



Universal Design for Learning



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that helps give all students an equal opportunity to succeed. This approach offers flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it and show what they know. Developing lesson plans this way helps all students, but it may be especially helpful for students with learning and thinking differences.¹

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) supports UDL as an approach that offers students many ways to learn the material being presented in a classroom. It allows *all* students to use different methods to show what they know and gives *all* students an equal chance to succeed in school.²

1. <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/universal-design-for-learning-what-it-is-and-how-it-works>
2. <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/your-childs-rights/basics-about-childs-rights/every-student-succeeds-act-essa-what-you-need-to-know>

Carol Ann Tomlinson defines differentiating instruction as "... an approach to teaching that advocates active planning for student differences in classrooms".³ In her book, Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom, she defines the "What and Why" of differentiating instruction as focusing on Student Traits, Classroom Elements, and Linking Student Traits to Classroom Elements.

Tomlinson explains that the teacher must focus on four Student Traits: (1) Readiness, a student's knowledge, understanding and skill related to a particular sequence of learning; (2) Interest, topics or pursuits that evoke curiosity and passion in a learner; (3) Learning Profile, how students learn best, and (4) Affect, how the students feel about themselves, their work, and the classroom as a whole.

The Classroom Elements she shares are (1) Content, what we want students to learn and how students gain access to this body of knowledge; (2) Process, how the student comes to understand the information, ideas, or skills; (3) Product, the demonstration of what students have come to know, understand, and be able to do as a result of the sequence of learning; and (4) Learning Environment, the operation and tone of the classroom.

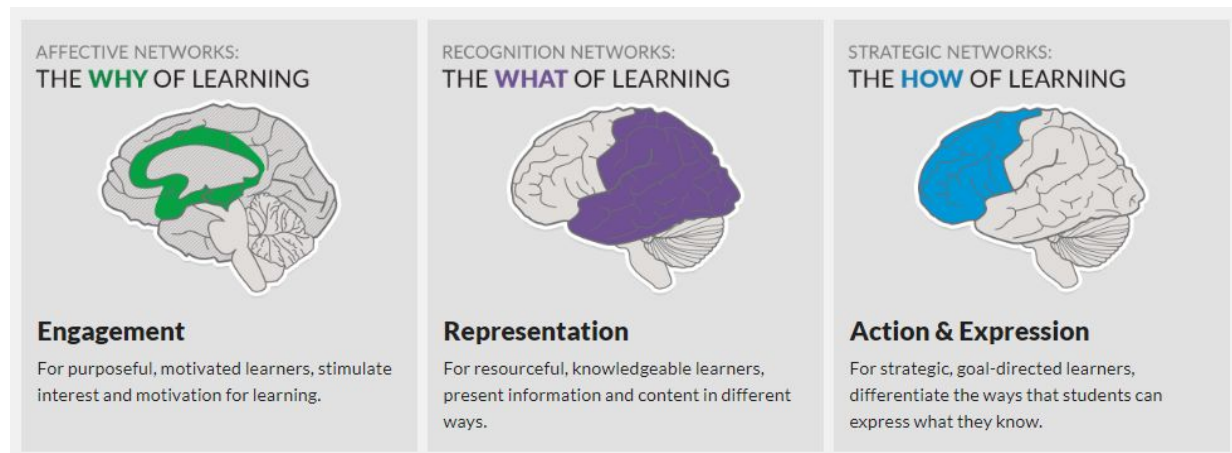
Differentiation is most successful when the teacher links Student Traits to Classroom Elements. Continually assessing students' readiness, interest, learning profile, and affect and then modify classroom elements as needed.

In the book, RTI in Math: Practical Guidelines for Elementary Teacher, Bender and Crane share, "Effective differentiation can provide an excellent opportunity for learning mathematics in the general education classroom, and it should be considered absolutely critical for Tier 1 instruction."⁴

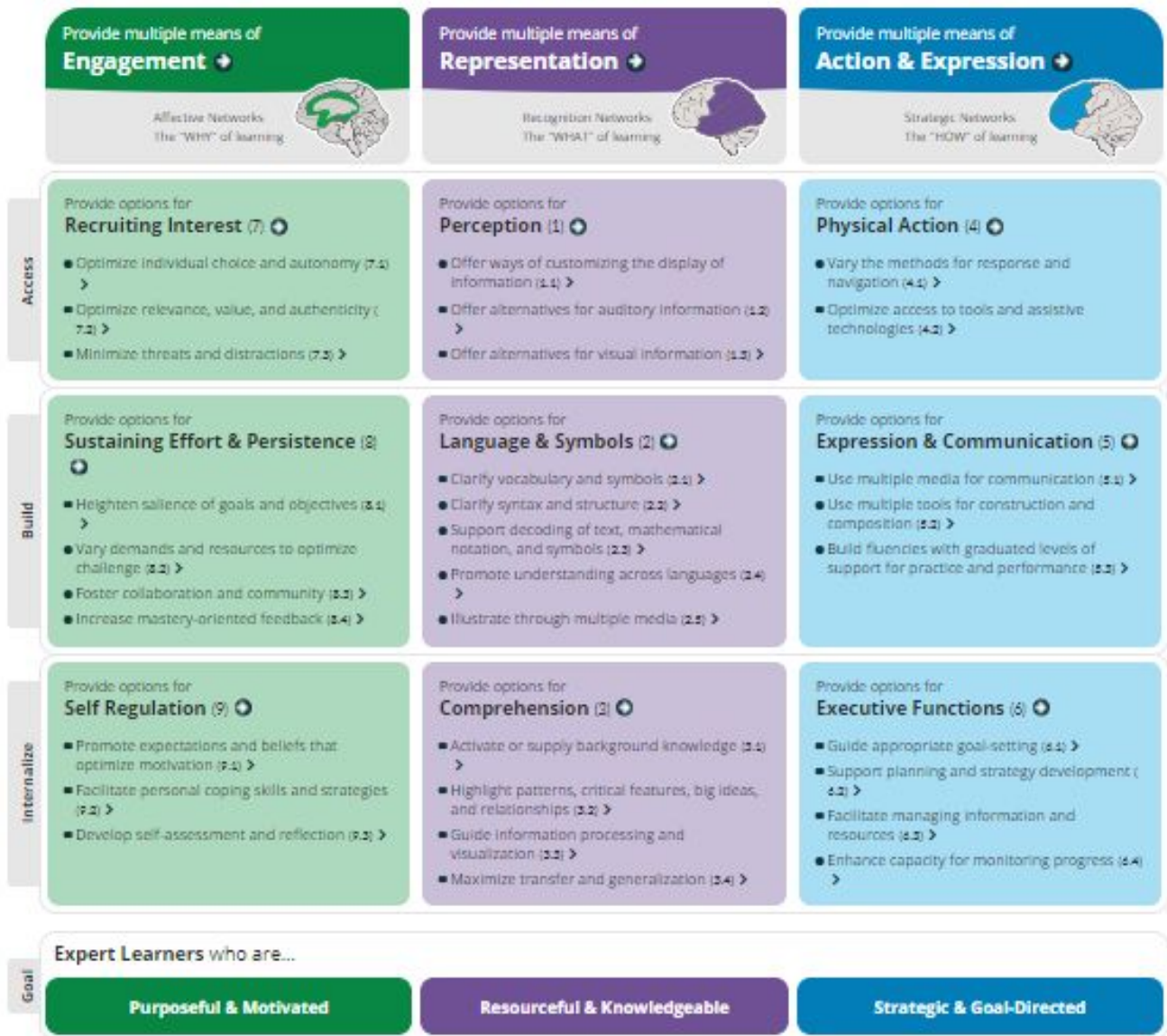
The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) defines UDL as "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn."⁵

3. Tomlinson, Carol Ann, Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom, ASCD 2003
4. Bender, William and Crane, Darlene, RTI in Math, Solution Tree Press 2011.
5. <http://www.cast.org/>

They define the multiple means of Engagement as recruiting interest, sustaining effort and persistence, and self regulation. Multiple means of Representation refer to perception, language and symbols, and comprehension. Multiple means of Action and Expression focus upon physical action, expression and communication and executive functions. The goal is to have Expert Learners who are Purposeful and Motivated, Resourceful and Knowledgeable, and Strategic and Goal-Directed.



Universal Design for Learning Guidelines



Basically, UDL is the foundation of an inclusive classroom, a classroom where all students learn together at their own level. In the Orcutt School District, we currently have Special Day Class inclusion programs at three of our schools. Where we have self-contained Special Day Classes, mainstreaming students as much as they are able is a foundational goal. We are striving to have fully included programs available to all of our students at all of our schools. Our UDL focus targets *all* students, those with special needs, those who are working at or above grade level, and those who are learning English as a second language.