



# A Framework for Promoting Access, Increasing Participation, and Providing Support in Early Childhood Classrooms

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide an inclusive framework for supporting all children in early childhood education classrooms while also considering early learning standards, curricula, and everyday activities and routines. We describe universal design for learning, multi-tiered systems of support, embedded learning opportunities, and how these practices can be intertwined to support the early development and learning of all young children. Within universal design for learning we describe the multi-sensory ways early childhood educators can represent information, engage young learners, and facilitate expression. Multi-tiered systems of support promote intentional and individualized instructional decision-making guided by data to support children in attaining target learning objectives. We describe embedded learning opportunities which are intentional and naturalistic opportunities to work on specific skills throughout daily activities and routines. Sample informal assessments and additional resources to learn more about each of these practices are included.

**Keywords** Inclusive education · Early childhood · Universal design for learning · Multi-tiered systems of Supports · Embedded instruction

## Introduction

Educating young children within inclusive early childhood education environments has positive implications for children who are typically developing and children with delays and disabilities, and thus, is a recommended practice by

the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Camilli et al., 2010; DEC/NAEYC, 2009; Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Odom et al., 2011; Strain & Bovey, 2011). Inclusive education promotes the acquisition, maintenance, and generalization of all children's skills and facilitates social acceptance and friendships (Barton & Smith, 2015; Milam et al., 2020; Odom et al., 2006, 2011; Sainato et al., 2015; Soukakou, 2012; Strain, 2017; Urlacher et al., 2016; Winstead et al., 2019). In addition, programs that embrace inclusive practices demonstrate enhanced quality, and are less costly (Buysse et al., 1999; Odom et al., 2001a, 2001b).

DEC and NAEYC define inclusion as, "...the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society..." (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). Inclusive early childhood education occurs when educators provide access for all children, assure active engagement by all, and provide appropriate support that is individualized for all children and their abilities within early childhood education environments (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). In order to promote access and engagement, and provide appropriate support for all young children, educators must

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consider how to intentionally intertwine specific mandated components and evidence-based practices that facilitate the development of all young children.

Mandated components might include state early learning standards and program-adopted curricula. Evidence-based practices might include embedded learning opportunities (ELOs) and other evidence-based teaching strategies implemented within frameworks and approaches like multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and universal design for learning (UDL). Although educators may have training in these components and practices, they may view them as isolated or separate, with little opportunity to consider how they fit together to support best practice. It is important that educators determine how these components and practices can be intertwined to promote high quality learning environments for all young children. In the scenario below we describe what many educators experience upon learning about each of these practices.

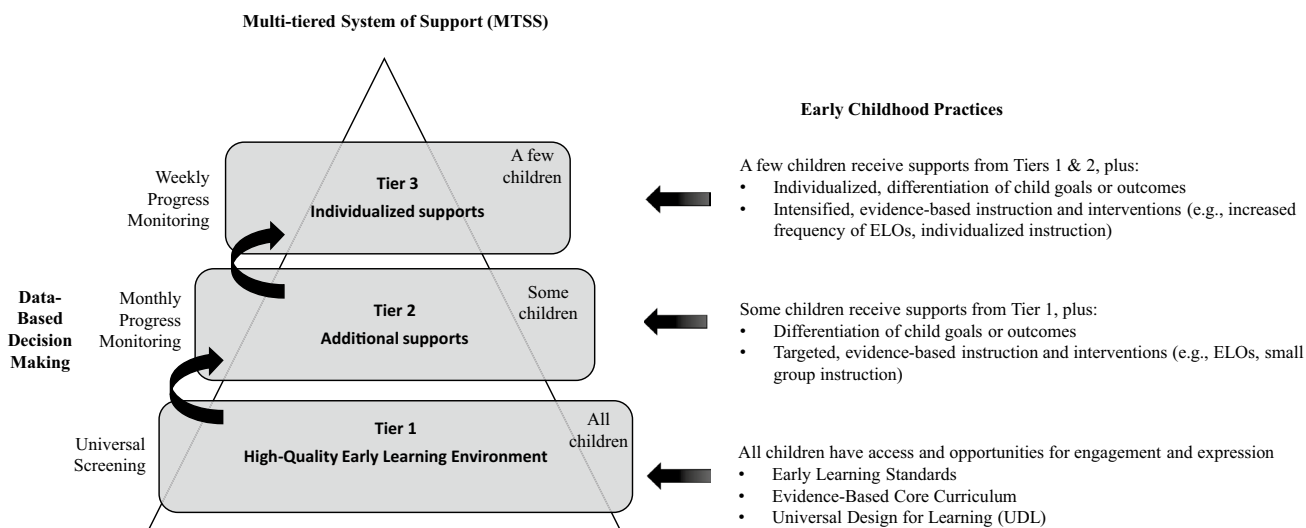
*Liliana is a preschool teacher of 18 children who are 3–5 years of age. The children in her class have a variety of needs. While most are typically developing, three have disabilities. She is also noticing that some of the children in her class are not yet demonstrating mastery of the skills in some of the domains that she is teaching. Liliana loves her job, and she has received professional development on many new initiatives including MTSS, UDL, and ELOs; however, she is not yet certain how to implement these practices within her everyday classroom environment to meet the needs of all of the children in her class.*

Many educators are like Liliana. They have heard about various practices that will enhance child development; however, they are uncertain of how to best meet the diverse needs children present within the context of everyday activities

and routines, and they recognize that it will take time and practice to do this well. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describe how each of these components and practices can be intertwined within an MTSS framework to promote access and participation, and provide appropriate support for all young children. This aligns well with the goal of an MTSS which is to, “organize the resources available in a system or program to meet the needs of all students.” (p. 3, Carta, 2019). See Fig. 1 for a visual representation of MTSS.

## MTSS

An early childhood MTSS is a framework that provides differentiated levels of high-quality teaching to help all young children learn (DEC, 2019). Four key practices in an early childhood MTSS include: (a) universal screening to determine which children may need additional support, (b) differentiation of child goals or outcomes to clarify what individual skills children are ready to learn next, (c) tiered instruction or interventions to meet children’s need, and (d) ongoing progress monitoring to adjust instruction as needed (DEC, 2019). In MTSS, early childhood teaching teams provide children with varying degrees of support within three levels, or tiers (Carta, 2019; DEC, 2019; DEC et al., 2013). The type of support a child receives is based on how they respond to the instructional and social opportunities within their natural environment. Additionally, some children may need instruction at a more intensive tier in one area of development (e.g., expressive language), while responding to a less intensive tier in other areas (e.g., motor development). Because of this flexibility, MTSS is responsive to all children and their unique needs. In order to determine which



**Fig. 1** Early Childhood Practices Organized Within an MTSS Framework

tier of support children need, the team, or the individuals who interact with the child during everyday activities and routines (e.g., caregivers, educators, related service providers), collect data to understand what children currently know and can do, analyze the data to determine what children are ready to learn next, and determine the appropriate level of support (tier) (Carta, 2019; DEC, 2019; DEC et al., 2013). Examples of MTSS in early childhood include the Building Blocks model (Sandall et al., 2019), Pyramid Model (Hemmeter & Fox, 2009), and Recognition and Response (Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010). Programs may choose to adopt one of these models which provide a comprehensive approach to implementing an MTSS.

## Tier 1

In Tier 1 of MTSS, educators provide a high-quality early learning environment that is grounded in developmentally appropriate evidence-based practices. Developmentally appropriate practices are designed to promote the development of each individual child, based on their strengths and areas for growth within a play-based approach (NAEYC, 2020). This includes implementing a core curriculum that has evidence of effectiveness, is implemented with fidelity, and is guided by state early learning standards. In early childhood environments, play should be at the forefront of any selected curriculum as this is a critical early childhood activity that promotes learning of skills across developmental domains (e.g., social-emotional, communication, cognition) for all children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Tier 1 also includes implementing UDL principles to ensure that all children have access to, and are able to participate fully in, the classroom curriculum aligned with early learning standards. In this way, a strong foundation is provided for all children. All children receive Tier 1 instruction, and continue to receive this core instruction, even when they receive additional support in accordance with Tiers 2 or 3.

## Early Learning Standards and Curricula

Early learning standards are one component of Tier 1. Several states and federal programs such as Head Start have developed early learning standards (Administration of Children & Families, 2015; Office of Early Learning, 2017). The purpose of these standards is to provide unified state or organization guidelines regarding the continuum of development and to provide guidelines regarding what all children will attain or work toward attaining as a result of participating in early childhood education environments (Scott-Little et al., 2003). Early childhood education programs frequently adopt curricula to work toward state or

organization standards. These curricula are selected because they provide materials, activities, and lessons that can be implemented in early childhood education environments to work toward early learning standards. Although these curricula provide materials, suggested activities aligning with state or organizational learning standards, and strategies to teach various skills, it is unlikely that they identify responsive and individualized practices early childhood educators may need to use to meet the needs of all children. There are published curriculum and assessment systems that include individualized teaching strategies specifically designed to address the needs of children with disabilities [e.g., Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System (AEPS); Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP)]. The curriculum-embedded assessments within these systems may be useful for programs as they assess all children across areas of development, monitor children's progress, and consider referrals for special education evaluation. The primary consideration in the adoption of a Tier 1 curriculum is that it provides a high-quality early learning experience for all children. In order to support all young children within inclusive early childhood environments, it is important to design the early childhood curriculum to promote access and participation for all children (Dinnebeil et al., 2013). See Table 1 for resources specific to MTSS.

## Promoting Access and Participation

UDL is a process in which educators identify ways to provide (a) multiple means of representing learning objectives, (b) varied ways to engage children in activities aligning with these objectives, and (c) different ways in which children can demonstrate mastery of objectives (CAST, 2018; Darragh, 2007). When educators use principles of UDL effectively, all children will have access to and can participate in the core curriculum aligned with state or program standards. Although educators are likely representing information, promoting engagement, and facilitating expression in one way that aligns with the curriculum, it is important to ensure that all young children are accessing the curriculum and participating in everyday activities and routines. The ways in which educators choose to use principles of UDL should be responsive to the diverse needs and backgrounds of the children they are teaching (DEC, 2014). Because UDL is a component of Tier 1, these principles continue to be implemented by educators across all Tiers.

## Representation

Young children use a variety of sensory experiences to engage and explore their environment (Rose & Meyer, 2006). Educators must ensure that all learners have access to information by providing multiple and varied presentation

**Table 1** MTSS Resources

Resource	Location	Description
Multi-Tiered System of Support Framework in Early Childhood: Description and Implications Revised Position Statement (2019) (DEC, 2019) Position Statement(DEC, 2019) Position Statement(DEC, 2019) Position Statement(DEC, 2019) Position Statement	Web source: <a href="https://d4ab05f7-6074-4ec9-998a-232c5d918236.filesusr.com/ugd/38a114_ce26cf6d1e3a412e8f8be2b8c5412db02.pdf">https://d4ab05f7-6074-4ec9-998a-232c5d918236.filesusr.com/ugd/38a114_ce26cf6d1e3a412e8f8be2b8c5412db02.pdf</a>	This is a draft of the Division for Early Childhood MTSS position statement
<i>Multi-tiered systems of support for young children: Driving change in early education.</i> (pp. 1–14). Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co (Carta, 2019)	Book: <a href="https://products.brookespublishing.com/Multi-Tiered-Systems-of-Support-for-Young-Children-P1124.aspx">https://products.brookespublishing.com/Multi-Tiered-Systems-of-Support-for-Young-Children-P1124.aspx</a>	This resource provides a framework for delivering services for all young children and their families. It includes an evidence-based planning book and video set for children ages 3–5 across a variety of settings
Connect Module: Tiered Instruction (Module 7) (Buysse, 2012)	Online module: <a href="https://www.connectmodules.dec-sped.org/connect-modules/learners/module-7/">https://www.connectmodules.dec-sped.org/connect-modules/learners/module-7/</a>	This is a module that describes how tiered instruction can be used in early childhood environments
Pyramid Model NCPMI	Web source: <a href="https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/Pyramid/overview/index.html">https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/Pyramid/overview/index.html</a>	This website describes the Pyramid Model framework of evidence-based practices for supporting children’s social-emotional development
Head Start Center for Inclusion 2021, Head Start Center for Inclusion	Web source: <a href="https://headstartinclusion.org/">https://headstartinclusion.org/</a>	This website offers trainings, tip sheets, and tools and supports

modes such as auditory, tactile, and visual. It is also critical that through these modes, adjustments can be made (e.g., larger font, increased volume) so that the information is provided in a way that matches all children’s needs. Educators can enhance representation by eliminating barriers such as information that would not be relevant to all learners (e.g., language specific slang), pre-teaching concepts by linking new information to previously understood material, using cross-linguistic information and materials, and providing multimedia resources. Educators who make intentional decisions as they represent information create environments that allow all children to access learning experiences that are meaningful, which is necessary for skill attainment.

If an educator is working toward identifying new vocabulary items, the curriculum might suggest using a specific story to represent the vocabulary. Although this is an evidence-based practice to teach vocabulary, educators can provide multi-sensory experiences by representing vocabulary through senses such as touch, sound, and sight. The educator might consider using objects and sounds that represent target vocabulary in the story while reading the book. Making this adjustment could benefit all learners. For example, there may be children within the class who would benefit from seeing and hearing the vocabulary. Likewise, a curriculum might suggest a specific story or game to promote social skills such as taking a turn, but educators can use a variety of modalities to represent turn-taking. They could use videos, songs, and models so that children could see what turn-taking looks like and hear information about turn-taking which would make a social skills activity accessible to more learners.

## Engagement

Many considerations should be made by educators in regard to engagement by considering child interest and sustaining engagement (CAST, 2018). Providing choices for learning enhances engagement for all children. Educators can sustain engagement by reminding children of what will occur upon a child completing a step or activity, setting a child up for success by differentiating task steps to match what is developmentally appropriate for each child, promoting peer engagement, and providing feedback. By using multiple means of engagement, all children can engage in learning experiences.

An educator might engage children in learning about target vocabulary by giving them options to draw pictures, hold up their hand when they hear a word that means “X”, and/or share materials or objects that represent target vocabulary. Providing multiple means of engagement could benefit a variety of learners. To engage children in developing turn-taking skills, an educator might provide choices to all children about how they want to engage in turn-taking by asking if they want to practice with a friend or the teacher. An educator could sustain engagement by reminding them of the next step in the turn-taking sequence. Upon completion of each step, the educator might provide feedback by offering specific praise, identifying what the child did to encourage continued engagement.

## Expression

Expression is critical to consider for all learners to ensure they can express their knowledge. The curriculum might

suggest that the educator uses the story to model the target vocabulary and then provide opportunities for the child to express mastery of the target vocabulary. Young children can demonstrate expression through various actions and communication systems such as spoken words, written text, a work product (e.g., drawing), and/or physical manipulation of materials. Educators can consider multiple means of expression to ensure that all children can engage in displaying their knowledge. An educator might ask a child to point, use a picture card, or use assistive technology to identify target vocabulary. Likewise, an educator can ask a child to demonstrate taking a turn by engaging in that action, organizing picture steps to show turn-taking, or pointing to an example and non-example of turn-taking.

*The early childhood center where Liliana teaches has committed to meeting the needs of all of the learners in their program through implementation of MTSS. The program has adopted an evidence-based core curriculum that is aligned with their state's early learning standards. They are also using UDL principles (i.e., representation, engagement, and expression). As the educators create weekly lesson plans, identify child led learning centers, and adult led activities, they also identify various ways they will represent information, engage young learners, and facilitate expression while considering all of the children in the classroom. As Liliana plans a unit on "winter", she considers how she can implement multi-sensory activities that will promote access and participation during all of the activities. Liliana plans to read the book, *The Mitten*. As she considers access and engagement of all learners in her class, she thinks about how she can represent the content from the story in various ways (e.g., using a read-aloud with a felt board, showing a video of the story on the Smartboard, acting out the story with stuffed animals, offering an audio-recorded version of the book in the listening center and library). Liliana also considers how she can engage children by giving them choices about how to participate. For example, some children might enjoy putting felt animals on the board, while other children may benefit from the opportunity to move like the animals*

*during the story. Finally, she provides multiple ways for children to respond when describing the animals in the mitten. Children can say the name of the animal, point to the animal when given a choice of two pictures, or touch the pictures of the animal on a voice output assistive technology app on a tablet. Principles of UDL benefit all of the children in Liliana's class, and she will continue to use these practices in addition to any other support she provides, as practices in Tier 1 are always implemented for all children. See Table 2 for UDL resources.*

## Tier 2

In Tier 2 of MTSS, educators provide additional support to young children who may need supplementary practice on particular skills, based on universal screening data. These are not necessarily children with disabilities, but rather children who need additional practice in specific areas. Educators may provide Tier 2 learning opportunities for a small group of children through educator planned activities focused on a particular skill, and through child-directed learning opportunities embedded into routines and activities. As educators provide these learning opportunities, they continue to utilize Tier 1 practices such as UDL principles so that they are representing target skills, engaging children, and providing opportunities to express information which are available to all learners. For example, if the class is working on an early learning standard related to counting and one to one correspondence in Tier 1, and the educator observes that some children are not yet responding to instruction or demonstrating mastery after implementing the core curriculum and using principles of UDL, the educator can consider Tier 2 supports in addition to Tier 1 practices. The educator might gather this small group of children during play routines and embed additional opportunities to practice these target skills. These practice opportunities can be provided through the use of ELOs.

**Table 2** UDL resources

Resource	Location	Description
Universal Design for Learning: Creating a Learning Environment that Challenges and Engages All Students (IRIS Module on UDL) 2021, Vanderbilt University	Online Module: <a href="https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/udl/">https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/udl/</a>	This module provides information and resources regarding UDL including videos and examples of representation, engagement and expression
CAST: Professional Learning 2021, Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)	Web source: <a href="http://castprofessionallearning.org/free-udl-resources-and-tips/">http://castprofessionallearning.org/free-udl-resources-and-tips/</a>	This website provides webinars, resources, and information regarding UDL
National Center on Accessible Education Materials	Web source: <a href="https://aem.cast.org/creating/national-instructional-materials-accessibility-standard-nimas.html">https://aem.cast.org/creating/national-instructional-materials-accessibility-standard-nimas.html</a>	This website provides information, resources, and training on topics related to accessibility



## ELOs

An ELO is a brief teaching exchange that provides children with opportunities to practice target learning objectives or individual goals through everyday activities and routines (Johnson et al., 2015; Sandall et al., 2019; Snyder et al., 2015). Because ELOs are naturalistic and capitalize on children's interests, they can be embedded during everyday routines and activities, including play. An ELO includes an antecedent (e.g., choice making, environmental arrangement, wait time), followed by the child practicing a target skill (e.g., requesting, two-word phrases, counting), and concludes with a naturalistic and motivating consequence (e.g., providing the requested object, reinforcement with behavior specific praise, expanding the child's language). The Building Blocks framework (Sandall et al., 2019) provides many practical examples for modifying the curriculum and using ELOs to address the needs of children who would benefit from ELOs and other supports as part of Tiers 2 and 3 of an MTSS (see Table 3).

For example, an educator working with a small group of children on one-to-one correspondence and counting might join in with this group of children in the block center. As the children are building with blocks, the educator might represent this skill by counting each block in the tower (antecedent). The children might work together to count the blocks with supports such as modeling one to one correspondence and physical guidance (providing physical modeling and pointing or physically guiding the child's hand) (target skill). The educator should also consider the children and what might be reinforcing to them. For example, the educator might use a consequence such as praise by stating, "Wow your tower is 10 blocks high. You counted all 10 blocks." Other children might be reinforced by a classroom announcement about how they counted all of the blocks in their tower or by the educator joining in for more play. It is important to consider what type of consequence would motivate the child to continue to use the target skill or behavior so that they will do it again which will result in additional practice opportunities, which will then result in maintenance (using the skill without support) and generalization (using the skill in a new environment).

In order to effectively provide more intensive supports and ELOs, it is critical that educator teams work together. There are specific ways which educators can work together to ensure quality practice. Teaming and collaboration practices are identified as recommended practices by DEC. Specifically, it is recommended that practitioners work together to support desired outcomes of young children and their families (DEC, 2014). Look how Liliana and the co-educator support literacy and social-emotional development through the use of Tier 2 supports.

*Liliana and her co-educator have been observing and noticing that some children might need additional support in literacy and social emotional development, specifically rhyming and turn-taking. Based on their observations of children during the first few months of the school year and data collected during their fall screening and assessment, they began implementing Tier 2 interventions for some children in early literacy skills and social skills. These activities (e.g. rhyming games, stories about how to share toys) were offered as part of their regular small-group and child led play activities to provide additional practice with rhyming and turn-taking. The educators will continue to incorporate UDL principles from Tier 1. For example, Liliana and her co-educator played rhyming songs, read rhyming books, and showed pictures and objects that rhymed (representation). During small groups, the children were playing with manipulatives that rhymed. Liliana and her co-educator included various items that rhymed to promote choices in play (engagement). Children chose the toys they wanted to explore and made choices about how to organize them. For example, the children explored the toys and began placing them in rime groups while others matched them to rime cards. To provide Tier 2 support, they focused on one rime family at a time (e.g., "at" rime), and they prompted children to find two things that rhymed and used wait time for the child's response (ELO). Some children verbally shared what rhymed while others pointed, and one child used his assistive technology device to respond (expression).*

*To promote turn-taking, Liliana and her co-educator continued to use foundational Tier 1 practices to support social-emotional development and to encourage skills like turn-taking. To provide Tier 2 support, they introduced picture cards that had the steps of giving and taking a turn, shared videos of turn-taking, and described how to take turns by providing a verbal description (representation). Children were given the option to choose a friend or teacher to engage with for a planned, small group turn-taking activity (engagement). Liliana and her co-educator suggested children pass the toy to a child who had not yet had a turn (ELO). Some children took turns, while others talked about how to take turns (expression).*

*Liliana and her co-educator continued focusing on rhyming and turn-taking during child led play. For example, Liliana joined a small group of children and pointed out the manipulatives which contained the same rhyme among the toys they were playing with. She labeled and showed the children pictures and objects with the "at" rime and placed picture cards on the floor that said "at rime" and a no symbol (representation). Children began grouping all of the manipulatives that contained the "at" rime in a pile, and placing the non-at rime manipulatives in another pile. Other children began excitedly holding up manipulatives that contained the "at" rime (engagement). The children began*

**Table 3** ELO resources

Resource	Location	Description
Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs (3rd edition) (Sandall et al., 2019)	Book: <a href="https://products.brookespublishing.com/Building-Blocks-for-Teaching-Preschoolers-with-Special-Needs-Third-Edition-P1136.aspx">https://products.brookespublishing.com/Building-Blocks-for-Teaching-Preschoolers-with-Special-Needs-Third-Edition-P1136.aspx</a>	This book describes many teaching strategies for meeting the needs of individual learners including ELOs and activity matrices. The strategies are presented within an MTSS and align with UDL
Connect Module: Embedded Instruction (Module 1) (Buyse, 2012)	Online module: <a href="https://www.connectmodules.dec-sped.org/connect-modules/learners/module-1/">https://www.connectmodules.dec-sped.org/connect-modules/learners/module-1/</a> Web source: <a href="https://embeddedinstruction.net">https://embeddedinstruction.net</a>	This module includes examples of embedded interventions that educators can use during everyday activities and routines This website provides information regarding embedded instruction
Embedded Instruction 2021, embedded instruction for early learning. Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Florida	Checklists: <a href="https://ectacenter.org/decrp/topic-instruction.asp">https://ectacenter.org/decrp/topic-instruction.asp</a>	The ECTA Center provides checklists aligning with the DEC Recommended Practices. One of these checklists aligns with ELOs
ECTA Center 2020, Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center	Web source: <a href="http://headstartinclusion.org/elo#elo">http://headstartinclusion.org/elo#elo</a>	This module includes training materials, activities and videos; some available in Spanish
Head Start Center for Inclusion: Embedded Learning Opportunities 2021, Head Start Center for Inclusion	Web source: <a href="https://headstartinclusion.org/training-materials/extended-professional-development-packages/planned-instructional-sequences/">https://headstartinclusion.org/training-materials/extended-professional-development-packages/planned-instructional-sequences/</a>	This module includes training materials, activities and videos for planned instructional strategies which are similar to ELOs but provide a more intensive level of support
Head Start Center for Inclusion: Planned Instructional Strategies 2021, Head Start Center for Inclusion		

*naming the manipulatives that rhymed with their words, and one child used his assistive technology device to touch each picture that corresponded to the manipulatives in the “at” rime pile. Liliana knew that one of the children in the group was a little shy. Liliana asked this child to point to the “at” words (expression). Liliana continued by commenting on how she observed some of the children giving and taking turns with the toys (representation). Children began talking about and demonstrating how they could provide and take turns (engagement). Some children began giving items and others began accepting items while others pointed at their peers and said, “They are taking turns.” Liliana was really excited to think about how she could embed different targets across different types of routines.*

### Tier 3

As educators collect ongoing data and analyze the results, they may find that children need even more support to learn new skills despite participating in a high-quality core curriculum (Tier 1) and receiving additional moderate level support (Tier 2). In this case, educators provide more intensive, individualized instruction through Tier 3 approaches. Tier 3 requires a higher level of planning as these are often more structured supports (e.g., with clear teaching behaviors, expected child responses, and follow up behaviors from educators), and may be delivered more frequently providing several opportunities for intentional practice throughout everyday activities and routines. ELOs and UDL, can also be used as part of Tier 3 supports. In this case, the educator might plan to provide multiple means of representation, engagement, and opportunities for expression paired with their use of ELOs that can be embedded within several everyday activities and routines to provide the child with multiple individualized opportunities to practice the target skill (e.g., one to one correspondence, taking turns, rhyming). The educator can provide additional support in Tier 3 by working with the child one-on-one and thinking about how to make the skill more concrete.

For example, the educator might join one child in the block center during play and model counting a smaller number of blocks in the tower using both words and his or her fingers (representation). The educator could facilitate engagement by providing choices of blocks or other toys in the center, and use an ELO by suggesting the child count the tower of blocks. The child could count by using their fingers, their words, and/or using number cards or assistive technology to identify each block number (expression). The educator would use the same ELO sequence described above, but by working one-on-one with a child, the educator is providing more opportunities for practice because only one child will be responding to the educator’s suggestion

of counting blocks and receiving a reinforcer such as praise or continued engagement. The educator can also intensify support by focusing on a smaller sub step of the skill (five blocks opposed to 10) and embedding additional practice opportunities throughout daily activities and routines.

Educators should use ongoing progress monitoring to make data-based decisions to support child goals or outcomes (DEC, 2014). Look and see how Liliana uses Tier 3 paired with UDL supports below, including ongoing progress monitoring.

*Liliana and her team continued to collect data regarding child progress. They used checklists, child work products, and photographs, and placed these within a child portfolio as Liliana and her co-educators can share these with family members during teaming meetings to discuss child interests and progress. Based on their data, they determined that some children, including Wilson, might benefit from Tier 3 supports in literacy skills in addition to what he already receives in Tiers 1 and 2. During free play, Wilson is engaging in parallel play with another classmate. Liliana joins Wilson as he plays in the block center. After spending a minute observing Wilson and watching as he builds, Liliana notices that there are some objects that she can add into the block play. She gets a frog, dog, and cat. Liliana asks Wilson if he might like to add some animals to his structure. Wilson says, “Yes.” Liliana places the cat, dog, and frog on a block. She engages in representation when she holds up the animals and says, “We have a cat, dog, and frog. Dog...frog...dog and frog rhyme.” She has multiple manipulatives as well as pictures so that Wilson can choose how he wants to engage in the activity. For example, she tells Wilson, “You can pick a toy, a picture, or you can match the items.” Liliana concludes by providing an ELO when she says, “Which one rhymes with frog (antecedent)?” Wilson answers, “Dog” (behavior). Liliana says, that is right, dog and frog rhyme. Let’s keep playing (consequence)!” Liliana promotes multiple means of expression when she tells Wilson he can point, hold the picture or the toy, or use his words to name the one that rhymes.*

During this scenario, Liliana joined in the child’s play by intentionally embedding an ELO in one of the areas Wilson has been struggling with, rhyming. She continues to use UDL principles to promote access and engagement. Liliana can use ELOs throughout daily activities and routines to provide additional opportunities for Wilson to practice rhyming.

## Resources to Deliver Differentiated Supports

### Assessment Resources

Throughout the instructional process, it is important for educators to continue to engage in informal assessment to



determine whether children are responding to the support they are receiving. This type of assessment should be informal and ongoing. For example, educators might consider creating checklists related to target skills. This would allow the educator to capture critical information in a feasible way. This information informs how the educator responds. See Online Appendix A for sample informal assessments. Programs might also consider using a program-level assessment, like the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) (Soukakou, 2016), which assesses the quality of practices used to support children with special needs in early childhood classrooms, and it can be used to improve these practices.

### Routine Matrix Supports

It can be a challenge to remember how to intertwine early learning standards, curricula, MTSS, UDL, and ELOs while delivering instruction. Therefore, it is important to think about resources that can support the delivery of these components and practices. One resource is a routines matrix. Traditionally, a routines matrix identifies daily routines, children's individualized education program (IEP) goals, and teaching strategies like environmental adaptations, curriculum modifications, and ELOs for addressing those goals (Sandall et al., 2019). A routines matrix can also include MTSS, principles of UDL, and ELOs. See Online Appendix B for a sample routine matrix that addresses these components and practices.

### Professional Development and Coaching

It is important to remember that although the field of education has identified evidence-based practices, it can be challenging to implement these practices with fidelity or the way in which they were intended to be delivered. For an MTSS to work effectively, each of the core components must be implemented with fidelity (Carta, 2019). Therefore, it is important to consider resources that educators can access which include professional development and coaching. Professional development can be effective in enhancing knowledge, but embedded and ongoing coaching has been identified as a way to support educator's use of practices with fidelity. Coaching has been identified by researchers as an effective avenue to promote practice change (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Practice based coaching is a framework for coaching which extends previous coaching models, but is designed specifically for early childhood teachers and includes goal setting and planning, focused observations, and reflection and feedback (Snyder et al., 2015). Practice based coaching has been used within early childhood settings to enhance educator practice and child skills. Feedback can be delivered in a variety of ways. This includes delivering feedback face-to-face or via a technology enhanced system, and feedback can be provided by a peer, coach, and/or

administrator (Coogle et al., 2019; Ottley et al., 2017; Snyder et al., 2015). An educator might also use the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) checklists that correspond to the DEC recommended practices to evaluate how a specific practice, such as ELOs, is being used.

### Conclusion

It is important to consider how early learning standards, curricula, MTSS, UDL, and ELOs can be intertwined to promote access and participation and provide support for all young children. By intertwining these practices into an inclusive framework, educators provide high quality education for all children. This carefully designed system of support results in children attaining desired goals and outcomes by collecting ongoing progress monitoring and making data-based decisions that align with individual children.

*Liliana is utilizing principles of MTSS, UDL, and implementing ELOs throughout daily activities and routines. She is taking data, and feels rewarded to see the progress all of the children in her class are making. Most importantly, she is excited to see how implementing these principles facilitates the inclusion of all students! Liliana intends to continue to invite peers and administrators into her classroom to observe and provide feedback aligning with these practices as she knows that all professionals are a work in progress, and receiving specific feedback related to her practice will provide her opportunities to continue to learn and develop as a professional. She will also continue to collaborate with co-educators and families to support their use of these practices in the classroom and within their home. She plans to meet with her co-educators weekly to provide information regarding MTSS, UDL, and ELOs, and she will engage in observations of their practice and provide written feedback that includes both suggestions and affirmative comments to support their practice. She will connect with families using the mode of communication they prefer (video conferencing, email, face-to-face meetings, phone) to share information and engage in observation of their interactions with their child as they would like to support the home-class connection and consistent use of practices. Liliana feels confident that consistently using these practices promotes the inclusion and development of all children.*

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