

UDL through an Early Childhood Lens: Panel Presentation

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Abstract

Given the diversity of today's expanding preschool population and the recent Federal Inclusion Policy Statement, the need for a UDL approach to curriculum planning has reached a critical stage. This session will highlight best practices in early childhood settings for children with and without disabilities that provides for the active, inclusive and meaningful participation of ALL young learners. This panel will highlight three different UDL early childhood implementation projects. The presenters will guide participants in thinking about how to utilize UDL lesson planning and implementation tools, technology integration resources, and reflective coaching practices in their own early childhood setting.

Keywords

UDL, early childhood, implementation, technology, reflective coaching

INTRODUCTION

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework is widely regarded as an integral component for effective instruction in the classroom. Opportunities to proactively create flexible materials, methods and goals allow for successful learning and inclusion from the start. The need to expand the use of this framework into preschool classrooms to address the diverse strengths and needs of our youngest learners has become a priority. The implementation of UDL in preschool assists educators with intentional design of learning environments and teaching strategies that are responsive to all children's needs and provides flexible opportunities for demonstration of learning and growth in all areas. This panel identifies responsive UDL approaches, strategies and materials and then shares their perspectives on two different UDL implementation projects and the related tools, teacher reflections and strategies for successful-

ly bringing the UDL framework to the preschool classroom.

BACKGROUND

Young children come to preschool from diverse backgrounds with varying levels of experiences and needs. This diversity requires educators to intentionally create responsive and flexible learning environments that are responsive to all learning styles in the preschool classroom.

UDL CHECKLIST FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Identifying existing UDL practices in programs for young children birth to five, requires reflecting on the program's structure and intended outcomes. This checklist is the result of a myriad of inclusive programs all designed to present expanded learning opportunities to children of varying abilities, interest and backgrounds. It builds on well-designed early childhood learning environments with responsive teaching strategies to provide successful experiences for all children. The learning environment includes three components: the physical, social, and temporal, that are designed to support every child's ability to learn. A rich and supportive environment provides materials and activities that reflect children's interests, promotes purposeful play, and facilitates learning within and across all developmental domains (cognitive, physical, social, and emotional needs) and all curriculum content areas. As teachers purposefully observe children within the environment, they use this information to plan learning opportunities for each child and the group. They use a variety of teaching strategies and take an active role in children's learning and assessing their progress. Teachers apply a wide range of individual and appropriate supports including direct teaching and supporting child-initiated learning in order to meet the needs of all learners. UDL principles are intentionally applied to ex-

pand existing learning environments and teaching approaches to personalize learning for all children.

PRESCHOOL UDL IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

This project focused on the implementation of the UDL framework into two preschool classrooms in a community-based preschool. On a very small scale, the project followed CAST's UDL Implementation Process as a guide for moving through the five suggested phases of UDL implementation:

- Explore
- Prepare
- Integrate
- Scale
- Optimize

This project focuses on the first three phases. During the *explore* phase, the project guide (first author) met with the preschool director (second author) and discussed the importance and feasibility of introducing UDL into two classrooms. It was immediately confirmed that the principles of UDL were a good fit with their model of inclusion, developmentally appropriate practice, and use of technology. The implementation team consisted of the project guide, the preschool director and two teachers who volunteered to be part of this project. The two educators were willing to participate in a multi-tiered process, which included purposeful planning and reflective coaching on their implementation of UDL. Activities during the *prepare* phase included engaging in a mini-professional learning community where we studied the principles of UDL and developed the steps of our implementation plan. We also engaged in a lesson plan review of how the UDL guidelines would be incorporated. The specific learning goals, methods of instruction, variety of materials and assessment procedures were discussed and reviewed. The goal at this stage was to develop lesson plans that allowed for more choice and variability. During the *integrate* phase the implementation team engaged in an iterative process which included design, implementation, observation, reflection and revision (see figure 1). The teachers implemented the UDL-infused lesson as the project guide videotaped this initial implementation and took observation notes. After the initial implementation, the project guide engaged in a reflective coaching session with each teacher regarding the observed lesson. The implementation team worked together multiple times through this process of designing the lesson, implementing and completing a reflective coaching session. The documents and tools that were developed and used through

this process will be shared as well as teacher feedback and next steps (including *scale* and *optimize*).

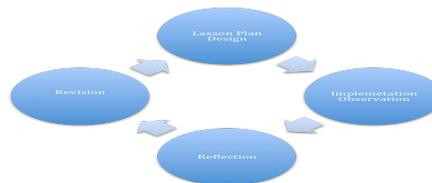


Figure 1. Iterative Implementation Process

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS-EARLY INTERVENTION THROUGH REFLECTIVE COACHING AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL DESIGNED FOR LEARNING PRACTICES

This project focused on changing the practices of a group of early interventionists who primarily serve infants and toddlers, from birth through four years, using a reflective coaching model to support the implementation of UDL strategies in home and classroom settings. The project was also framed by the 7 Key Principles of Early Intervention, with the goal of transferring strategies used by the early interventionist in the preschool classroom into home and community settings. The Implementation Process Guide recommended by CAST is being facilitated through the practices of reflective coaching. Reflective coaching is defined as “an adult learning strategy in which the coach promotes the learner’s ability to reflect on his or her actions as a means to determine the effectiveness of an action or practice and develop a plan for the refinement and use of the action in immediate and future situations.” (Rush and Sheldon, 2011). Rather than using a directive or expert model approach to learning about implementing UDL practices in early childhood settings, a small team of early interventionists are currently being coached through the *explore*, *prepare* and *integrate* stages of implementing practices that support the development of language, play and problem solving skills in young children. Using the coaching model, the educators targeted selected goals for improving their instructional practices in these areas and have begun to prepare and integrate changes into their weekly lesson plans. The UDL strategies focused on, via reflective coaching, have been the use of visual supports for language and the integration of choice in lesson plans for classroom activities. Staff have engaged in both supervisor and peer coaching throughout the project. Resources on reflective coaching as well as resources for supporting early interventionists’ acceptance, understanding and implemen-

tation of universally designed for learning strategies and tools in early childhood settings have been developed include a peer coaching guide, rating tools, and resources on planning for UDL in early intervention.

CONCLUSION

The session will end with an opportunity for participants to engage in reflection and discussion of the practices featured by the presenters, as well as in their own classrooms or early childhood settings.

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