## Teaching and Learning

This component includes learning activities and curriculum approaches in which children and youth acquire developmentally appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills that contribute to their social and emotional growth and overall psychological well-being.

Differences and Diversity in the Classroom

An understanding of individual differences is beneficial for designing learning activities and routines that affirm students’ personal learning preferences and accommodate their learning styles in the classroom. Classroom routines and approaches should reflect the diverse needs of all children and youth.

According to the [Center for Applied Special Technology](https://www.cast.org/) (CAST), a nonprofit research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is based on three primary principles:

* Multiple means of representation, to give diverse learners options for acquiring information and knowledge
* Multiple means of action and expression, to provide learners options for demonstrating what they know
* Multiple means of engagement, to tap into learners’ interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation

The application of these principles in the design of instructional materials and

activities involves the consideration of accessibility, fairness and flexibility, and teacher communications that are straightforward, consistent and explicit. In addition, the UDL approach is characterized by learning environments that are supportive, that minimize unnecessary physical barriers, and that accommodate students through multiple teaching methods.

Culturally Relevant Practices

In inclusive classrooms, teachers strive to be responsive to students on both individual and cultural levels. The actual degree of inclusiveness is often significantly affected by the types of interactions that take place among students and teachers in the learning context. These interactions may be influenced by:

* Curriculum content
* Prior teacher and student assumptions and awareness of potential multicultural themes and issues
* Instructional plans including the ways students are grouped for learning
* Teachers’ knowledge about the diverse backgrounds of students
* Teachers’ decisions, comments and behaviours during the process of teaching

Schools can create opportunities for increasing understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity among students within the classroom context by:

* Presenting more than singular perspectives on classroom discussion topics and including perspectives from individuals with varied backgrounds and experiences
* Inviting students, as well as their family members to act as resources of knowledge for sharing culturally relevant traditions and practices
* Making the classroom an inviting space through regular opportunities for dialogue among students, family members and members of the wider community
* Using multicultural literature as a resource for understanding key perspectives

Autonomy-Supportive Practices

Students possess inner motivational resources that may be supported or

impeded by conditions they experience in school. Teachers who adopt autonomy-supportive approaches plan instruction strategies that engage and nurture students’ inner resources. In contrast, more controlling educational environments can impede or thwart students’ inner motivation.

Practices associated with autonomy-supportive teachers include:

* Using effective listening skills
* Communicating information-rich language and avoiding use of controlling words and phrases
* Validating perspectives that are shared or expressed by students
* Explaining the value and rationale of given routines which may not be of interest to students
* Linking students’ interests, preferences and strengths with learning content and instructional activities
* Creating opportunities for students to design their own approaches for working
* Providing activities in which students can talk about learning with their peers
* Organizing learning materials and seating arrangements so students can work with concrete materials and interact, rather than watching and listening passively
* Praising instances of progress and accomplishment

Strength-Based Approaches

The use of strength-based approaches requires exploring with students points of personal connection that reflect their preferences, interests, areas of competency and aspirations. These points of connection may be explored by asking students to share personal stories of strength related to:

* Activities or things they like to do for fun (intrinsic motivation)
* Important people and relationships in their home, school or community settings (belonging)
* Activities and experiences that provide them with a sense of accomplishment (worth)
* Choices, dreams or aspirations they have for the present or future (choices, autonomy)

As areas of strength and personal connection are explored and identified, they may

subsequently be used as potential theme areas for the development of

specific curriculum strategies for students. Applying points of personal connection to

differentiate instruction or academic plans may include:

* Developing independent study projects on particular areas of interest for individual students or small groups
* Linking students with school or community mentors who have specialized knowledge or skill related to areas of student interests or strength
* Providing opportunities for students to demonstrate or celebrate areas of strength or interest through special events, performances or presentations
* Planning special lessons, field trips or initiatives that incorporate theme areas relevant to important student relationships, accomplishments or goals