



Questions to Consider in UDL Observations of Early Childhood Environments

Universally Designed Learning (UDL) environments provide considerations for the widest diversity of learners possible so that all children benefit. These include children with varying disabilities, linguistic diversities, and varied learning styles. The concept of Universal Design for Learning facilitates inclusive early childhood environments by ensuring equitable access and meaningful participation through flexible and creative approaches within a developmentally appropriate setting.

The following questions are to be used in conjunction with the attached *Early Childhood Inclusion/Universal Design for Learning Checklist*. Individuals conducting early childhood environment observations can use these questions and checklist to discover how to increase UDL policies and practices and to identify those that already exist. For additional UDL related resources and information, please visit the Building Inclusive Child Care (BICC) website (www.northampton.edu/bicc).

General

1. Is there a consideration for learner differences in all children, not just those with disabilities?
How is this consideration shown?
2. Can all children access and engage in all learning opportunities?
3. What strategies exist to ensure all children are included? What strategies exist to eliminate barriers that might segregate or stigmatize a child?

Curriculum

Curriculum design must be responsive to diverse classrooms. Educators must share a commitment that all children participating will be successful in their development and learning. Successful outcomes for all children are characterized by diversity and individualization.

Teaching Strategies

1. How are individual sensory, motor, linguistic, and cognitive characteristics of children considered? How are they fostered (e.g. individual, small group, whole group opportunities)? How is higher level thinking encouraged?
2. Do children have opportunities for exploring, learning, and communicating through varied approaches (e.g. modeling, prompting, sign language, use of pictures, symbols, graphics, role play, “the arts”, assistive technology, etc)?
3. Are multiple guided practice opportunities provided?
4. Are opportunities provided for children to begin a project or learning experience and continue it at a later time? How does the environment respond to children’s individual energy levels, health conditions, attention spans, or interests?
5. Is consideration given to the "timing" of children's responses (e.g. flexibility given to the pace of an activity, providing adequate time for children to respond, use of assistive technology to assist with memory and communication in responding)?
6. How is it ensured that each child can see, hear, and understand rules and expectations (e.g. simple directions using multiple means of communicating)?
7. Is "partial participation" encouraged? Are expectations for participation and performance varied?
Example: If children are listening to a story and are asked to recall events, some may attend to and repeat back key words, others may recall names of characters by pointing to pictures or using signs and gestures, others may predict what will happen next using complete sentences.
8. Is content presented in multiple formats (e.g. verbal, print, video, concrete objects, repeating key words) in understandable or culturally appropriate language?
9. How are transitions handled (e.g. verbal, visual)? Are children given indications before transitions happen (e.g. dimming of lights, playing of soft music)? Are children provided a consistent routine (e.g. easily identifiable and accessible schedule)?
10. Does the classroom provide efficient utilization of existing staff/teachers? If a child needed one-to-one assistance for a task, would someone be able to provide it? If not, is there a way to structure activities so that someone would be available? What additional local resources might be available?

Learning Outcomes

1. Are learning outcomes demonstrated in ways that reflect individual strengths?
2. How are individual accomplishments recognized? Are only the “best” or “first” accomplishments by a few students recognized by the teacher?
3. Are children encouraged to use different ways of responding (e.g. pointing, vocalizing, picking up something)?
4. Do children show what they have learned in a variety of ways (e.g. chance to “show what you know” through play, verbal, artwork, song, etc.)?

Physical Environment

All children must be able to safely access and engage in the learning opportunities presented.

Layout

1. Does the environment provide for easy, safe, and independent access to activities, spaces, equipment, and materials?
2. Are there clear, wide paths for safe and easy movement? Would it be possible for a child with limited mobility (e.g. using a walker or wheelchair) to easily get to the classroom, move around within the classroom, and access/participate in an outdoor playground? How might access be improved?
3. Is a safe floor covering used (e.g. for children who are “on the go”, those in wheel chairs, visual impairments)?
4. Are varied seating options used (e.g. floor, mat, cushion, chair, or specialized seating)?
5. Is there a place in the environment where children can “rest” during the day and/or experience reduced noise levels (e.g. reading area with pillows; use of headphones)?
6. What sensory related environmental considerations are made (e.g. noise, lighting, over visual stimulation on walls and spaces)?

Materials

1. Are materials and resources varied and diverse (e.g. items of different sizes, textures, shapes, etc.) for easier manipulation?
2. Are teacher made and/or inexpensive materials used to demonstrate creativity and flexibility (e.g. paper clip to turn pages, raised line paper made with glue, turkey baster for painting, etc.)?
3. Are materials available that reflect diverse family experiences and cultures?
4. Is there use of multiple types of equipment, materials, songs, games, toys, books, computer software, that provides each child with equal access to concepts for skills of math, science, and other learning content areas?

Relationships

Collaboration, between all individuals associated with the child's learning, is essential for fostering and maintaining positive relationships (e.g. families, teachers, therapists, early intervention personnel).

1. Do all children feel welcomed and an equal member of the group? How is this demonstrated?
2. Are family goals and preferences for each child considered? How are these goals and preferences shared? (e.g. written, verbal, formal, informal, scheduled, spontaneous)?
3. Do all staff/teachers have access to IFSP/IEP goals? How are they helping children progress toward those goals? Do they collect data?
4. Are there frequent opportunities for sharing information with families? Are there multiple opportunities for family involvement?
5. How are all children given opportunities to understand, express, and respect personal feelings?

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Early Childhood Inclusion/Universal Design for Learning Checklist

Curriculum

Curriculum design must be responsive to diverse classrooms. Educators must share a commitment that all children participating will be successful in their development and learning. Successful outcomes for all children are characterized by diversity and individualization.

Teaching Strategies

Use of quiet verbal & visual communication
(gestures, sign language)
Non-verbal transition indicators (lights, music)
Levels of prompting (verbal, modeling, physical)
Multiple positive guided practice opportunities
Easily identifiable routine (pictorial, symbolic)
Variable groupings (whole, small, peer, one-to-one)
Pace of activity (responsive to energy level, health needs, thought process)
Presentation of content in multiple formats

Balance of adult and child-initiated tasks
Exploratory play with materials and ideas
Opportunity to begin project and return at a later time
Use of songs, stories, dramatic play, and art to express emotions (responding to pictures, role play)
Equal access to learning content area activities
Learning through peer interaction
Developmentally appropriate practices
Opportunity to "show what they know" in various ways

Learning Outcomes

Same activity, different focus (partial participation)
Encouragement of varied response modes
Individual accomplishments recognized

Implementation of IFSP/IEP goals and objectives
Diverse assessment methods

Physical Environment

All children must be able to safely access and actively engage in the learning opportunities.

Physical Layout

Quiet area for rest/therapy
Safe and accessible areas (wide pathways, uncluttered floor, indoor/outdoor floor covering)
Access to classrooms
Moving within classrooms (to activities)
Playground
Sensory - low noise level/minimal visual stimulation
Accessible activities and equipment
Varied seating options (floor, mat, cushion)

Materials

Creative and flexible materials (non-roll crayons, textured balls, paperclip page turners)
Inclusive curriculum materials (variety of toys, books, music, posters about diverse cultures and abilities)
Technology (literacy software, computer, assistive technology devices such as Touch Screens and switches)

Relationships

Collaboration, between all individuals associated with the child's learning, is essential for fostering and maintaining positive relationships (e.g. families, teachers, therapists, early intervention personnel).

Frequent home/school communication (daily log, verbal)
Regular formal and informal meetings to discuss each child's goals and progress
Knowledgeable and trained staff (emergencies, continuing education)
Collaboration with various personnel, families
Staff willingness to do tasks (hygiene, self-care)

Efficient utilization of existing personnel
Warm & positive staff interactions among staff/children/families
Varied forms of social interactions & exchanges encouraged among children/staff ("high-five" greetings, signs in Braille, sign language)

Center Name: _____

Date Observed: _____

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