Unit 4 – Language and Literacy
Key Topic 4: Universal Design, Individualizing, and Family Partnerships

Focus Statement

Students become familiar with the concepts of universal design, individualized curriculum decisions, and the rationale for family partnerships in the context of supporting children's language and literacy development. Students also explore methods for approaching these three topics.

Before You Start

As stated in the introductory chapter to the framework, "a fundamental consideration in planning curriculum for individual children is being responsive to the competencies, experiences, interests, and needs each child brings to the preschool classroom" (*California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1*, p. 3). This requires being responsive to diverse cultural communities, languages, family structures, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

In addition to the diversity listed above, children enter preschool with a wide range of experiences related to early language and literacy development (PCF, V1, p. 98). Children's parents may also have a wide range of language and literacy skills in their home language and/or English. Because language is such an essential skill for children's learning and success in school, it is critical that students develop the knowledge and skills needed to foster the language and literacy development of any child who is in their classroom and partner with every family.

The English-language development foundations and the language and literacy foundations in the *California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 1* (PLF, V1) are recommended to be used in tandem with the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* (PCF, V1, pp. 178-179). An essential step in planning for individual children is considering each child's development in her home language as well as her understanding and use of English. Reviewing the English-language development foundations and the English-language development chapter in the curriculum framework can inform teachers on ways to use the framework's suggestions for the environment, materials, interactions, and strategies that support children's learning in language and literacy.

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To support these contributions in curriculum planning, this key topic is divided into three subtopics. Each emphasizes features of the curriculum framework that focus on working with each child as an individual: universal design, individualizing curriculum, and forming partnerships with families.

In the first subtopic, universal design, it is suggested that a guest speaker or a panel present to your class on considerations when planning for children with disabilities or special needs. Suggestions for presenters include early childhood special education teachers, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, assistive technology specialists, preschool teachers with experience in including children with disabilities in their classes, and parents of children with disabilities or special needs.

Please note that the same active learning segments for the Universal Design, Individualizing, and Family Partnerships subtopics are used in the social-emotional development, English-language development, and mathematics domains. Slight modifications are made in each domain to reflect its specific content.

Information Delivery

The following content from the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* (PCF, V1) is referenced in this key topic and may be delivered through lectures and/or assigned readings:

- California's Preschool Children (pp. 3-5)

- Universal Design for Learning (p. 13)

- Domain guiding principle for language and literacy: "Celebrate and support the individual" (p. 101)

- Overarching principle from the PCF, V1: "Individualization of learning includes all children" (pp. 7-8)

- "Partnering with families in curriculum planning" (p. 23)

The *Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning, 2*nd *edition* (PEL Resource Guide), and its accompanying instructional guide are also good resources for the second subtopic on individualizing.

Active Learning

Subtopic 1: Universal Design

Getting it started
Begin by having students read the definition of and key

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points about universal design for learning described in the framework (PCF, V1, p. 13). Write each approach (i.e., "multiple means of representation," "multiple means of expression," and "multiple means of engagement") at the top of a sheet of chart paper. Because these concepts may be new to your students, it is suggested that you spend some time discussing each one by reviewing the examples provided in the PCF, V1 and providing some additional ones. Also encourage students to share any experiences they have had with adapting curriculum for young children with disabilities or special needs. Ask a few students to write these examples from the PCF, V1 under each heading.

Keeping it going
Point out to students that suggestions for adapting or modifying environments and activities can be found in the environments and materials, vignettes, and interactions and strategies. Assign students in pairs or small groups to different strands or substrands and ask them to review the interactions and strategies. Ask them to find those interactions and strategies that would be useful in working with children with disabilities or special needs. This could take some time because the suggestions are embedded in the text without any highlighting, so you may want students to do this as an out-of-class assignment.

Ask them to consider which ones they think they could carry out on their own and where they would need extra help or resources. Point out that Appendix D, Resources for Teachers of Children with Disabilities or Other Special Needs, could be a starting point for finding supports (PCF, V1, pp. 319-322).

Taking it further
Have students work individually or in small groups to review the suggestions from the environments and materials and interactions and strategies for adapting or modifying an activity or approach. (Students can use the list from the above segment, "Keeping it going.") Have students write each suggestion on a half sheet of paper or large Post-it® note. Their task is to decide if the suggestion falls under "multiple means of representation," "multiple means of expression," or "multiple means of engagement." Remind students that some suggestions may fall under more than one heading.

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They then place the note on the chart paper with the appropriate heading. You could also have students do this by labeling three sheets of paper or three columns on a sheet of paper with the three approaches and writing the suggestions under their chosen heading. You may also wish to assign students specific suggestions instead of the whole list to review.

After students have finished posting their suggestions on the appropriate categories, discuss why they made their matches.

Putting it together
You may wish to conclude this subtopic by having students discuss the following questions:

- What are some of the key concepts in universal design?

- Which concepts were clear to you? Which concepts were confusing?

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- What other questions do you have about universal design related to language and literacy?

- What resources do you think would be most helpful to you in your work?

Another approach
This could be done instead of the preceding exercises or in addition to them as an expansion.

Explain to students that they will be hearing from a guest speaker or panel to discuss considerations when planning for children with disabilities or special needs. Note that this is not intended as an in-depth exploration but as an introduction to some of the ways in which curriculum can be made responsive to the needs of all children.

Ask the presenters to address the importance of supporting children's language and literacy development, ensuring that children with disabilities can communicate with their peers and adults in the class, and partnering with families. Provide the presenters with the information on universal design in the PCF, V1 on page 13 and ask them to include examples of how they've used some of the strategies suggested. If students are not familiar with special education, ask the presenters to also give a brief overview that includes a summary of the

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assessment and IEP process; how services are provided; and ways that the special education teachers, therapists, and other specialists can work with teachers in preschool programs to figure out and/or provide the adaptations for each child who has a disability.

Ask the students to note examples of each of the three universal design approaches that the speaker or panelists describe that support language and literacy.

After the speakers have left, ask students to write any additional suggestions from the presenters on the chart papers or their own lists. Then have students respond to the following questions individually or through a class discussion:

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- What information from the presenter(s) caught your attention or stood out for you?

- What are you most confident about in supporting the language and literacy development of children with disabilities? What concerns you?

- What new or different perspectives do you have? How has this presentation been helpful?

- What do you want to keep in mind when you are planning ways to modify or adapt the learning environment and experiences for children with disabilities to ensure their progress in language and literacy?

Subtopic 2: Individualizing

Getting it started
Begin this subtopic by reviewing the section in the framework titled "California's Preschool Children" (PCF, V1, pp. 3-5). Have students find and summarize the key points and share them through a classroom discussion.

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Keeping it going
Next have students read the sixth overarching principle, "Individualization of learning includes all children" (PCF, V1, pp. 7-8).

Ask students to give examples of differences they might see in

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different children for each of the characteristics described in the sixth overarching principle: " . . . temperament, family and cultural experiences, language experiences, personal strengths, interests, abilities, and dispositions . . . " Ask some students to chart or take notes of the examples.

Then continue the class discussion by reviewing the examples and asking the students to describe some of the implications of these individual differences in supporting children's language and literacy development.

Taking it further
Assign a substrand to individual or groups of students and have them review the interactions and strategies for the assigned substrand. The students can reference the lists developed as Handout 1 in Unit 4, Key Topic 3, or you may provide them with a list. As they review the interactions and strategies, ask students to note ways that the strategy can help teachers get to know children individually. For example, in the PCF, V1 (pp. 112-113), the strategies "Acknowledge children's contributions" and "Engage in 'getting to know you' conversations" in the substrand "Language Use and Conventions" can help teachers learn which children are more spontaneously verbal and which ones respond more when others initiate conversations.

After the students have had time to identify examples in their assigned strategies and interactions, ask for some students to share one or two of their ideas with the whole class. Continue the discussion until students have a good sense of how the interactions and strategies can support individualization for children.

Putting it together
Conclude this subtopic by having students consider the following questions that could help them get to know the individual characteristics of children who might be in their classrooms and how to plan for each child's continuing progress in language and literacy:

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- What kinds of documentation could you use to help you understand individual children in terms of their language and literacy?

- What are some ways you could get to know the families of individual children? About their language?

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- How could you learn about the child's community?

- How could you find out what things a child is interested in?

- What different kinds of information about the child could you obtain by observing him during the different parts of the daily routine?

- What are some ways you could determine each child's strengths in his/her language and literacy development?

- How could you use this information to plan curriculum that supports each child's language and literacy development?

Subtopic 3: Family Partnerships

Getting it started
Point out to students that there is a section entitled "Engaging Families" at the end of each strand (PCF, V1, pp. 126, 155-156, and 165-166). Ideas to give to families for use at home are listed in each of these sections. Assign groups of students a strand and have them list the strategies in their strand on pieces of chart paper—two strategies per sheet with blank space between the two strategies or as headings for two columns. They are then to list examples from the framework under each strategy and post their chart sheets on the wall.

Keeping it going
Next have the groups move to another sheet of strategies and add other ideas for implementing the strategy. This is similar to a brainstorming activity, so allow about 5 minutes per rotation and continue until all groups have added ideas to all the strategies.

Taking it further
Continue this exercise by having students review pages 3-5 of the PCF, V1, "California's Preschool Children," and identify examples of how children's families are diverse.

Ask students to next think about other ways families are unique:

- Family composition in the home including primary caregivers, siblings, other family members

- Length of time in the United States

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- Parents' educational experiences in the U.S. or other countries

- Parents' literacy skills

- Types of employment and work schedules

- Parenting beliefs and practices

Discuss how each of these characteristics might impact children's language and literacy development.

Next have the students identify any considerations or additional ways to individualize the strategies for families. You could do this as a large group discussion or have the original groups add the considerations and additional strategies for their strand. Each group could then present its ideas.

Another way
Instead of having students brainstorm ways to implement the strategies for engaging families (described in "Keeping it going"), have students interview teachers and parents to identify examples. These interviews could be conducted in different ways:

- Students first ask teachers and parents for ways that they have partnered and the students then list these examples under the different strategies.

- Assign students different strategies and have them ask teachers and parents for examples for those specific strategies.

Putting it together
Conclude this subtopic by having students respond to these questions:

- What considerations or ideas about the impact and influence of families on children's language and literacy development caught your attention?

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- Which ones resonated with you because of your experiences with children and families?

- Which strategies or interactions do you think are most important to include in order to build strong partnerships with families that foster children's language and literacy?

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- What is a first step you would take in building these partnerships?

Reflection

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You could have students reflect on this key topic by having them respond to the following questions for each subtopic or for the overall key topic. This could be done through journaling or as a discussion.

- What ideas stood out most for you today?

- Which ones reinforced what you have already learned or experienced? Which ones gave you a new perspective or insight?

- How might you apply a new perspective to your work now or in the future?

- What further information or support do you need?

- What first step do you need to do?

Deeper Understanding

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There are two suggestions to engage students more deeply in this key topic:

- Students are to choose one of the three subtopics and interview a teacher and parent on the subtopic. The objective of the interview is to identify recommended practices that the teacher uses and that the parent has experienced in promoting children's language and literacy development. Depending on your students' background, you may wish to develop the interview questions in a class session before having students conduct and write up the interviews.

- There is an extensive body of research about the importance of reading and sharing books with children to support their language and literacy development. Have students identify some of this research and prepare a paper or presentation that includes the following content:

  - Summary of the research and findings

  - Adaptations for reading and sharing books with children with disabilities or special needs

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- The role of families in reading and sharing books with their children

- Considerations in selecting and sharing books that reflect children's individual interests, strengths, and development

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