well, and low when the design does not meet their needs. Mark the moments where you imagine your learner feels most supported and where they face barriers. These insights will guide us toward changes that make learning more equitable

3. Hypothesize Why

Anywhere that you imagined a student would not be productively engaged toward meeting the goal, hypothesize the reason(s) that each

activity may not have worked for them. For example: “The student might not have understood the directions that were given.”

While a student may share this as the reason, journey mapping prompts you to dig deeper. This approach prompts you to relocate the notion of barrier from within the individual to within the design. In the next step, we will reframe the barrier and identify the part of the instruction that caused a barrier for the student.

Identify barriers (10 minutes)

1. Choose Students

For each low point, identify the barrier in the lesson design that prevents the student from meeting their goal. For example: “The directions were only given orally.”

2. Reflect on Barriers

Trace the path of each of the color dots using a marker. Ask yourselves: Where are the common lows? Common highs? Are there any surprises or patterns?

3. Reflect on Language and Access

Use these guiding questions to analyze what might be missing and what barriers exist:

- How are students’ cultural and linguistic identities validated and affirmed?
- How does the lesson build on what students already know in English and in their home language?
- What opportunities exist for students to use their home language?
- What key vocabulary is essential and how does the design ensure understanding?
- How is comprehension scaffolded?

Equity pause

1. What aspects of the individual's experience have you paid particular attention to? What might you have missed or downplayed?
2. In what ways do you think your own experiences and identities may have impacted your perception of this person's experience?
3. Have you asked learners themselves what they think might support their learning?

Design options

Use the UDL Guidelines to identify Design Considerations that could reduce the barrier. Then, design one to two new options to add to the design to support your student to successfully engage with the activity. Go through each barrier this way, until you have added one to two options for each low point on the map.

Step Five: Reflect and Plan for Improvement

The observations, sticky notes, and discussion from your Journey Mapping activity can serve as powerful catalysts for improving how students experience this and similar lessons. The goal of this step is to identify practical, manageable changes that will enhance access and engagement for multilingual learners.

Consider these questions as you reflect:

- What appear to be the most pressing student needs that we need to design for in the future?
- If you mapped multiple students' experiences, what common gaps emerged? What bright spots stood out?

Potential Action Steps:

- **Identify One Immediate Change**
Choose a small, high-impact adjustment you can implement in the next lesson (e.g., adding visuals to directions, providing sentence frames for discussion).
- **Plan a Longer-Term Improvement**
Select one design element to revise for future lessons or units (e.g., integrating home language resources, building in structured peer support).
- **Seek Follow up Feedback from Students**
Decide when and how you will revisit the lesson to explore if changes improved multilingual learners' experiences.
- **Document and Share Insights**
Summarize key findings and share them with your students, team, or leadership to inform broader instructional planning.

Keep these insights in mind as you refine the lesson design and plan next steps for data collection and analysis.

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