

## VOLUME

# Applying Universal Design for Learning in Early Childhood Environments

Universal Design for Learning, or UDL, can increase participation and enhance learning outcomes by making curriculum and activities accessible to all children in the program. To increase access to curriculum content across learning domains it is vital to use a variety of materials and activities designed to address individual needs. A key component to implementing UDL is planning ahead.

How can UDL guidelines be embedded into the learning domains of young children? Consider skills across social-emotional, adaptive, communication, motor, and cognitive areas of development while planning lessons and activities.

### How can UDL guidelines be embedded in planning?

- ✦ For multiple means of engagement, include various methods to increase participation. Recognize the impact of culture, language, disabilities, and delays, and provide ways for children to engage.
- ✦ For multiple means of representation, plan a variety of learning experiences to help children acquire content knowledge. Embed real-life objects and experiences to increase understanding.
- ✦ For multiple means of expression, provide numerous modes and opportunities to increase chances for children to demonstrate what they know.


Using a UDL framework for planning to support all children in the early childhood program is a deliberate activity. Teachers, in collaboration with the team, intentionally create plans based on childhood developmental milestones using data and information about individual student needs.

Teacher Actions	Developmental Milestones and Needs
Refer to the <a href="#">Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards (FELDS)</a> for sequences of skill development and for ideas for planning lessons and supports.	Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) will include information regarding specific learning strengths, preferences, and supports for students with disabilities.
Begin with the universal and least intrusive strategies that focus on natural environmental supports.	Children learn skills in each domain throughout their daily schedule of routines and activities.
Collaborate with your team and with children’s family members.	Children need consistency, communication, and supports between school and home.
Incorporate frequent and specific praise and feedback related to participation.	Children need specific and positive feedback to encourage growth and development.
Provide choices related to response modes and favorite activities throughout daily lessons.	Most children learn by doing. Provide ample opportunities for hands-on activities.
Observe and collect data for progress monitoring during playtimes.	Children practice newly learned skills during play.

### Planning and Team Collaboration Process

1. Identify members of the planning team – Team members include teachers, paraprofessionals, and service providers, such as speech and language pathologists, or occupational therapists. Family members are encouraged to share knowledge with the team.
2. Collaboratively plan for supports throughout daily routines – Each member brings different expertise to the planning process, shares data and observations, and contributes to planning supports, throughout the day.
3. Prepare materials for students, following the UDL guidelines for multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression.
4. Plan for data collection and progress monitoring of the targeted skills, including IEP goals for children with disabilities.


Meet the early childhood team as they collaborate to discuss their concerns and develop supports.



**Ms. Dee**  
Early Childhood Teacher

I want to incorporate language skills into play.

Ms. Dee plans to read and guide a discussion in a shared reading circle. In a shared reading circle, the teacher and children will read aloud an engaging text that provides experience with print and promotes development of the reading process. It is interactive and can be tailored to meet the needs of children. Today’s book is *I Went Walking*, which is a picture book that introduces animals and focuses on sequence and positional words (e.g., first, last, middle).



**Ms. Nan**  
Speech Pathologist

I want to make sure to offer a variety of materials for communicating.

Ms. Nan plans to create visual word cards for the story and find props for story re-telling. She will provide additional connections to the story for a few children, including adding two or three sequence words on a child’s communication device. She assists children in monitoring duration of time by providing visual reminders of the schedule for shared reading activities, and reinforces the concepts of sequence and position with a small group at the sand table after the lesson.



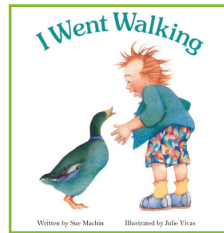
**Mr. Will**  
Paraprofessional

I want to support students and help them learn.

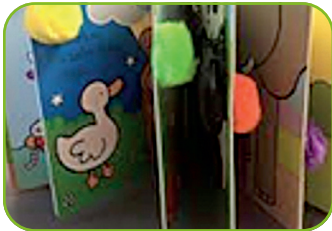
Mr. Will ensures that special seating is available for children who need it. He also gets visual supports and activity-related materials ready in order to remind children of the expectations for the lesson and the sequence of activities, and to increase their engagement. Mr. Will leads the class in the movement activities.

## Example of Planning UDL Supports for Literacy Circles

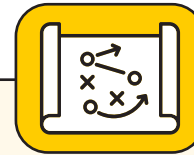
Examples of implementation of UDL strategies in daily routines and activities are described here using the examples of reading circles and play-based learning centers. It is important to keep in mind that developmentally appropriate activities for young children incorporate a variety of skill areas and domains during each activity or lesson.



During the lesson, Ms. Dee guides students in discussion in the shared reading circle. She uses picture cards and board books with easy-turn pages to provide various modes of engagement and representation.



Below, Ms. Dee provides an auditory version in Korean of *I Went Walking* to a student who is learning English, then works with another student who chose to create her own picture book.



**Multiple Means of Engagement:** Ms. Dee's lesson plans begin with activities that activate prior knowledge of animals. Ms. Dee engages children in the reading components of identifying the front and back of the book, the title, and the author, and ends with taking a "picture walk" through the book before reading. Ms. Dee incorporates various forms of engagement by using plastic animals from the play center, photos of actual animals, stuffed animals, and a brief video story of the book. The lesson includes the activity of naming the animals in the story and sequencing them by position in the walk. The lesson ends with Ms. Dee soliciting responses from the children about their feelings about the story. Allow time for children to express their favorite part of the story or to share personal information related to the story for example, sharing information about having a dog or cat or another pet.

**Multiple Means of Representation:** Ms. Dee and Ms. Nan plan for a variety of strategies for supporting student understanding. For this story, the materials used for multiple means of engagement are also useful for encouraging the children to participate in activities based on their needs. Ms. Dee, Ms. Nan, and Mr. Will provide visual representations, real objects, and photos that correspond with information in the lesson. They plan activities that involve children re-enacting the story, moving pictures of animals into the correct sequence, walking in a line like the animals did, and role-playing using puppets and stuffed animals.

**Multiple Means of Expression:** The team develops activities for soliciting responses. They encourage children to express their understanding of the story in different ways, for example through verbalizations, communication boards or assistive devices, signs, gestures, drawing or showing a picture, or creating their own book. Encourage children to express knowledge and demonstrate learning at varying levels of concept development. For example, some children might indicate understanding of text-to-picture by following along by pointing, naming some initial sounds, or memorizing and reciting the text. Provide opportunities for motor-related responses, such as acting out stories and games that include such actions as "hopping like a bunny." They will transition to the next activity by walking in a line in a similar method as the animals in the story.



Ms. Nan facilitates play at the sand and sensory table after the group lesson. Her focus for this activity is developing language concepts using sequence and positioning, as well as social communication using word boards and various communication devices. Then she moves to a play table and supports social communication between students in imaginative play.



Left and below, Mr. Will prepares a variety of choices of materials and adapted tools at the art center and helps children display their artwork related to the story. He engages children in conversation focused on sequence and positioning of items in their artwork.



He then incorporates opportunities for physical movement breaks and associating movements with story characters. He works to encourage each student's unique expression as they imitate animals and dance to a song about animals.

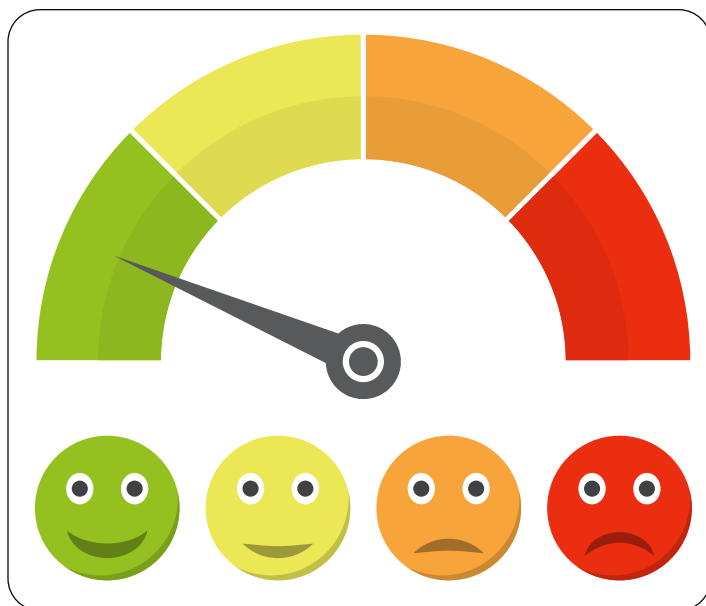




All staff members should collaborate to plan ways to support children in learning to recognize and regulate emotions through direct instruction and classroom visual supports. Plans should include pre-teaching social/emotional skills, guided practice, role-playing, specific and consistent feedback, and procedures that are used throughout classroom routines.

Various types of support are used to help children develop skills such as cooperation (sharing, taking turns) and self-regulation (calming down, coping). To support children's means of expression, teachers might have children role-play cooperative and coping situations, read stories or watch and discuss videos about sharing and about emotional regulation, depict social situations with drawings or photos and social scripts, or discuss social situations and self-regulation strategies prior to activities.

Staff should develop and consistently use a visual representation of rules, schedules, and procedures, as well as communication options for students, such as picture boards, communication devices, and ways to represent feelings and emotions. Strategies and choices for calming and regulating emotions (e.g., counting, accessing a favorite object or adult, sensory and motor activities, or going to a quiet space) should be taught and practiced before children need to use them so that there is clear understanding of when and how to use these strategies. Children can make choices for play activities as well as for self-regulation strategies related to their interests. Areas for choice could include materials that allow for engagement with peers or individual play scenarios, or materials that relate to their interests or that relate to their culture. It is important to recognize children's emotions and their need for calming techniques and to assist them in using their selected strategies for self-calming.



## Take a Deep Breath

Smell the flower



Blow the pinwheel



## Universal Design for Learning in Early Childhood Programs

### Planning and Implementation Checklist

It is important to plan ahead to increase access to and participation in the curriculum for all children. This checklist provides considerations to use in planning for and applying UDL in the early childhood program.

Engagement	Representation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure comfortable physical accessibility.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate prior knowledge into new content.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide a variety of learning activities.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide choices for different interests, needs, cultures, and preferences.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate social interactions.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Teach self-monitoring, coping skills and strategies.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate persistence and sustaining effort.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Give choices for play interactions.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide learning activities that use various types of materials.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Engage in variety of modalities (motor, verbal, hands-on, visual).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Maintain positive social interactions.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide adult guidance for children.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Give specific feedback and praise.</li></ul>

Expression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Employ various methods of response.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate observation across various settings.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Collect data for progress monitoring.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Optimize access to tools and technology.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Support children with setting goals.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Guide children in planning and completing activities.</li></ul>



For more information on applying Universal Design for Learning in inclusive early childhood programs, contact your local TATS or FIN representative.

Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS) — <http://www.tats.ucf.edu>  
Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) — <http://www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com>



### Notes:

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This document was developed by the Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS) and the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN), projects funded by the Florida Department of Education, Division of Public Schools, Bureau of Exceptional Student Education, through federal assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B.