The **DEC Recommended Practices For Environments[[1]](#footnote-1)** remind us that young children, and particularly those who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities, “learn, play, and engage with adults and peers in a multitude of environments” that include home, school, child care, and community. Environmental practices include the physical environment (e.g., space, equipment, materials), the social environment (e.g., interactions with peers, siblings, and family members), and the temporal environment (e.g., the sequence and length of routines and activities).

One way of preparing students to understand how to develop environments that support each young child is to help them become familiar with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)[[2]](#footnote-2), as mentioned in Recommended Practice E2. Here are some resources you could use to build an understanding of what UDL is and how to use it in designing environments for very young children.

1. Building Inclusive Childcare Universal Design for Learning (a free video about a campus-based early childhood program that has incorporated a UDL approach in all classrooms)

[**http://www.northampton.edu/Early-Childhood-Education/Partnerships/Building-Inclusive-Child-Care.htm**](http://www.northampton.edu/Early-Childhood-Education/Partnerships/Building-Inclusive-Child-Care.htm)

1. Conn-Powers, M., Cross, A.F., Traub, E.K., & Hutter-Pishgahi, L. (2006, September). The universal design of early education: Moving forward for all children. *Beyond the Journal: Young Children on the Web*. [**https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/styles/iidc/defiles/ECC/ECC\_Universal\_Design\_Early\_Education.pdf**](https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/styles/iidc/defiles/ECC/ECC_Universal_Design_Early_Education.pdf)
2. Questions to Consider in UDL Observations in Early Childhood Environments (a set of guiding questions for examining how UDL could be incorporated, including a section on environments) [**https://www.miracosta.edu/instruction/childdevelopmentcenter/downloads/5.6UDLforPreschoolEnvironments.pdf**](https://www.miracosta.edu/instruction/childdevelopmentcenter/downloads/5.6UDLforPreschoolEnvironments.pdf)

Here are some ideas for incorporating an emphasis on UDL in assignments you may be using with your students.

**Observation**. If students are required to complete a series of observations in this course, consider adding the following component. Turn the questions about Physical Environment (page 3) from Questions to Consider in UDL Observations in Early Childhood Environments (Resource 3 above) into a checklist like the one below. Ask students to complete the checklist for the setting in which they observe by indicating whether each feature of UDL was observed or not. Ask students to also indicate opportunities that might increase the full participation of each child.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Observed** | | **Additional Opportunities** |
| **Yes** | **No** |
| 1. Does the environment provide for easy, safe, and independent access to activities, spaces, equipment, and materials *for each child*? |  |  |  |

**Environmental design**. A common assignment in this course asks students to design an environment for a group of very young children. Consider adding a requirement to incorporate the principles of UDL into the design.

1. Find the DEC Recommended Practices online at <https://divisionearlychildhood.egnyte.com/dl/tgv6GUXhVo/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UDL means the removal of physical and structural barriers (UD) and the provision of multiple and varied formats for instruction and learning (UDL). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)