TATS & FIN Talk

VOLUME 2

About Universal Design for Learning in Inclusive Early Childhood Environments

A ramp into a building, curb cuts, and lowered service counters: as a result of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, we have all come to expect and use universal designs that make environments accessible to everyone. When ramps are available, all of us use them — whether we use a wheelchair, a walker, or we simply prefer to walk up an incline rather than steps. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) applies the universal design concept to the classroom environment and curriculum so that children with diverse needs can access classroom materials to promote their growth and development.

Designing environments that are accessible to all also applies to learning. In the same way that it is unacceptable to wait until a person in a wheelchair arrives to think about designing and building a ramp for a restaurant, it is also unacceptable to design learning environments that are inaccessible to some students.

UDL is a framework for intentionally, proactively, and reflectively addressing the learning needs of diverse and exceptional learners in the classroom (CAST, 2018). It contains principles that guide the selection of curriculum materials and resources that all children can use, providing support for diverse abilities, learning preferences, languages, and cultural backgrounds.

Three Guidelines for a Universally Designed Early Childhood Learning Environment

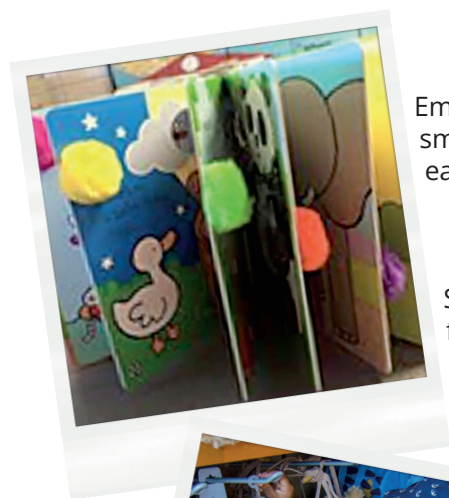## 1 Multiple means of
Engagement

Affective Networks | The "WHY" of learning

https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement

How do you provide options for children to be engaged and motivated to learn?

Ms. Fernandez makes the most of all her students' preferences during literacy center activities.

Emily likes to look at books with Arturo, but she has difficulty turning the pages. With small pom-poms glued to each page, both children can easily turn the pages.
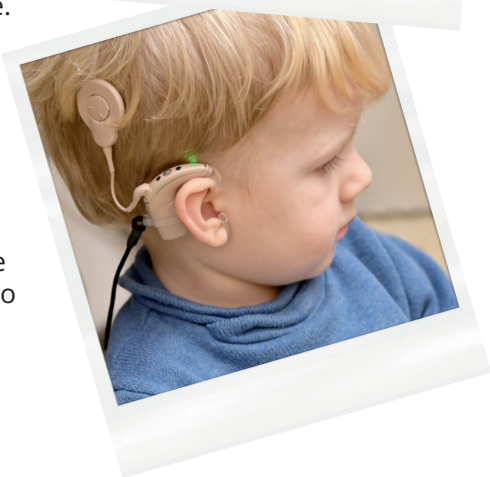
Samantha, who is working on mastering an IEP goal for fine motor skills, cuts animal shapes and glues them to a background.

Cheri has a new baby sister at home. She plays with the stuffed animals, taking care of them, and naming them with the animal names from the story.

While watching a story, Erik accesses the audio using a cochlear implant tailored to his needs.
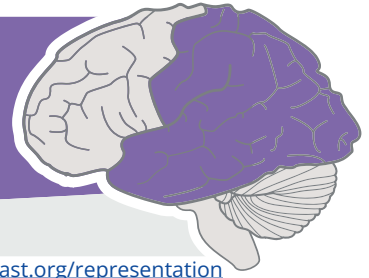
Paavai, Samantha, and Noah choose to hear and watch the recorded version of a story. They play the story using a tablet.

2 Multiple means of
Representation

Recognition Networks | The "WHAT" of learning

https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation

How do you present information so it can be perceived and understood by all children?

Mrs. Clark develops picture schedules to help all her children visualize their day and complete routines. She reviews the schedule during circle time.
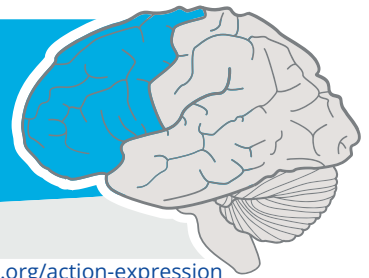

Since Arturo and Juan are just learning to speak English, the daily schedule and procedures at centers are labeled with Spanish and English words.

Items in the classroom are labeled using photographs and pictures, as well as by color, in English and Spanish. All pictures have Velcro on the back, allowing all the children to manipulate and place them on the wall schedule as they learn about each day's routine or activity.
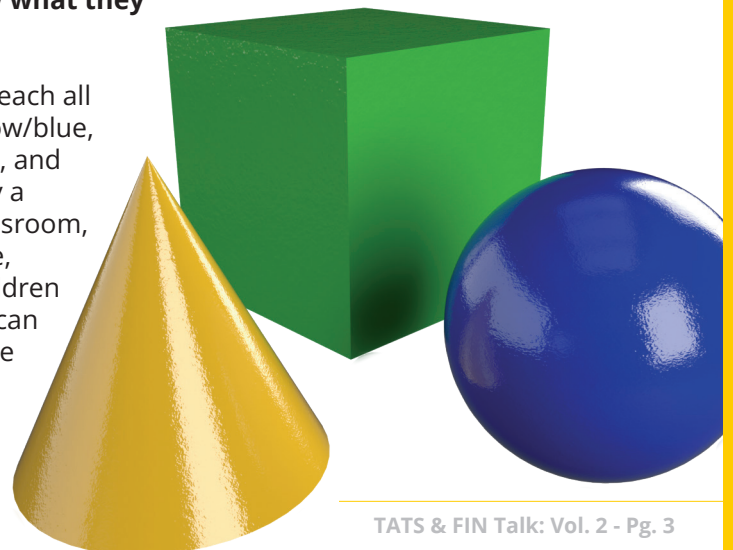
3 Multiple means of
Action & Expression

Strategic Networks | The "HOW" of learning

https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression

How do you provide opportunities for all children to show what they have learned?

Ms. Wang uses materials in a variety of colors and shapes to teach all the children about patterns. She shows them patterns of yellow/blue, yellow/blue; then she shows them square/circle, square/circle, and flower/dog, flower/dog. She gives them pattern blocks to copy a model pattern with, she has them point to patterns in the classroom, and uses stuffed animals to show patterns. For every example, each step is done for the children except for the last step. Children do this step and gradually increase the number of steps they can perform independently. After the lesson, she provides multiple ways for her students to show what they know.

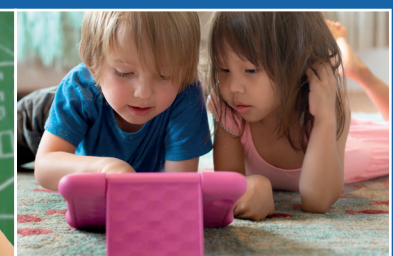|				
Items made of different materials or of different sizes are available so the children who can't distinguish color differences can feel texture or shape differences.	A student matches a pattern with 3D manipulatives and pegs, providing more support to guide the child in following a pattern.	Children are challenged to make a long pattern using their shirt colors, and then replicate it using tiles. This provides opportunity for children to move and use real life skills.	A child creates patterns using both shapes and colors in the pattern. This allows for an extension of the skill to reflect a child's developmental level.	A three-year-old creates patterns and listens to movement songs about patterns using an app on a tablet or device with the help of a friend.

A Key Consideration: All Activities and Materials Should be Accessible for Every Child

There will always be children in your early childhood program with diverse learning needs, but UDL creates a classroom that is ready for every child. As you read the information below, think of additional ways UDL can support children, with and without disabilities, in your early childhood learning environment.

Examples of UDL supports in the **Independent Functioning** domain include accessible playground equipment, classrooms, and facilities; clearly labeled and accessible learning centers, and self-care checklists using visual cues.

UDL materials in the **Curriculum and Instruction** domain reflect student interests, choice, visual cues, and labels. Lessons include audio, visual, and tactile material. Curriculum supports might include visual schedules, peer supports, interactive technology and switches, manipulatives and toys with high contrast color and varied textures, engagement strategies, answer keys for self-checking, and problem-based learning.

In the **Communication** domain, multiple languages, visual labels on classroom materials, visual procedures and schedules, peer models, family communications, culturally sensitive characteristics, and various modes of communication (gestures, signs, word cards, verbal) can support students.

Allow student choice for completing **Assessment** activities, such as text to speech software, pictures and displays, learning logs, recordings of children's thoughts, ideas, and stories.

UDL in the **Social-Emotional** domain includes identifying feelings and emotions, self-regulation procedures and visuals, peer-to-peer support, relationship-building activities with adults and other children, and responsive to diversity.

See if you can identify the three UDL Guidelines in the scenario below!

Miss Suzie's preschool class is painting pictures for Mother's Day. Miss Suzie gives students the option to paint while standing at the easel or to paint while seated at the table. In addition, Miss Suzie provides a variety of paintbrushes and paint color choices. She also includes the option for finger painting, for children who are interested in exploring the tactile feeling of paint. One child in her class, Jin, loves to play with vehicles. Miss Suzie includes a small bin of cars and trucks from the block area and encourages Jin and his peers to run the wheels through the paint, as well. With the inclusion of several different painting tools (e.g., a variety of brushes, car and trucks, or the option of using their fingers), children are excited to begin the activity and remain engaged for some time.

Lohmann, Hovey, & Gauvreau (2018). *Using a universal design for learning framework to enhance engagement in the early childhood classroom.* The Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship, 7(2).

Although UDL may take extra time as you plan your early childhood learning environment, curriculum, and assessment, it can reduce the need for planning individualized accommodations or modifications for specific children. Inclusive early childhood environments designed with UDL in mind can help all children learn and grow together. For more information about Universal Design for Learning in inclusive early childhood programs, contact your local TATS or FIN representative.

Scan to
View Answers

Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS) — http://www.tats.ucf.edu
Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) — http://www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com

Notes:

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