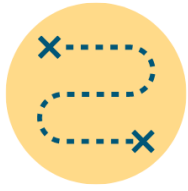


UNIVERSAL DESIGN TOOL



How to Set Up an Inclusive Environment in Any Learning Space

by Amy Moylan

TOOL DESCRIPTION

Photos of a highly accessible and Universally-Designed classroom paired with charted guidelines to support teachers in considering and applying Universal Design within their own classroom spaces, based on students' demonstrated needs.

CRITICAL CONTEXT INFORMATION

The exemplar classroom is a first grade classroom in a public urban elementary school; however, much of the guidance is more broadly applicable.

TOOL & LINKS

- [Universal Design Photo Examples and Guidelines](#)

About this Tool & Guidance for Adaptation

Please see the photo examples and guiding chart linked above to accompany the prompts for deeper thinking below.

1. Consider: Are you creating a space that is set up to include all kinds of learners?
2. How can you shift, add, change or adapt an aspect of that space to cater to all the work in that space?
3. Consider one or more of the following questions to these aspects:
 - A. Seating: Is it varied for body types and movement feedback?
 - B. Lighting: Is the neon lighting potentially over-stimulating to light sensitive learners?
 - C. Entrance and flow: Can someone enter your space in different modes while holding things and move around freely?
 - D. Access to content: Can learners hear, touch, see and experience the resources and content presented?
 - E. Representation: Do your books, signs, and displays represent varied cultures, genders, and sources?

Excerpted from *Innovation in Practice: A Student-Centered Learning Toolkit By Teachers, For Teachers*. ©The Teacher Collaborative 2022. [Theteachercollaborative.org](https://theteachercollaborative.org)



Teacher Narrative

Imagine walking into any learning space and thinking, “Wow, this space was meant for me. I feel seen and validated and accommodated. It is set up to meet all of my needs and learning considerations.”

A shift in my career came when I realized that relying solely on student learning plans held me back from more proactively considering how I could design a space that was inclusive of all learners, not just those in need of specific modifications or accommodations. To accommodate student needs based on their learning profiles, I was missing a proactive opportunity to meet the needs of most of my learners before they even entered my classroom.

One of my priorities is designing a trauma-informed, accessible, welcoming classroom space for my first graders. “The ability to self-regulate—to strategically modulate one’s emotional reactions or states in order to be more effective at coping and engaging with the environment—is a critical aspect of human development” (CAST).¹⁰

I learned that in order to support students with neurodiverse needs, I needed to learn what kinds of stimuli were detrimental and what was helpful. I needed to learn how to be proactive in my approach to set up a welcoming environment and teach self-regulation. Students presenting with difficulty regulating their bodies benefited from a set up with flexibility built in. They could choose which kind of seating helped them focus and learn from the beginning of their classroom experience in first grade. Instead of waiting for dysregulation and adjusting in response, this approach served as a proactive support with a message of inclusivity for an expectation of the propensity to move in different ways. The guidelines linked above and the accompanying photos show a few ways in which these supports benefitted my students.

I found out that what was helpful and accommodating for some was helpful and accommodating for all. Some students discovered learning styles with flexibility and ease where they wouldn’t have been able to explore that otherwise.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Amy Moylan (she/they) has been teaching first grade for 22 years. Amy currently teaches first grade at the Baldwin School in Cambridge, MA. Amy’s quest to create the most inclusive environment possible lends itself to their dynamic project-based learning approach.



¹⁰ See: <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement/self-regulation>.