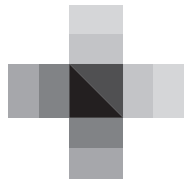


# The CSS+ Curriculum Planning Framework

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A growing consensus has emerged about the importance of early childhood education. That is, educators, policy makers, and researchers now recognize that young children come to school with significant differences in their prior learning, and these professionals can document that high-quality early learning programs can help all children succeed in school, including those who may lag behind their peers (Brown, Knopf, Conroy, Googe, & Greer, 2013; Epstein & Barnett, 2012). In addition, early childhood programs serve children who are at risk for later school failure (Halle et al., 2009), including children who live in poverty, are ELLs, and have developmental delays or may be at risk for developing disabilities. Although the number of young children in the population in general is growing at only a modest rate, dramatic increases have occurred in the cultural and linguistic diversity of preschool children, and a greater share of them may also live in poverty. These circumstances appear unlikely to change in the near future, and preschool teachers undoubtedly will teach children from diverse backgrounds with a greater variety of early learning experiences than ever before (NAEYC, 2009). It is not, however, just a matter of having all children begin school earlier than they have in the past. Merely having 3- and 4-year-old children participating in school does not guarantee that they all will be prepared to succeed in later grades. We have learned the importance not only of early learning but also of appropriate learning content in preschool and the role of the teacher in providing the content.

Several myths have persisted for too long in early childhood education that affect how teachers teach and the content that they teach. First, despite the fact that the most recent version of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) guidelines (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) emphasizes providing a balance of child-initiated and teacher-guided learning opportunities, many preschool teachers continue to believe that DAP means children should construct knowledge on their own with very few instances of explicit teacher instruction (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000). Research tells

us, however, that children's learning is positively affected when teachers use both explicit and implicit instructional strategies matched to the learning tasks at hand, the context in which learning is to occur, and the children's prior knowledge and understanding of the content (Hong & Diamond, 2012).

The belief that young children are not ready to learn sophisticated content is a second myth that persists in early childhood education. Again, the long-held belief simply does not hold up against years of evidence. Children in preschool programs that include instruction on the key academic content areas, such as literacy, language, science, and mathematics, have an academic advantage as they enter school (Downer & Pianta, 2006). Thus, early childhood programs are encouraged to offer a challenging curriculum to young children that "integrate children's learning within and across domains and disciplines" (NAEYC, 2009, p. 21).

Early educators who work with preschool children (3–5 years old) face the challenge of planning for and implementing a comprehensive set of learning activities. This set of learning experiences must be interesting, engaging, and relevant to the learning needs of a range of young learners while addressing critical early learning outcomes linked to children's later academic success (Grimm, Steele, Mashburn, Burchinal, & Pianta, 2010). A written plan that delineates the content that children are to learn (the what) and learning experiences, materials, and teaching and assessment strategies that are used (the how) to achieve those learning outcomes is needed (i.e., a curriculum) (National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning [NCQTL], 2012).

To address the learning objectives of children enrolled in special education, IDEA directly addresses curriculum in the provision of educational services for children and youth with disabilities through the concept of *access to the general education curriculum*, which is defined in the regulations as participation and progress in the general curriculum (Federal Register, 2006). Specifically, IDEA's statutory language requires that each student's IEP include a statement describing how the child's disabilities affect his or her involvement with and progress in the general curriculum; the measurable goals that will be set in order to enable the child to be involved with and progress in the general curriculum; and the services, program modifications, and supports necessary for the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum. It is clear from reading the statute and regulations that the mandate's intention is to have educators raise their expectations about children's learning outcomes by providing a challenging curriculum for students with disabilities and being accountable for students' achievement of those meaningful outcomes (Agran, Alper, & Wehmeyer, 2002).

In order to develop and subsequently implement a coherent curriculum plan, the early educator or group of educators within a program need(s) a curriculum framework to guide decision making for the teaching and learning process and maximize the likelihood that all children will achieve desired outcomes. The CSS+ Curriculum framework is exactly that—a curriculum framework to aid preschool teachers to effectively teach all children included in classrooms. It is intended to provide a guide

for early educators as they plan and provide access to and opportunity for all young children they serve to make meaningful progress in challenging curricular content.

The remainder of this chapter presents an overview of the CSS+ Curriculum framework. It begins by describing each component of the framework and illustrating how each contributes to an integrated, developmentally appropriate plan that is flexible but comprehensive to maximize learning for all young children. Next, it provides an introduction to the step-by-step process that educators engage in as they develop their curriculum and activities for their particular classrooms. This chapter will specifically provide readers with

- An understanding of the major components of the CSS+ Curriculum framework and how these parts work together as a dynamic system to guide implementation of a high-quality early childhood education program
- An introduction to a process for systematically building curriculum plans

## **FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING ALL CHILDREN'S ACCESS AND LEARNING**

Preschool educators are challenged by the considerable complexity they encounter as they engage in planning and implementing their curriculum content, particularly given the diversity of children in most classrooms. Teachers must plan carefully and find ways to regularly communicate about their plans. A curriculum framework is needed to guide their instructional decision making and maximize the likelihood that all children will learn from planned activities. Just as a contractor building a house follows a blueprint to ensure that the finished product meets expectations for quality and design, early educators can use a framework in order to meet children's unique learning needs and be responsive to family and community expectations. Numerous multitiered models of instructional support designed to provide high-quality education to support the development of all children, including those who may need additional intervention to ensure their developmental progress, have been described (Coleman, Buysse, & Neitzel, 2006; Greenwood et al., 2008). Some well-documented examples include the Building Blocks Model (Sandall & Schwartz, 2008), Pyramid Model (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003), Recognition and Response: Model of Response to Intervention (RTI) for Pre-K (Buysse et al., 2013), and Center on Response to Intervention in Early Childhood (CRTIEC) RTI in Early Literacy and Language (Greenwood et al., 2012). Each of these models differ in focus (e.g. social competence, active participation in the general curriculum, literacy), but they all incorporate the key components of high-quality curricular content and instructional strategies for all children and provide guidance to help teachers identify the need for and design additional instructional interventions to address children's individual needs.

We have designed, tested, and refined a multitiered instructional model in the CSS+ Curriculum framework for the purpose of supporting early childhood educators to deliver not only interesting and challenging content but also integrated curriculum content in inclusive settings. We based the framework on integrating specific content domains to provide challenging curriculum content (see Figure 2.1). The assumption is that preschool curriculum must serve to lay the foundation for learning in kindergarten. The decision of “the what” of learning, therefore, should view children’s learning and development as a continuum of what children can and should learn on their path to school success. The levels of instructional support in the framework begin with UDL principles for all, move to differentiation to maximize individual children’s active participation and learning within the learning activities, and finish with individualization for addressing unique child goals and learning targets. In addition, the framework includes progress monitoring, collaborative teaming, and family–professional partnerships as critical components for effective planning and implementation of preschool teaching and learning (see Figure 2.1). The following sections provide an introduction to each of these components, which are presented in more detail in the chapters that follow.

## Challenging Curriculum Content

As previously noted, curriculum includes what to teach (content to be learned; scope) and when to teach (important sequences based on continuum of development and learning) (DEC, 2007). Curriculum must also include strategies for supporting the learning of all children and a system

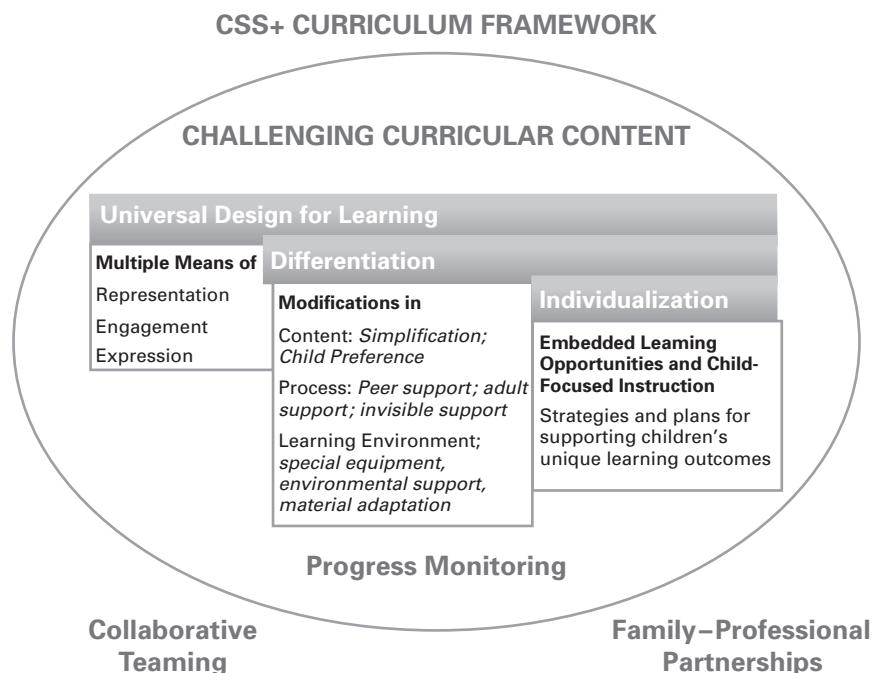


Figure 2.1. CSS+ Curriculum framework.

of assessment and progress monitoring for ensuring that all children are learning. We focus on the first two aspects of curriculum in this component of the CSS+ Curriculum framework—the content to be learned, or what early childhood educators refer to as the scope, and the developmentally appropriate sequence for presenting the content. Decisions by today’s early educators on the content that they should target is directly linked to the recognition that the preschool curriculum lays the foundation for the kindergarten curriculum and children’s success as they move into school. Early childhood educators are increasingly reminded of the need to more carefully align their instruction with standards through third grade and beyond (Conley, 2014). Thus, early childhood programs are encouraged to offer a challenging and integrated curriculum that “integrates children’s learning within and across domains and disciplines (including language, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, social competence)” (NAEYC, 2009, p. 21). The CSS+ Curriculum framework focuses on the domains of language and literacy, mathematics, science, social-emotional competence, and the arts. Guidance is provided for the early educator on sources (e.g., state early learning guidelines, national professional organization recommended standards, program-adopted comprehensive curriculum, program-adopted domain-specific curriculum) for identifying the scope, sequences, and strategies for integrating children’s learning within and across these domains.

## Universal Design for Learning

UDL asks early childhood educators to focus on designing learning environments from the very beginning for the widest diversity of learners rather than having to make extensive individual accommodations and modifications later that focus on making the learning environment work for an individual child (Conn-Powers, Cross, Traub, & Hutter-Pishgahi, 2006). That is, all children are initially provided with a variety of ways to gain access to and process new knowledge or acquire new skills and demonstrate what they are learning. UDL encompasses three primary principles: 1) multiple means of representation to give learners a variety of ways to gain access to information and content, 2) multiple means of engagement to gain and maintain learner’s interest, and 3) multiple means of expression to provide learners with a variety of ways to demonstrate what they know (Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2009). On a basic level, these UDL principles provide a framework for early educators to design engaging learning opportunities that incorporate a variety of ways to gain access to the curriculum content, offer multiple methods to recruit children’s active attention and sustained engagement, and include a range of formats for children to respond and demonstrate what they know and have learned.

## Differentiation

Looking more closely at the diversity of children and their engagement in the general curriculum is the next step in the curriculum planning process.

Differentiation can support the early educator in moving to this next step. Differentiation is the use of instructional strategies that are designed to maximize each child's participation and learning in the general curriculum (Hall, 2002). Modifying and adjusting instruction to meet the needs of all children based on an understanding of their current and changing abilities, learning styles, and interests is central to differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2003). Differentiation strategies can be clustered into three primary focuses in which the complexity or difficulty is varied by making adjustments in the content, process, and/or learning environment (Tomlinson, 2003). Sandall and Schwartz (2008) described eight types of curricular modifications (i.e., peer support, adult support, invisible support, simplification, child preference, environmental support, material adaptations, special equipment). The eight types of curricular modifications are clustered into three primary differentiation focuses in the CSS+ Curriculum framework (see Figure 2.1).

## Individualization

UDL and differentiation strategies can help support children's active participation in all activities and curriculum content of the early learning environment. These may not be sufficient, however, to ensure that every child has learning opportunities designed to address individual goals and outcomes as described on his or her IEP. The CSS+ Curriculum framework addresses this need through the strategy of embedded learning opportunities (ELOs; Horn, Lieber, Sandall, Schwartz, & Li, 2002) in which the educator plans and implements brief instructional episodes across activities to provide direct instruction for children's individualized learning needs and outcomes to ensure that the child has learning opportunities to their meet individually defined needs. ELOs are based on the premise that simply providing access to the general early childhood curriculum is sufficient for many children to achieve their learning objectives. Early education teams sometimes will need to provide instruction through modeling, verbal prompting, and physical guidance in order for some children to learn new or more complex skills within the context of the general curriculum and early learning environments (i.e., use ELOs to provide instruction).

## Collaborative Teaming

The effective implementation of the CSS+ Curriculum framework requires that early educators work together, collaborating on an ongoing basis. Given the significant changes in early childhood education, professional collaboration can ensure access to the curriculum for all children and provide specialized interventions for the unique needs of individual children. Unless professionals collaborate with one another in the classroom and across disciplines, children may experience fragmented and disconnected services that do not support their learning and development. Collaborative teams must work together to develop shared beliefs and common goals while respecting the unique expertise and contribution of each team

member as they share the work involved in helping children move toward their goals.

## Progress Monitoring

Ongoing assessment and monitoring how children learn is a key aspect of the CSS+ Curriculum framework. *Progress monitoring* refers to a continuous measuring and documenting of change or progress in child performance to determine children's progress toward standards-based learning objectives. Information about how children's performance related to the targeted learning outcomes, including those determined important for individual children as well as all young children, is gathered to make decisions about instructional modifications and supports needed to address the scope and sequence of the content. Teachers can use progress monitoring to obtain feedback about what children have and have not learned and create a continuous loop of planning, instruction, and recurrent monitoring. The process of using continuous progress monitoring yields valuable results and also involves teacher and supervisor time, effort, and energy in early childhood classrooms. Progress monitoring must be viewed as an important aspect of the educational teams' work.

## Family–Professional Partnerships

The CSS+ Curriculum framework recognizes that family–professional partnerships lead to benefits for the child, the family, and professionals. That is, children benefit when key stakeholders in their care and education come to an understanding that allows them to work toward the same goals. Families and professionals, however, benefit from the availability of multiple perspectives and resources for solving problems and providing for high-quality learning opportunities (Turnbull et al., 2015). Programs must offer well-considered plans for meaningful and active family involvement in program activities in order for true partnerships between preschool programs and children's families to develop. The plans must simultaneously provide flexibility, however, in both the type and level of involvement families may choose, depending on their circumstances and preferences. Most important, early childhood professionals must understand that establishing family–professional partnerships is a process that takes time, trust, and mutual respect.

## STEPS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

We have divided the work into a six-step process to support early educators in any type of preschool setting to use the CSS+ Curriculum framework for designing, planning, and implementing their classroom curriculum. The process begins with identifying the scope and sequence and ends with reflecting on the implementation of this plan as the next set of plans are designed. Table 2.1 presents each step and briefly identifies the major actions that must be completed for each. Chapter 3 (Foundations of Challenging Curriculum Content), Chapter 4 (Integration of

**Table 2.1.** Steps in the planning process

Implementation steps	Tasks to complete
Step 1: Develop/identify your scope and sequence.	Outline curriculum content that is significant enough to teach. Determine curriculum content that can be accomplished in a given year. Identify the order in which the material should be taught.
Step 2: Determine a strategy for ensuring a coherent and integrated format.	Determine organization strategy by Identifying topics or units that children find interesting or engaging <i>or</i> Identifying a thematic approach Develop a plan for ensuring that the thematic or topic units provide for a coherent sequence within and across units. Develop a plan for ensuring that the thematic or topic of a unit is integrated throughout the day as appropriate. Develop a plan for integrating learning content across the day and across the thematic or topic units.
Step 3: Develop activity plans addressing universal design for learning (UDL) principles for supporting all learners.	Develop a plan for addressing the UDL principle of multiple means of representation. Develop a plan for addressing the UDL principle of multiple means of engagement. Develop a plan for addressing the UDL principle of multiple means of expression.
Step 4: Review activity plans to address differentiation and individualization for children in classroom.	Identify children in need of additional supports to enhance their engagement and learning of the curricular content. Develop plans for providing curricular modification to address children's identified needs. Identify children who are in need of learning opportunities to meet their unique goals and outcomes. Develop a plan to implement brief instructional episodes (i.e., embedded learning opportunities) across activities to provide direct instruction for children's individualized learning needs and outcomes.
Step 5: Connect progress monitoring to the scope and sequence.	Develop a plan for collecting progress monitoring data on children's progress on achieving curricular outcomes. Develop a plan for collecting progress monitoring data on individual children's progress on achieve individual learning goals.
Step 6: Reflect on implementation for the next activity plans and for future planning.	Plan a time and process for the team to reflect on the implementation of the activities plan and make modifications to the plan. Plan a time and process for the team to regularly review progress monitoring data and make modifications to plans based on the data.

Challenging Curriculum Content), Chapter 5 (Foundations of Universal Design for Learning), Chapter 6 (Foundations of Differentiation and Individualization), and Chapter 7 (Components of Progress Monitoring) discuss each step in detail and illustrate each step with the help of the five early childhood educators who work in the various settings introduced in Chapter 1. Chapter 8 (Organization of the Learning Environment) brings each of these steps together as the reader is guided on how to manage and organize the elements of each learning day.