

UDL for Little Learners

by Jeff Horwitz

Extended Discussion Guide with Text Connections

How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized the same way as the book itself - as a field guide based on a typical early childhood schedule. Each section is aligned to a chapter and a portion of an early childhood day. This means you don't need to read it cover to cover. Gather your people, choose a part of the day that you want to begin to redesign or better understand, and dig in!

Each chapter section includes the Ask Yourself questions and activities from that chapter, designed to guide you to examine your practices and start the process of redesigning your learning experiences and environments. These elements make this guide ideal to be used with your team, your colleagues, as a book study, or in collaboration with others.

So whether you're starting at arrival and working your way to dismissal, or jumping straight to the chapter that's been on your mind, this guide is here to support your journey. Every teacher has their own story of when they realized the job is much bigger, messier, and more wonderful than anyone prepared them for. UDL gives us a framework to design for that beautiful chaos and complexity. That is what this guide is here to do.

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Nap / Rest Time and Specials are included here as bonus chapters. These chapters were not included in the printed book but are available to download from the resource page where you found this guide.

Tip: Page numbers will populate after opening in Word.

Designing the Environment

FROM THE BOOK -

“Each chapter will include reflection questions and activities that guide you to examine your practices and start the process of redesigning your learning experiences and environments. The hallmark of a universally designed space is that there are multiple pathways which honor the wonderful diversity of thought, talents and experiences that come into our classroom each day.”

ASK YOURSELF

- **Values & Intentionality:** What two to three core values do you want your classroom environment to convey, and what is one specific design choice (e.g., furniture arrangement, posted visuals) you can make this week to reinforce those values?
- **Co-Creation and Ownership:** How have your students been involved in co-creating the space (e.g., establishing expectations, labeling materials), and how does this process build their ownership of the classroom community?
- **Purposeful Zones:** Walk through your classroom mentally. Do you have a designated zone for collaboration, a space for quiet independent work, and a calm corner? For any zone that is missing, what is one piece of furniture or simple design change that could create that space this week?
- **Flexible Seating and Barriers:** Think about a student in your class who struggles to stay focused or engaged during carpet or seat work. What barrier might their seating be creating - core strength, need for movement, need for space? What is one flexible seating option you could introduce to remove that barrier?
- **Seen on Day One:** If a new student walked into your classroom on the first day, would they be able to find their name, their spot, and where their belongings go? Would they feel welcomed and like they belong in this space before a single word is spoken?

ACTIVITIES

1. **Zones Audit:** Draw a quick sketch of your classroom layout. Label each area with its current purpose. Then identify: Is there a collaborative zone? A quiet zone? A calm corner? A gathering space? For any zone that is missing, sketch where it could live in your current layout and list the one or two items you would need to create it.

2. **Barrier Walk:** Choose one student in your class who you know struggles with seating - on the carpet, at their desk, or both. Observe them for one focused work period and note specifically when and how the seating becomes a barrier. Then identify one flexible seating option you could trial with that student this week and reflect on whether it changed their engagement or focus.
3. **Collaboration Station Setup:** If you don't have a dedicated collaborative space, designate one table or area this week. Then add at least two of the following supports: a visual anchor chart for what good teamwork looks like, labeled roles for each seat, or a talking tool. Introduce it to students during morning meeting before they use it independently.
4. **Seen From the Start:** Imagine you are a student walking into your classroom for the first time. Can you find your name? Your seat? Where your belongings go? Audit your room from that perspective and make any changes so that every student could answer yes to all three on day one.
5. **Co-Creation Planning:** Identify one bulletin board, display, or space in your classroom that is currently empty or teacher-created. Plan how you will involve students in building or filling that space over the first few weeks of school.

Community & Connections

FROM THE BOOK -

“The relationships we have with our students are the reason we get into this work. We value connecting with these young people, watching them grow and develop, learning who they are and the wonderful way they see the world. When we can’t seem to connect with a particular child we have sleepless nights, we rifle through our toolbox, we rack our brains and try and try and try.”

ASK YOURSELF

- When you think about the students in your classroom, can you identify at least one genuine interest, strength, or detail about each child’s life outside of school? If not, which students do you know least well and how might you change that?
- How do students in your classroom experience arrival each day? Does every child hear their name spoken with care by an adult before they settle into the day?
- Think about your classroom’s community agreements or norms. Were they co-created with students or decided by you? How would your students describe the values of your classroom community?
- When conflict or disconnection happens between students in your classroom, what happens next? Do students have the language, tools, and supported structures to make amends, or does resolution depend entirely on you?
- If you mapped the friendships and relationships in your classroom right now, which students would have strong mutual connections and which students might be on the edges of that map? What is one intentional step you could take to help a less connected student move from new to known?

ACTIVITIES

1. Design Your Before You Arrive Experience: Create one resource - a short video walkthrough, a picture book, or a meet the teacher guide - that introduces your classroom to incoming students before the first day. Include a question or two for families to discuss together at home.
2. Co-Create Your Class Charter: Set aside time in the first week of school to work with students to define how you want your classroom to feel and how you will treat each other.

Record their language, their words, in a visible document that lives in the classroom all year.

3. Interest Inventory Conversations: Create a short list of 8–10 questions covering likes, dislikes, family, hobbies, and how students handle hard moments. Over the first two to three weeks of school, sit with each student individually in a casual setting and work through the questions in conversation.
4. Map the Relationships in Your Classroom: Using your class list, observe free play, centers, or arrival over a week and note who gravitates toward whom, who plays alone, and who moves between groups. Map what you find visually and use it to inform intentional partnering decisions.
5. Teach and Practice Making Amends: Using a read aloud or a scenario not connected to anyone's personal experience, explicitly teach the two components of making amends - accountability and repair. Give students sentence stems and practice as a whole class.

Transitions

FROM THE BOOK -

“Two words that you will hear a lot of when talking about UDL are variability and barriers. Transitions are a prime place where predictable variability shows up. Because this variability is predictable, that means it can be planned for. Each year as we gain experience and meet more and more students our toolbox grows.”

ASK YOURSELF

- What transitions in your classroom tend to be the most challenging for students? Why do you think that is?
- How predictable and consistent are my current transition routines? How could I make them more so?
- What sensory considerations should I keep in mind during transitions? Are there any sensory triggers that might cause difficulties for students?
- In what ways can I provide choices and options during transitions to support student engagement and autonomy?
- How am I currently supporting executive function skills during transitions? What additional supports could I implement?
- How well do I anticipate and address potential emotional challenges during transitions? What proactive strategies could I use to help students manage their emotions?

ACTIVITIES

1. **Transition Mapping:** Individually or as a group, map out a typical day and identify all the transitions. Discuss potential barriers for each transition and brainstorm UDL-aligned strategies to address them.
2. **Observe and Analyze:** Observe transitions in your own or a colleague's classroom (with permission). Take notes on what works well and what could be improved. Discuss observations and share ideas.
3. **Develop Visual Supports:** Create visual supports, such as checklists or schedules, for a specific transition. Share and discuss these supports with colleagues and get feedback.

4. Share Best Practices: In a PLC, have each teacher share one transition strategy that has worked well in their classroom. Compile these ideas into a shared resource.
5. Transition Makeover: Choose one challenging transition and collectively brainstorm ways to redesign it using UDL principles. Develop a detailed plan, implement it, then reflect on the results.

Reflection

FROM THE BOOK -

“One of my favorite quotes comes from John Dewey, a 20th-century educator who said, ‘We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.’ Reflection is super powerful and the best tool at our disposal to help students own the learning and examine the role their choices play in their learning.”

ASK YOURSELF

- When do you currently build in time for reflection in your day, and where are you missing opportunities? Think about your daily schedule - after lessons, during transitions, at closing circle, during center time. Where could you trade just 5 minutes of ‘doing’ for reflecting to deepen student learning?
- Which type of reflection (formulaic, situational, deliberate, or dialectical) do you use most often with your students, and which type would stretch your practice? Are you staying at the surface level with checklist-style questions, or are you pushing into situational or deliberate reflection?
- What barriers prevent your students from reflecting successfully, and which UDL supports could you implement this week? Think about specific students: Who lacks the vocabulary? Who struggles to remember what happened? Who needs movement? Who would benefit from visual supports?
- How do you currently help students see their growth over time, and what small system could you put in place to make this more visible? Do your students have portfolios? Photo documentation? Work samples they revisit?
- Think about John Dewey’s quote: ‘We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.’ When do YOU reflect on your teaching practice, and how does that reflection shape your growth?

ACTIVITIES

1. Map out your daily and weekly schedule, then identify 3–5 specific moments where you could integrate brief reflection opportunities. For each moment, note: what type of reflection makes sense, how long it would take (2–5 minutes), and what it would replace. Choose one to implement immediately and commit to trying it for two weeks.

2. **Build Your Reflection Support Toolkit:** Create a physical or digital collection of reflection supports you can use across your day. Include: 5–7 reflection questions appropriate for your students' age, 3–4 sentence stems, visual aids (emotion faces, center photos, activity icons), and 2–3 movement-based reflection options.
3. **Create a Simple Reflection System:** Choose one of the systems mentioned in the chapter (reflection drawers, 1–3 scale with fingers, photo documentation, or design your own) and implement it in your classroom. Use it consistently for one week. At the end of the week, reflect: What worked? What needs adjustment? How did students respond?
4. **Start a Student Portfolio System:** Select one subject area and begin a simple portfolio process with your students. Decide how work will be collected, how often students will add to it, and what prompts will guide their selection. Set up the system and guide students through their first portfolio addition.
5. **Design a 'Change Over Time' Experience:** Plan a deliberate reflection opportunity where students can look back and see their growth - comparing writing samples, reviewing photos from the first week of school, or watching videos of themselves from earlier in the year.

Small Group Instruction

FROM THE BOOK -

“The hallmark of a universally designed space is that there are multiple pathways which honor the wonderful diversity of thought, talents and experiences that come into our classroom each day. Small group time is one of the most powerful tools we have - when the rest of the class is truly engaged.”

ASK YOURSELF

- Reflect on your current small group setup. What percentage of your attention do you give to your small group versus monitoring the rest of the class? What would it take to shift that balance toward deeper engagement with your small group?
- Think about a recent time when your independent work time fell apart. Looking back through the lens of the barriers mentioned in this chapter, which specific barrier(s) were at play? How might you address that barrier next time?
- Consider the ‘buffet of choices’ approach versus having all students do the same independent work. What feels exciting about offering more choices? What feels scary or overwhelming? What’s one small step you could take toward offering more flexibility?
- The chapter mentions that ‘for many of us, talk is how we make sense of the world.’ How much does your current small group structure honor students’ need to talk and move?
- Reflect on your ‘teacher tools’ (the look, the tone, the name mention). When do you find yourself using these most during small group time? What might it mean if you’re relying on them constantly versus rarely?

ACTIVITIES

1. Observe: Set up your small group time, but don’t actually pull a group. Instead, simply observe for 10–15 minutes without intervening. Take notes on what students do well, where they get stuck, and what surprises you. Use these observations to identify one specific barrier to address.
2. Create a ‘Buffet Menu’: Choose one subject area and brainstorm 3 ‘May Do’ options that align with your current learning goals. Make sure options vary in format (tech/no tech, solo/partner, creative/practice-based).

3. Problem-Solving Protocol: Each person shares their biggest small group time challenge. The group uses the 'Predicting Barriers' framework from the chapter to diagnose which barrier(s) might be causing the issue, then brainstorms 2–3 practical solutions.
4. Plan to Co-Create Visual Expectations: Draft an anchor chart that shows what small group time looks like, sounds like, and why it matters. Include both 'What students will be doing' and 'What the teacher will be doing.'
5. Teach and Document One New Strategy: Choose one strategy from the chapter you haven't tried yet. Plan how you'll teach it, try it with students, and document what worked and what needs adjusting.

Emotional Literacy

FROM THE BOOK -

“We all know that when our students are dysregulated, learning is the last thing happening. The goal isn’t to eliminate big feelings - it’s to give students the language, tools, and community to navigate them. When we proactively plan for emotional variability the same way we plan for academic variability, we change what’s possible in our classrooms.”

ASK YOURSELF

- Emotional Vocabulary Audit: Review the last few days in your classroom. What emotions have you heard your students name? What emotions have you observed them experiencing but lacking words for? Choose 2–3 emotion words to intentionally teach this month.
- Your Own Emotional Literacy: Think about a recent moment when you felt dysregulated in your classroom. What strategy did you use (or wish you had used) to regulate yourself? How might modeling your own regulation process out loud help your students learn these skills?
- Built-In Engagement Assessment: Review a typical instructional block. How many minutes do students spend in passive listening versus active engagement? What’s one built-in engagement strategy you could embed to proactively support regulation rather than waiting for a reactive brain break?
- Calm Corner Assessment: If you have a calm corner, evaluate it: Can students independently access it? Do they know how to use the tools inside? Have you taught each strategy explicitly? If you don’t have a calm corner, what’s one small step you could take this week to create one?
- Empathy in Action: Think of a recent conflict or challenging social moment between students. What specific empathy skill could you teach or reinforce to help your students navigate similar situations more successfully?

ACTIVITIES

1. Emotion Word Introduction Plan: Choose 2–3 emotion words beyond happy/sad/mad that would benefit your students. For each word, create a simple introduction plan: define it in

kid-friendly language, identify a book character that demonstrates the emotion, and connect it to a body sensation. Introduce one word this week.

2. **Build or Enhance Your Calm Corner:** If you don't have a calm corner, gather materials this week and designate a space. If you already have one, audit it using three components: (1) Tools to name feelings, (2) Menu of strategies, (3) Physical comfort items.
3. **Teach One Breathing Technique:** Select one breathing technique from the chapter that you haven't used with your students. Teach it during a calm moment and practice it together as a class 2–3 times over several days. Create or print a visual reminder to post in your calm corner.
4. **Embed One Built-In Engagement Strategy:** Choose one lesson or routine where students typically lose focus. Select one built-in engagement strategy from the chapter and intentionally embed it. Reflect: Did students stay more regulated? Did you still need a reactive brain break?
5. **Create an Emotional Literacy Anchor Chart with Students:** Co-create an anchor chart about emotional literacy during morning meeting or circle time. Use words and pictures so it's accessible to all learners. Display it prominently and refer to it regularly.

Centers

FROM THE BOOK -

“Think of your centers like an all-inclusive resort - high engagement because there is something for everyone, and autonomy because students go do what they want to do. The hallmark of a universally designed center time is that every student could walk in, know what to do, and find something that lights them up.”

ASK YOURSELF

- Walk around your classroom and look at your centers through the eyes of each of your students. Is there something here for everyone? Whose interests are not yet represented and how could you weave them into an existing center?
- Which center is currently least attended or has lost its spark? What might be keeping students away - the work, the space, the materials, or something else?
- When you observe center time, what does engagement look like? Are students deeply engaging or rotating quickly without completing tasks? What barrier might be at play?
- Does your current center structure - rotational, choice-based, or a combination - align with your values around student agency and variability? What is driving your current structure and is that still the right reason?
- If you stood in your most challenging center right now, would a student know what to do without asking you? What one support could you add today?

ACTIVITIES

1. Center Audit: Take a fresh look at your current centers. Create a chart with these columns: Center Name, Type, Barriers Addressed, and One Thing I Could Change. Complete it for each of your current centers. What patterns do you notice?
2. The Student Lens: Sit in your classroom and think about each student as you look around the room. For each student ask: Is there something here for them? Would they know what to do? Make notes and use that information to make one change to your centers this week.

3. Add One Layer of Support: Choose one center that students frequently ask you for help with or that you notice students avoiding. Add one layer of support: a visual direction card, a help card, a task card, or a short video.
4. Update and Discover: Choose a center that has lost its spark. Give it a quick makeover - swap out materials, add a new tool, rotate in something you've had stored away. Then use the Discovery and Inquiry strategy to reintroduce it.
5. Try a New Structure: If you currently use a purely rotational model, try giving students choice for one center time. Reflect afterward: How did students respond? What worked? What barriers came up that you hadn't anticipated?

Arrival & Morning Routines

FROM THE BOOK -

“Arrival matters. It’s the first moment of the day, and for some of our students it’s the hardest. For many of our youngest learners, the transition from home to school can feel enormous. How we welcome each child into our space sets the tone for everything that follows.”

ASK YOURSELF

- How predictable and welcoming is your current arrival routine? Does every student have a clear, consistent sequence they can follow independently?
- Which students struggle most during arrival? What specific barrier do you think is at play - emotional, sensory, language, or something else?
- How are emotions acknowledged during arrival in your classroom? Is there a system for students to share how they are feeling when they come in?
- What is your morning choice time like currently? Does it offer a variety of activities that allow for quiet independent work, movement, cooperation, or fine motor skills?
- What is one thing you could change about your arrival routine tomorrow that would make it more predictable, accessible, or welcoming for your students?

ACTIVITIES

1. Create a visual schedule for your classroom’s arrival routine. This could involve drawing pictures, finding clip art, or taking photos of different steps. Physically display this schedule and practice walking through it with students.
2. Design a ‘feelings check-in’ system for your classroom. This might involve creating a chart with various emotion faces, providing different colored cards for students to choose from, or setting up a quiet corner with drawing materials for emotional expression.
3. Brainstorm and gather a collection of ‘transitional objects’ or engaging ‘special school-only’ distractions that could be used to support students struggling with separation.
4. Observe or ask a colleague to observe classroom arrival from a student’s perspective. Map out the ‘path’ a student takes from the door to their designated area, identifying any potential points of confusion.

5. Design what the morning choice time could look like. What activities could you include? How could you offer a variety that allows for quiet independent work, movement, cooperation, or fine motor skills?

Morning Meeting

FROM THE BOOK -

“The practice of Morning Meeting has many strong elements that with a little tweaking based on predictable barriers and variability can become a foundational element for your day - allowing all students to feel welcomed and included, build a strong community, spark engagement, and set a tone of learning for the rest of the day.”

ASK YOURSELF

- How does your current morning meeting structure address the diverse needs of all learners in your classroom?
- In what ways can you incorporate more student voice and choice into your morning meeting activities?
- Considering the identified barriers (e.g., long sitting times, attention challenges), what specific UDL-aligned strategies could you implement to make your morning meeting more engaging and accessible?
- How can you embed language development more intentionally into your morning meeting routines?
- Reflecting on the ‘From the Classroom’ example, what elements of your morning meeting might benefit from a clearer purpose or more explicit planning with barriers in mind?
- What is one new strategy you plan to try in your next morning meeting to better support universal design for learning?

ACTIVITIES

1. Map your Morning Meeting: Take your current morning meeting structure, and for each part list 1–2 barriers you see in your practice. Then brainstorm one UDL-aligned support you could apply to remove that barrier.
2. Redesign the Share: Think of the default way that sharing happens in your morning meeting and redesign that portion to include movement, visuals, or choice. Try your redesigned share and reflect on what changed.
3. Sentence Stem Supports: Make a list of common morning meeting questions or prompts and create sentence stems that lower the language barrier for each prompt.

4. Image Bedazzle: Take your most recent morning message and revise it with multiple means of representation - add colors, symbols, images, highlight words, or build up suspense.
5. Pause to Process: Identify one spot in your morning meeting where students would benefit from think time and add a structure like think-pair-share, a wait timer, or a visual reminder of choices. Try it for one week and track what changes you notice.

Calendar

FROM THE BOOK -

“Calendar time can be the backbone of a lot of our early childhood math work. Now, as a UDL practitioner, the question worth asking is: what is the goal of calendar time and what are the barriers to achieving that goal? Once we are clear on the purpose, we can design for the predictable variability in our room.”

ASK YOURSELF

- What are the actual mathematical goals driving your current calendar time? If you had to name them, could you?
- During your current calendar time, who is most engaged? Who is least engaged? What clues tell you that?
- Which predictable barriers from this chapter show up most often in your classroom (e.g., one-student-at-a-time participation, long sitting time, language load, proximity issues)?
- Do multilingual learners, quieter students, or those with high energy get as many chances to participate as their peers? How could you expand options for them to show what they know?
- If you asked your students to redesign calendar time, what might they change? How could you gather their input?

ACTIVITIES

1. Calendar Audit: Record or jot notes during your next 3 calendar times. Track: Who participates, who zones out, who fidgets, who struggles with language, who seems most engaged.
2. Student Voice Snapshot: Ask students, ‘What’s your favorite part of calendar? What’s the hardest part?’ Record answers anonymously with sticky notes or quick check-in cards.
3. Design a Calendar Journal Page: Create one prototype page for a calendar journal (e.g., write today’s date in multiple ways, draw the weather, represent today’s number with tally marks or coins).

4. Freshen It Up Challenge: Take one routine from your current calendar and brainstorm at least 3 new, fun, or thematic ways to do it (e.g., karate chops, dinosaur stomps, rainbow patterns).

Phonics & Foundational Reading

FROM THE BOOK -

“The research is clear: cracking the alphabetic code requires explicit, systematic phonics instruction for most children. And UDL gives us a way to deliver that instruction in ways that meet the full range of learners in our room - not by lowering the bar, but by widening the pathways to reach it.”

ASK YOURSELF

- How is foundational reading instruction currently delivered in your classroom or school? Is it mostly whole group, small group, or a mix?
- What barriers have you noticed in your current approach, such as pace, engagement, or participation? Which students might those barriers be affecting most?
- Looking at your current phonics block, where does the decision-making live? Is it mostly the teacher directing students through the lesson or do students have agency over how and when they move through the learning?
- How could you use assessment to better understand the range of learners in your classroom so you can design stations and structures that work for everyone?
- Which of the suggested stations might work best for your students and your space? What would you need to get one or two of them up and running?

ACTIVITIES

1. Look at your current phonics block and identify one whole group routine that could be redesigned to give students more agency. Write a brief plan for what that routine looks like now, what barrier it creates, and how you would redesign it.
2. Take a close look at your current phonics block and map out where the decision-making lives. Draw a T-chart with ‘Teacher Decisions’ on one side and ‘Student Decisions’ on the other. Identify one place where you could shift a decision to the student’s side.

3. Choose one of the phonics stations from the chapter. Design the station with at least three task card options and a challenge card. Think about how a student would know what to do when they get there without your direction.
4. Try out the gradual release structure with one upcoming phonics lesson. Plan your I do, We do, and You do phases and identify the self-assessment moment you will build into each transition.
5. Design a simple self-assessment tool that your students could use during phonics instruction to check in with themselves as learners.

Writing

FROM THE BOOK -

“Every student’s writing work is a little different - and that’s the beauty of it. When we offer choices in the process, content, and product of writing, we open the door for more of our students’ true voices to come out. And when we add the right scaffolds, we stop being the flexible pathway ourselves and let the environment do that work.”

ASK YOURSELF

- Considering the barriers to writing discussed, which barrier(s) do you observe most frequently in your own classroom, and what is one specific strategy from this chapter you will try to address?
- The chapter emphasizes offering choices in the process, content, and product of writing. Beyond content choice, what is one new way you could offer choice in either the process or product of writing to increase student engagement and agency?
- The text highlights the importance of supporting executive functioning skills and persistence in writing. How might you incorporate the idea of being a ‘struggle scout’ or other growth mindset strategies into your writing instruction?
- After reading about UDL-aligned strategies, what is one existing resource or routine in your classroom that you could adapt or scaffold to better support a wider range of learners during writing time?
- Thinking about the concept of gradual release for generating story ideas, how could you implement a similar strategy to help students who struggle with initial idea generation while still supporting those who are ready to begin writing independently?

ACTIVITIES

1. Scaffold and Support Scavenger Hunt: Using the UDL Focus Areas document and the section on flexible methods and materials, explore your classroom for scaffolds and supports that students can use during writing - alphabet charts, name tags, anchor charts, visual checklists, scaffolded graphic organizers.
2. Creating a ‘UDL Writing Toolkit’ for Students: Gather and organize a variety of physical and digital tools for students to access during writing time - different-sized pencils/markers,

various types of paper, clipboards, personal dictionaries, alphabet charts, and visual checklists.

3. Develop Super Scaffolded Graphic Organizers: Print out or create digital versions of the super-scaffolded graphic organizer and its less scaffolded versions to offer students choice in their level of support.
4. Build a Classroom 'Struggle Wall' or 'Persistence Path': Create a visual display where students' efforts in overcoming writing challenges are celebrated - anonymized examples of revisions, erasures, or notes about problem-solving strategies.
5. Create Writing Choice Zones: Designate specific areas in the classroom where different writing choices are available (e.g., a 'Cozy Corner' with clipboards, a 'Tablet Station' for digital writing, a 'Big Paper Area' for collaborative writing).

Recess

FROM THE BOOK -

“Recess matters. It is an essential part of the school day and one that often goes undesigned. The same way we think about barriers and supports for literacy or math, we can think about recess - and when we do, we open up the playground for every student to belong, play, and thrive.”

ASK YOURSELF

- Have you taken the time to introduce the playground and recess equipment like you would another part of your classroom?
- What are some predictable barriers your students face during recess, and how can you proactively plan to eliminate them?
- How can you advocate for and activate better recess experiences for your students, considering equipment, space, and student engagement?
- How can you establish shared expectations for recess among all supervising adults to ensure a consistent and supportive environment?
- What strategies can you implement to help students transition effectively from the high energy of recess back to focused learning in the classroom?

ACTIVITIES

1. Plan out how you would introduce parts of the playground equipment to your students the same way you would introduce any other part of your classroom.
2. Design role-playing experiences for your students around playground situations. Pro tip: Have them generate the list!
3. Co-create signage with your students, designed for early childhood students, for shared expectations to be posted in the recess space.
4. Co-create a list of playground activities with the space and equipment available for your students.

5. Collaborate with other adults in the building who support or supervise your students on shared expectations and successful strategies. Connect with the PE teacher and ask them to share games your students could play on the playground.

Math

FROM THE BOOK -

“Math has this weird relationship in our schools. We have begun to view math in a binary way - either we’re good at math or we’re not. UDL gives us a way to change that story by making tools cool, by meeting students in the concrete before the abstract, and by building a math culture where every student sees themselves as a mathematician.”

ASK YOURSELF

- **Tools and Culture:** Think about your current math instruction. What messages, spoken or unspoken, are you sending students about using tools like manipulatives, number lines, or scratch paper? What is one concrete step you could take tomorrow to begin making tools ‘cool’ in your classroom?
- **Concrete to Abstract:** Review your upcoming math lessons for the week. Where might students be moving too quickly from concrete to abstract? Which lesson would benefit most from adding a concrete or pictorial phase?
- **Your Own Math Story:** Reflect on your own relationship with math. How do your experiences as a math learner influence the way you teach math now? What beliefs about math might you need to examine or reshape to better serve your students?
- **Barriers in Your Classroom:** Of the six barriers listed in this chapter (foundational skills, vocabulary, mindset, paper-pencil heavy, fine motor, processing time), which 2–3 are most prevalent in your classroom right now?
- **Launch, Explore, Discuss, Apply, Reflect:** Consider one upcoming math lesson. How could you restructure it using this framework? What would change about student engagement, choice, and understanding?

ACTIVITIES

1. **Create Your Enable Table:** Designate a space in your classroom for an Enable Table. Gather the math tools you currently have and organize them in this space. Introduce the Enable Table to your students using the co-creation process described in the chapter.
2. **Design a Launch-Explore-Discuss-Apply-Reflect Lesson:** Take an upcoming math standard and design one complete lesson using the five-phase framework. Create at least

3 station options for both the Explore and Apply phases, ensuring you have concrete, pictorial, and abstract choices.

3. **Build Sentence Frames and Gestures:** Identify 5–7 key vocabulary words or concepts for your current math unit. Create sentence frames that support students in using this vocabulary and develop consistent gestures to accompany these concepts.
4. **Audit Your Math Barriers:** Spend one full math lesson observing and taking notes. Which of the six barriers are you seeing in action? Create a chart documenting which students face which barriers, then choose one strategy from this chapter to address the most common barrier.
5. **Collaborate with Colleagues on Layers of Support:** Divide up the 'layers of support' work - sentence frames, visuals, menu of strategies, choice of manipulatives. Meet to share your work and discuss how you'll implement these layers together.

Read Alouds & Reading Comprehension

FROM THE BOOK -

“Read alouds are one of the most powerful tools in an early childhood classroom - and one of the easiest to do without clarity of purpose. When we read with intentionality, when we make our thinking visible, and when we give students ways to engage with a text that go beyond listening, we change what’s possible for every reader in the room.”

ASK YOURSELF

- How much choice do my students currently have in their reading? What’s one way I could increase that choice within my current constraints?
- When I read aloud, am I consistently modeling and naming the comprehension strategies I use (predicting, visualizing, questioning), or do I ping-pong from strategy to strategy?
- Looking at the predictable barriers list, which barrier(s) do most of my students face during reading time?
- If I could implement just ONE strategy from this chapter this week, which would have the biggest impact for my students?
- How does my own relationship with reading influence how I teach it? What shifts might I need to make?

ACTIVITIES

1. **Audit Your Read Aloud Intentionality:** For your next 3 read alouds, write down beforehand: What comprehension skill am I modeling today? What will I pause to notice or ask? How will I make my thinking visible? After each read aloud, reflect on whether you were more intentional.
2. **Try the Whiteboard Visualization Strategy:** During your next read aloud, give students whiteboards. Read a descriptive passage and ask them to sketch what they picture in their minds. Have a few students share and explain their sketches.

3. Build a Reader's Notebook System: Design a simple reader's notebook or reading response tool that works for the range of learners in your room. What scaffolds would help your least experienced readers? What extensions would challenge your most fluent ones?
4. Design a Literacy Station: Choose one of the literacy station ideas from the chapter and design it fully - what is the task, what materials are needed, what does the student do when they're done, and how does it connect to your current learning goals?
5. Start with Inquiry: Plan your next read aloud to begin with a question, an image, or a provocation that sparks curiosity before you even show the cover. Document student responses and compare their engagement with a more traditional introduction.

Nap / Rest Time

BONUS CHAPTER *This chapter was not included in the printed book. Download it and other bonus content from the resource page where you found this guide.*

FROM THE BOOK -

“Rest time is one of the most uniquely early childhood parts of our day - and one that often gets the least design attention. When we look at rest time through a UDL lens, we realize there is a wide range of needs happening on those cots, and designing for that variability matters just as much as designing for the academic parts of the day.”

ASK YOURSELF

- What does rest time currently look like in your classroom? How much flexibility exists in your current approach?
- What barriers do you notice students encountering during rest time? Which students struggle, and what patterns do you see in their challenges?
- What spaces, resources, or partnerships exist in your school that you haven't yet tapped into for creating flexible rest time options?
- Who in your school community could you partner with to expand options for students during rest time? What would need to happen to make that collaboration successful?
- What's one concrete change you could implement next week to provide more choice or flexibility during rest time? How will you know if your adjustments are working?

ACTIVITIES

1. Track rest time data for one week: How many students fall asleep? How long does it take? Who struggles? Who doesn't need rest? Use this data to identify patterns and inform your planning.
2. If you could design an ideal dual-space rest time setup, what would it look like? What's one step you could take toward that vision, even in a limited way?

3. Sketch out 2–3 different configurations for how you could create dual spaces (rest vs. quiet time) within your existing classroom or building. Consider furniture, lighting, sound, and materials needed.
4. Create a menu of 5–10 quiet time activity options (audiobooks, nature walks, art projects, read-alouds, etc.) and identify what resources, support, or partnerships you'd need to implement each one.
5. If you have colleagues teaching the same age group, schedule a meeting to discuss how you might share spaces and students during rest time. Create a shared rest time protocol document with your team.

Specials

BONUS CHAPTER *This chapter was not included in the printed book. Download it and other bonus content from the resource page where you found this guide.*

FROM THE BOOK -

“Specialists have the unique challenge of seeing many classes for a limited amount of time - and often with less context about individual students than the classroom teacher. That context gap is real, but UDL gives specialists a framework to design proactively for the predictable variability that walks through their door, regardless of whose class it is.”

ASK YOURSELF

- Think about the amount of contact time you have with your students over the course of a year. How does that reality shape the way you plan and what does that mean for how you establish routines and procedures?
- Look around your specialist space. What visuals exist to support students who aren't yet readers or who are still developing language? Where are the gaps?
- Think about a lesson you taught recently. Where did students have multiple pathways to access the content, demonstrate understanding, or engage with the material? Where were they limited to one pathway?
- How are you currently building on the work of colleagues in your building? What routines, nonverbals, or expectations could you adopt or share that would create more consistency for students across their school day?
- Think about a student who struggles in your space. What predictable barriers does that student face and what is one proactive design decision you could make before they walk through your door?

ACTIVITIES

1. Contact Time Audit: Do the math for your own context. How many minutes will you see each class this year? Write down three things you want students to be able to do independently by the end of their time with you and work backwards from there.

2. Barrier Walk: Walk through your specialist space as if you are a student arriving for the first time. What can you figure out on your own? What would confuse you? Make a list of three barriers you could proactively address before your next unit begins.
3. Multiple Pathways Lesson Audit: Take one upcoming lesson and map it against three goals - following directions, working on a skill, and demonstrating understanding. For each goal, identify where students currently have only one pathway and design one additional option.
4. Colleague Connection: Identify one grade level team you haven't connected with yet this year. Find fifteen minutes to identify one routine, nonverbal, or expectation you could align with or borrow. Bring one thing from your space to share in return.
5. Job Design Sprint: Look at your next week of lessons and identify one moment in each class where a student job or role could replace something you are currently doing yourself. Design the job and create a simple visual to support it.

Closing Circle & Dismissal

FROM THE BOOK -

“Closing circle is an opportunity for us to gather as a community, to share in each other’s experiences of the day, to build belonging and to process the day. It would be great if students left our care, onto their next adventure, calm, connected, and cared for. That doesn’t happen by accident - it happens by design.”

ASK YOURSELF

- What current barriers prevent you from implementing a consistent Closing Circle in your classroom? What’s one small step you could take this week to carve out time for it?
- How does the end of your day typically feel for both you and your students? What would ‘regulated, restored, and storing away their learnings’ look and feel like in your specific classroom context?
- Which of the Closing Circle activities mentioned resonates most with you and your students’ needs? What makes this approach feel manageable and meaningful for your specific classroom community?
- Think about the connection between your Morning Meeting and your Closing Circle as bookends to the day. How could these two rituals mirror or complement each other to create a sense of completeness for students?
- Consider the diverse states your students might be in at the end of the day (waking from rest, returning from specials, hungry, anxious about going home, overstimulated). Which students might find the transition home most challenging, and how might a structured Closing Circle specifically support them?

ACTIVITIES

1. Design Your Closing Circle Routine: Create a 5–10 minute Closing Circle plan for your classroom. Map out the structure (greeting, activity, goodbye), choose 2–3 activities you’ll rotate through the week, and identify what time you’ll carve out in your schedule. Write it down and commit to trying it for one week.
2. Photo Documentation Challenge: For one full day, take photos throughout your classroom activities. At the end of the day, select 5–8 images that capture key moments. Use these

in your Closing Circle to prompt reflection. Note how students respond to this visual approach compared to verbal prompts alone.

3. **Barrier Brainstorm and Solution Mapping:** Create a two-column chart listing all the barriers that currently prevent you from having an effective Closing Circle. In the right column, brainstorm one concrete strategy to address each barrier.
4. **Build Your Closing Circle Activity Menu:** Create a visual reference of 8–10 Closing Circle activities you can rotate through. Organize them by type (Songs, Games, Goodbyes/Gratitude, Mindfulness, Brief Reflection). For each activity, note what it requires and when it works best.
5. **Morning Meeting & Closing Circle Connection Audit:** Review your current Morning Meeting and identify elements that could bookend your day. Map out 3–5 parallel structures that would create symmetry and predictability for students. Try implementing one parallel element this week.