



Appendix B - Supporting Exceptional Learners

Children enter early childhood programs with diverse learning and developmental needs. Each child has unique characteristics that may help or hinder the ability to learn. It is the role of the program and educators to provide a learning environment where every child can be successful.

Early childhood environments should be inclusive ones where children with disabilities and developmental delays enjoy learning experiences alongside their typically developing peers. In 2015, the United States Department of Education along with the United States Department of Health and Human Services issued a draft policy statement on the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs.

“The Departments define inclusion in early childhood programs as including children with disabilities in early childhood programs, together with their peers, without disabilities, holding high expectations and intentionally promoting participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations and using evidence-based services and supports to foster their cognitive, communication, physical, behavioral, and social-emotional development; friendship with peers; and sense of belonging. This applies to all young children with disabilities from those with the mildest disabilities, to those with the most significant disabilities.”

The Foundations were designed for all children. The content within this developmental framework provides the breadth of information from which to create goals and experiences that will help children reach their highest potential while capturing their interests and building on what they already know. Educators must emphasize and celebrate all children’s accomplishments and focus on what children can do.

To differentiate instruction is to recognize children’s varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interest, and to react responsively. Differentiated instruction is a process of teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same group. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each child’s growth and individual success by meeting the individual needs of each child in the learning process. Differentiation should be used to engage all learners. In order for early educators to differentiate instruction they must first understand the developmental goals a child needs to obtain. This understanding should be used to develop lesson plans and learning experiences that help the child meet the goals.

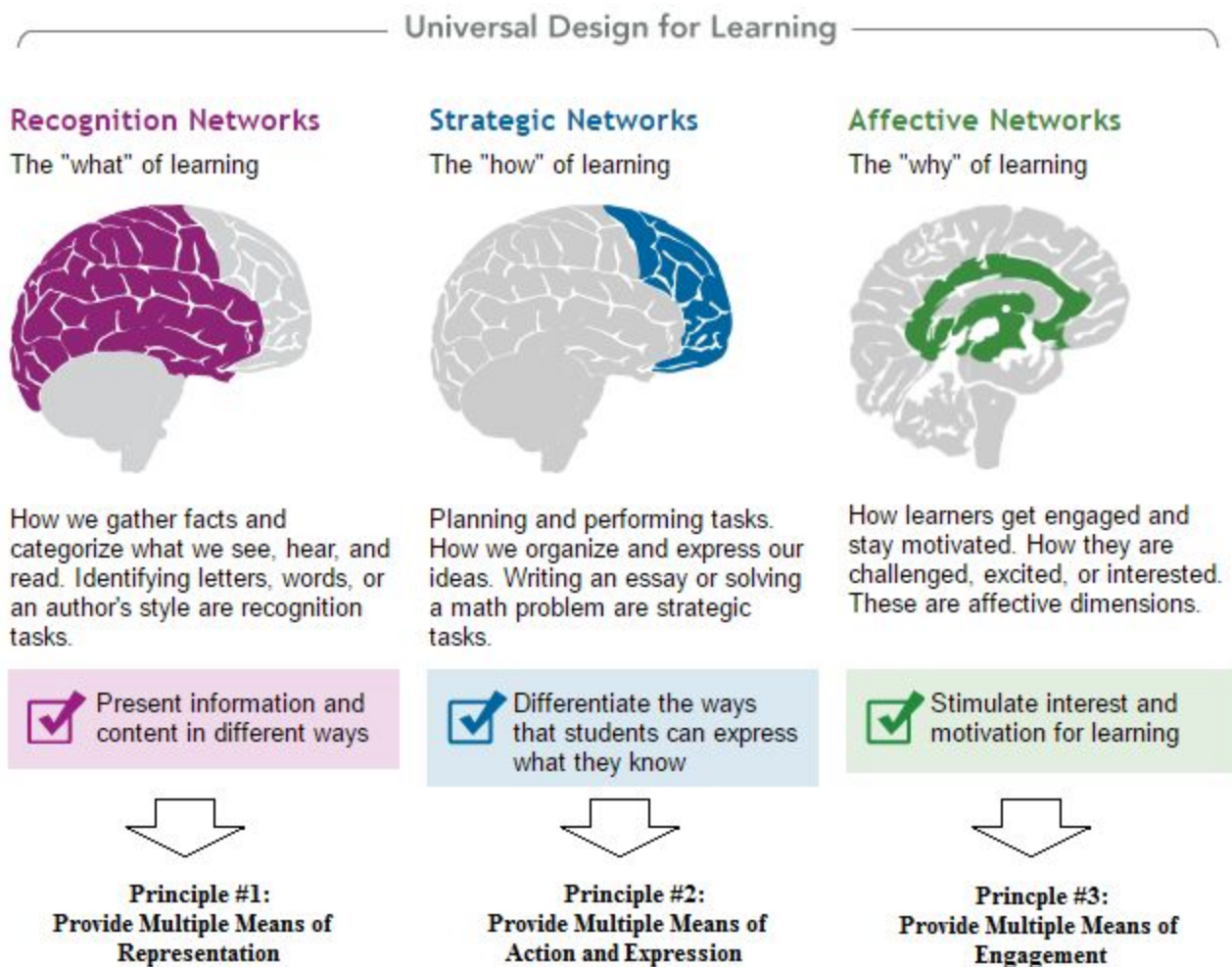
Educators may need to adapt or modify classroom environments, interactions, and/or materials and equipment to help children with disabilities fully participate.

Universal Design for Learning

When using the Foundations in developing curriculum, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can be utilized to give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone. It is not a single, one-size-fits-all solution, but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.

UDL is a theoretical framework developed by the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) to guide the development of curricula that are flexible and supportive of all children. The concept of UDL was inspired by the universal design movement in building architecture. This movement calls for the design of structures that anticipate the needs of individuals with disabilities and how to accommodate these needs from the outset. Although universally designed structures are more usable by individuals with disabilities, they offer unforeseen benefits for all users. Curb cuts, for example, serve their intended use of facilitating the travel of those in wheelchairs, but they are also beneficial to people using strollers, young children, and even the average walker. The process of designing for individuals with disabilities has led to improved usability for everyone.

UDL calls for the design of curricula with the needs of all children in mind, so that methods, materials, and assessments are usable by all. Traditional curricula present a host of barriers that limit children's access to information and learning. A UDL curriculum is designed to be innately flexible, enriched with multiple media so that alternatives can be accessed whenever appropriate. A UDL curriculum takes on the burden of adaptation rather than leaving it up to the child to adapt. It minimizes barriers and maximizes access to both information and learning.



The UDL framework guides the development of adaptable curricula by means of three principles (Figure 1 and 2). The three UDL principles call for flexibility in relation to three essential facets of learning, each one orchestrated by a distinct set of networks in the brain. UDL recognizes four essential teaching methods for each facet of learning (Figure 1 and 2).

Universal Design for Learning
Principle 1: to support recognition learning, provide multiple, flexible methods of presentation
To support diverse recognition networks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide multiple examples ● Highlight critical features ● Provide multiple media and formats ● Support background context
Principle 2: to support strategic learning, provide multiple, flexible methods of expression and apprenticeship
To support diverse strategic networks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide flexible models of skilled performance ● Provide opportunities to practice with supports ● Provide ongoing, relevant feedback ● Offer flexible opportunities for demonstrating skill
Principle 3: to support affective learning, provide multiple, flexible options for engagement
To support diverse affective networks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offer choices of content and tools ● Offer adjustable levels of challenge ● Offer choices of rewards ● Offer choices of learning context

Source: <http://www.udlcenter.org> Hall, T., Strangman, N., & Meyer, A. (2011). Differentiated Instruction and Implications for UDL Implementations.