Students with Disabilities
and the Core Arts Standards

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
FOR TEACHERS

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Students with Disabilities and the Core Arts Standards: Guiding Principles for Teachers

The Core Arts Standards are designed to guide US schools' arts curriculum, instruction, and assessment (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, n. d.). Standards writers included a review team of arts and special education professionals, led by the Office of VSA and Accessibility at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, ensuring that each standard encompasses a broad range of communication and learning styles. Because the standards emphasize a process-oriented approach to arts education, Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCA's) provide arts teachers and districts with detailed examples of assessment implementation, including strategies for embedding instruction. In addition, each MCA addresses the needs of students with disabilities through inclusion guidelines within the strategies, developed by the Kennedy Center team. To complement the inclusion guidelines within the MCA's, these guiding principles offer arts teachers a broad based description of the policies, processes, and instructional approaches for including students with disabilities in the Core Arts Standards.

The Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities

All students, regardless of disabilities, have the right to the same educational goals and standards. Federal laws mandate that students with disabilities be included in all aspects of the general public education curriculum. Reauthorizations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 and 2004 indicated that students with disabilities must have access to and are expected to make progress in the general curriculum (IDEA, 1997, 2004). Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act) required that all students participate in school, district, and state accountability systems (NCLB, 2001). According to IDEA, students with disabilities must be appropriately accommodated to participate in these assessments. Taken together, IDEA and ESEA provide the basis for inclusion of all students with disabilities in

general education, with high expectations for their achievement in high quality education programs (Kleinert, Kearns, Quenemoen, & Thurlow, 2013; Thurlow & Quenemoen, 2011).

Who are Students with Disabilities?

Students with disabilities are a heterogeneous group. Their only commonality is the presence of a disabling condition that requires specialized supports to benefit from the general curriculum (McLaughlin, 2012; 34 C.F.R.§300.39). Specified disability categories enable the determination of eligibility for services, and inform overall educational program planning and implementation. However, the use of disability categories only, as a means of providing educational supports to individual students, is not effective, for the following reasons:

- A specific disability can manifest in individual children in a tremendous range of ways and across a continuum from mild to severe.
- Students with differing disabilities often have characteristics that overlap, making identification more complex.
- Students may have multiple disabilities and specialized needs that cross disability categories.
- The operational definitions of specific disabilities vary from state to state and district to district.
- Educational practices may be similar for individual students with different disabilities.
- Certain minority groups are disproportionately represented in specific disability categories, including the problem of over-identification for some minority groups in some disability categories.
- An increasing number of students have disabling conditions that do not fit well within the traditional disability categories. (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 2001, p. 8)

Knowledge of the disability categories, and their prevalence, informs arts educators as to the general characteristics and needs of students they might be serving in their classrooms. The disability categories identified by IDEA, and the percentage of prevalence within the overall category of students receiving special education services ages 6 to 21, are as follows:

Table 1

Categories and Prevalence of Disabilities under the IDEA

Disability	Percent
Specific learning disability	41.2
Speech or language impairment	18.7
Other health impairments	12.2
Intellectual disability	7.6
Emotional disturbance	6.8
Autism	6.5
Multiple disabilities	2.1
Developmental delay	1.9
Hearing impairments	1.2
Orthopedic impairments	1.0
Visual impairments	0.4
Traumatic brain injury	0.4
Deaf-blindness	0.02

Source: National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (2012)

The most prevalent disability category is that of Specific Learning Disability. Students with Specific Learning Disabilities possess average to above-average intelligence, but have a disorder in one or more psychological processes involving use of spoken or written language. This will affect the ability to process information in one or more areas related to listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or calculating in mathematics (34 C.F.R. §300.8(c)(10)).

Each student's Specific Learning Disability is manifested uniquely, and educational supports require an understanding of each student's areas of need. The same assertion applies to all of the other disability categories. Though teachers can have a broad understanding of a student's possible support needs, based on disability category or label, knowledge of a student's unique characteristics and needs is essential for successful inclusion in the general education curriculum. For a full description of each disability category, see the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities website: http://nichcy.org/, or the Center for Parent Information and Resources website: http://www.parentcenterhub.org/topics/disability/

Responsibilities of Arts Teachers of Students with Disabilities

All teachers, regardless of their content area expertise, are required to teach students with disabilities. According to guidelines by the Council of Chief State School Officers for licensing general and special education teachers,

all teachers, both general educators and special educators, must have knowledge and skills related to their subject matter discipline and the principles of effective teaching and learning as well as specific knowledge and skills drawn from the field of special education. (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 2001, p. 6)

Additionally, students with disabilities should be challenged to excel so that they are well prepared for successful post-secondary school education, careers, and lives in the community (Thurlow, 2012).

The Core Arts Standards (NCCAS, n. d.) establish a framework for general educators in the arts to provide the necessary challenges and preparation for engagement in and appreciation of the arts both during and after the school years. To deliver appropriate and meaningful instruction and assessments within the framework of the standards, it is the responsibility of arts teachers working with children with disabilities to adhere to the following (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 2001; McNulty & Gloeckeler, 2011):

- Possess core knowledge of a broad range of disabilities and how to implement general strategies and frameworks for inclusion.

- Share and collaborate in evidence-based practices with the special educators and related personnel assigned to the students they teach.

- Know specific information about each student's abilities and disabilities.

- Know and utilize the content of the Individual Education Program (IEP), including learning strengths and needs, and goals and accommodations required for each student.

- Create a positive learning environment inclusive of all students.

Arts teachers are not expected to work in isolation. They can best adhere to the above responsibilities when their schools and districts support the achievement of all students. Schools in which the culture reflects an understanding of shared responsibility for both general and special education students are most likely to provide teachers with needed supports. In such schools administrators and faculty maintain high expectations for student performance, school-wide intervention systems address the needs of struggling learners, inclusion and collaborative teaching occurs so that students receive needed special education supports in general education classrooms, and organizational structures and professional development target the needs of special education students (McNulty & Gloeckler, 2011).

Guidelines for Using the Core Arts Standards

with Students with Disabilities

The Core Arts Standards are intentionally broadly stated to allow for a variety of presentations and responses based on individual student needs and abilities. Full access to the standards by all students, regardless of disabilities, was considered in the design to enable arts teachers to facilitate the achievement of students with disabilities at the same levels expected for all students. Although the content standards are not the curriculum, they define the target skills and knowledge the curriculum should encompass (Thurlow & Quenemoen, 2011). Because the Model Cornerstone Assessments depend on instructional products and outcomes, the following guidelines are designed for instruction and assessment of students with disabilities within the Core Arts Standards framework.

Table 2

Guidelines for Teachers of the Arts

1. Maintain high expectations
2. Promote communicative competence
3. Use the principles of Universal Design for Learning
4. Know how to select and use appropriate accommodations for individual students
5. Make use of evidence-based practices
6. Target instruction and use formative indicators of student performance

Source: Compiled from Kleinert, et al., 2013; Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, & Hall, 2005; Thurlow, 2012; Thurlow, 2011.

Maintain High Expectations

Teachers should expect students with disabilities to achieve grade-level standards. All students can work toward grade-level standards and most will be able to achieve them provided teachers deliver additional supports, following conditions described in the guidelines (Thompson, et al., 2005). The practice of challenging students to reach high expectations should apply to all, but is particularly critical for students with disabilities. If some are not achieving at expected levels, change the services, supports, and specialized instruction, rather than lower expectations (Thurlow & Quenemoen, 2011). In other words, design instruction and materials so that all students can fully interact with the content. According to Thurlow (2012), when students with disabilities leave school, they should (a) have the ability to use technology, (b) understand a variety of perspectives, and (c) communicate effectively. All teachers, regardless of discipline, contribute to the future of students with disabilities.

Promote Communicative Competence

Most students, regardless of severity of disabilities, possess a means to communicate. Communication is a foundational priority for all other educational activities. Supports for students with communication difficulties require that they reliably receive information from others and communicate to others what they know. They should be able to express their needs, desires, questions, and comments about their lives and their world (Kleinert, et al., 2013). Students with communication challenges require supports provided by special education and related service personnel, such as speech and language pathologists and assistive technology specialists. Some students make use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices. Arts teachers should know, understand, and make full use of all students' communication supports effectively. Working collaboratively with special education and related service personnel can facilitate this process. The following resources are recommended to assist teachers in providing communication supports:

- Communication Services and Supports for Individuals with Severe Disabilities: FAQs, at http://www.asha.org/NJC/faqs-njc/

- Speech and Language Impairments Fact Sheet at http://nichcy.org/
  disability/specific/speechlanguage#teachers http://www.parentcenterhub.
  org/repository/speechlanguage/

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication: http://www.asha.org/public/
  speech/disorders/AAC/

Use the Principles of Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) establishes a framework for creating learning environments in which all students can thrive (Fuelberth & Laird, 2014). Designing instruction and assessment accessible for all alleviates the need for most individual accommodations. According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2005, p. 4), UDL:

- *Assumes a continuum of learning differences* in the classroom; that is, students will learn at levels at, below, and above grade level, and each student has individual areas of strength and weakness;

- Relies on the general curriculum that is *presented flexibly, so it includes, engages, and challenges all students appropriately;*

- Enables *all students to progress* under the same standards, rather than establishing alternative curricula or standards. It maintains high expectations for all and does not "dumb down" the curriculum for students with disabilities.

- Is *inclusive by design:* teaching methods and assistive technologies will be built in or be readily available; they will not have to be added on as afterthoughts by the teacher.

The three guiding principles of UDL (Rose & Meyer, 2002) are:

1. Represent information in multiple formats and media.
2. Provide multiple pathways for students' actions and expressions.
3. Provide multiple ways to engage students' interests and motivation.

The first principle encourages teachers to provide options for perception, language and symbols, and comprehension in the transfer of learning. The second principle encourages teachers to provide options for physical action, expressive skills and fluency,

and executive functions. The third principle encourages teachers to provide options for recruiting interest, sustaining effort and persistence, and self-regulation (CAST, 2011). The following resources are recommended to assist teachers in the implementation of UDL:

- Council for Exceptional Children (2005). *Universal Design for Learning: A guide for teachers and education professionals*. Arlington, VA: Author.
- CAST: The Center for Applied Special Technology, at www.cast.org
- National Center on Universal Design for Learning, at www.udlcenter.org
- Glass, D., Blair, K., & Ganley, P. (2012). Universal Design for Learning and the arts option. In T. E. Hall, A. Meyer, & D. H. Rose (Eds.), *Universal Design for Learning in the classroom: Practical applications.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Know How to Select and Use Appropriate Accommodations for Individual Students

The intent of UDL is to provide access to full educational participation for all students, although some students with disabilities might require additional individualized approaches and supports. In such cases, teachers should provide appropriate accommodations, rather than lower expectations, weaken the curriculum, or change the standard. Individualized accommodations allow teachers to preserve instructional and assessment content, but alter the way in which students interact with the content. The same set of accommodations should remain in place for both instruction and assessment (Thurlow & Quenemoen, 2011; Thurlow, 2011).

The IEP provides the format for addressing most accommodations for a student's general education needs. Accommodations are identified and developed by team members, and the arts teacher is often a member of the IEP team. Input from the arts teacher is essential because, if not included, the IEP accommodations list is not likely to identify specific arts related educational needs requiring specialized material or environmental designs and/or assistive technology. Whether the arts teacher is included in the IEP meeting or provides consultation to the attending team members, such specialized accommodations must be met to meaningfully include each student

in assessments and instruction (IDEA, 1997, 2004; Thurlow, 2012). Arts teachers should work with assigned special educators and related personnel in developing accommodations for individual students. Numerous resources are available to assist teachers in selecting accommodations for instruction and assessment. Several of these resources include:

- Beech, M. (2010). *Accommodations: Assisting students with disabilities.* Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/accomm-educator.pdf

- National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials, at http://aim.cast.org/

- Loesl, S. D. (2012). The adaptive art specialist: An integral part of a student's access to art. In S. M. Malley (Ed.), *The intersection of arts education and special education: Exemplary programs and approaches* (pp. 47-68). Washington, DC: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

- Tomasic, M. (2014). Developing curricula and assessment tools for the physically integrated dance class. In S. M. Malley (Ed.), *2013 VSA Intersections: Arts and special education exemplary programs and approaches* (pp. 182-202). Washington, DC: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Make Use of Evidence-based Practices

Programs and practices demonstrated by research to positively effect student outcomes are known as evidence-based practices (Cook & Odom, 2013). Identified and adopted by one or more members of the IEP team, they can include specific strategies and interventions for individual students. Often, these practices are shared and used consistently by all teachers working with a particular student. If a student's special education teacher or IEP team recommends a particular strategy or intervention, there is a chance for better student outcomes if it is used across all educational settings. Arts teachers should include such practices in their instruction and assessment. Evidence-based practices (EBP) have the following characteristics (Marder & Fraser, 2013):

- The specific strategy or intervention has been evaluated through research, published in a peer-reviewed journal, and replicated with positive outcomes.

- The strategy includes an assessment of the student's current performance followed by implementation of a strategy or intervention to improve performance.

- The strategy includes data collection procedures and ongoing monitoring of student progress.

- The strategy identifies the specific skills and measurable outcomes to be addressed.

- The benefits for implementing the strategy or intervention outweigh the limitations.

For more information about evidence-based practices see:

- CEC Evidence Based Practice Resources at http://www.cec.sped.org/Standards/Evidence-Based-Practice-Resources-Original?sc_lang=en

- Marder, T., & Fraser, D. (2013) Evidence-based practice for special educators teaching students with autism. *New Horizons for Learning, X* (2). Retrieved from http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/Journals/specialedjournal/MarderandFraser

- The Center for Evidence Based Practice at http://www.evidencebasedpractices.org/index.php

- What Works Clearinghouse at http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

Target Instruction and Use Formative Indicators of Student Performance

The practice of targeting instruction, monitoring student progress through formative indicators, and adjusting materials and procedures benefits all students, but is of particular importance for students with disabilities (Thurlow, 2012). Arts teachers should pay particular attention to how materials are presented and students respond to them, using UDL principles. The Core Arts Standards provide a framework for progression within and across the standards. By scaffolding instruction to meet

standards, teachers can build formative indicators into curriculum (Thurlow). Several special education teaching resources provide information on how to target instruction and monitor progress. Sources include the following:

- Archer, A. L, & Hughes, C. A. (2011). *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
  For a sample chapter see: http://explicitinstruction.org/download/sample-chapter.pdf
- Strategies for scaffolding instruction: http://www.edutopia.org/blog/scaffolding-lessons-six-strategies-rebecca-alber

Considerations for Students with Extensive Support Needs

Arts teachers who follow the above guidelines might question their application to students with extensive supports needs (e. g., intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, severe autism) (Rydnak, Jackson, & White, 2013). Research related to instruction, however, provides evidence that students with extensive support needs

- can acquire skills and content knowledge in general-education settings when provided appropriate supports and instruction;
- are responsive to both UDL-based adaptations and rigorous instruction when in general-education settings;
- are best served when collaborative educational teams approach their education in general-education settings with the intent of finding solutions to potential barriers to access and learning. (Rydnak, et al., p. 33)

More evidence is needed on the effects of particular instructional contexts, such as the amount of time spent in general versus specialized settings on skill acquisition and maintenance. Further, there is a current need to examine (a) how evidence-based practices typically used in special education settings are best implemented within general education, (b) how certain methods of instruction by general educators might be effective for students with extensive support needs, and (c) how the principles of UDL can best be utilized and augmented with more intense direct instruction (Rydnak, et al., 2013).

Current expectations are that students with extensive support needs will progress through age and grade appropriate curricula (Wehmeyer, 2006), hence following the same standards as their age and grade level peers. By adhering to the above teacher responsibilities and guidelines, with an emphasis on collaboration with special educators and related services personnel, arts teachers should be able to address instructional requirements of their students with extensive support needs in meeting the Core Arts Standards.

The Arts and Students with Disabilities

Research, narratives, testimonies, and descriptions of successful projects and programs demonstrate that students with disabilities benefit from well-designed inclusive arts education (Malley & Silverstein, 2014). Engaging in the arts provides students with disabilities opportunities to convey sophisticated ideas and experience validation of their work. For many students contending with academic challenges requiring a set way of acquiring knowledge, the arts, with inherent opportunities for diverse and variable expressions, responses, and outcomes, offer the only means of success and full expression. Students with disabilities participating in the arts can exercise cognitive processes, find and develop their unique voices, and tell their stories (MacLean, 2008). Arts teachers, special educators, and other professionals and paraprofessionals working with students with disabilities have attested to the power of arts education in their students' lives (Malley & Silverstein, 2014). Research and observations in literature have linked the positive impact of arts education for students with disabilities to both academic and social/emotional domains (e.g., Hillier, Greher, Poto, & Dougherty, 2011; Kempe & Tissot, 2012; Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2008). Responsive and pro-active inclusion of students with disabilities in arts education is paramount to their overall well-being and future success. With these guidelines, in conjunction with those in the Model Cornerstone Assessments for each arts discipline, arts teachers can address the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms in ways that are respectful of differences and fully inclusive.

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Resources

Communication

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association at http://www.asha.org/

Augmentative and Alternative Communication

    http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/AAC/

Communication Services and Supports for Individuals with Severe Disabilities: FAQs, at

    http://www.asha.org/NJC/faqs-njc/

Speech and Language Impairments Fact Sheet

    http://nichcy.org/disability/specific/speechlanguage#teachers

    http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/speechlanguage/

Universal Design for Learning

CAST: The Center for Applied Special Technology, at www.cast.org

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National Center on Universal Design for Learning, at www.udlcenter.org

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National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials, at http://aim.cast.org/

Tomasic, M. (2014). Developing curricula and assessment tools for the physically integrated dance class. In S. M. Malley (Ed.), *2013 VSA Intersections: Arts and special education exemplary programs and approaches* (pp. 182-202). Washington, DC: The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Evidence Based Practice

CEC Evidence Based Practice Resources at

http://www.cec.sped.org/Standards/Evidence-Based-Practice-Resources-Original?sc_lang=en

Marder, T., & Fraser, D. (2013) Evidence-based practice for special educators teaching students with autism. *New Horizons for Learning, X* (2). Retrieved from http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/Journals/specialedjournal/MarderandFraser

The Center for Evidence Based Practice at

http://www.evidencebasedpractices.org/index.php

What Works Clearinghouse at http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

Targeted Instruction

Archer, A. L, & Hughes, C. A. (2011). *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

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Strategies for scaffolding instruction: http://www.edutopia.org/blog/scaffolding-lessons-six-strategies-rebecca-alber

General Information for Inclusion and the Arts

Center for Parent Information and Resources Library:

http://www.parentcenterhub.org/resources

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National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities: http://nichcy.org/

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