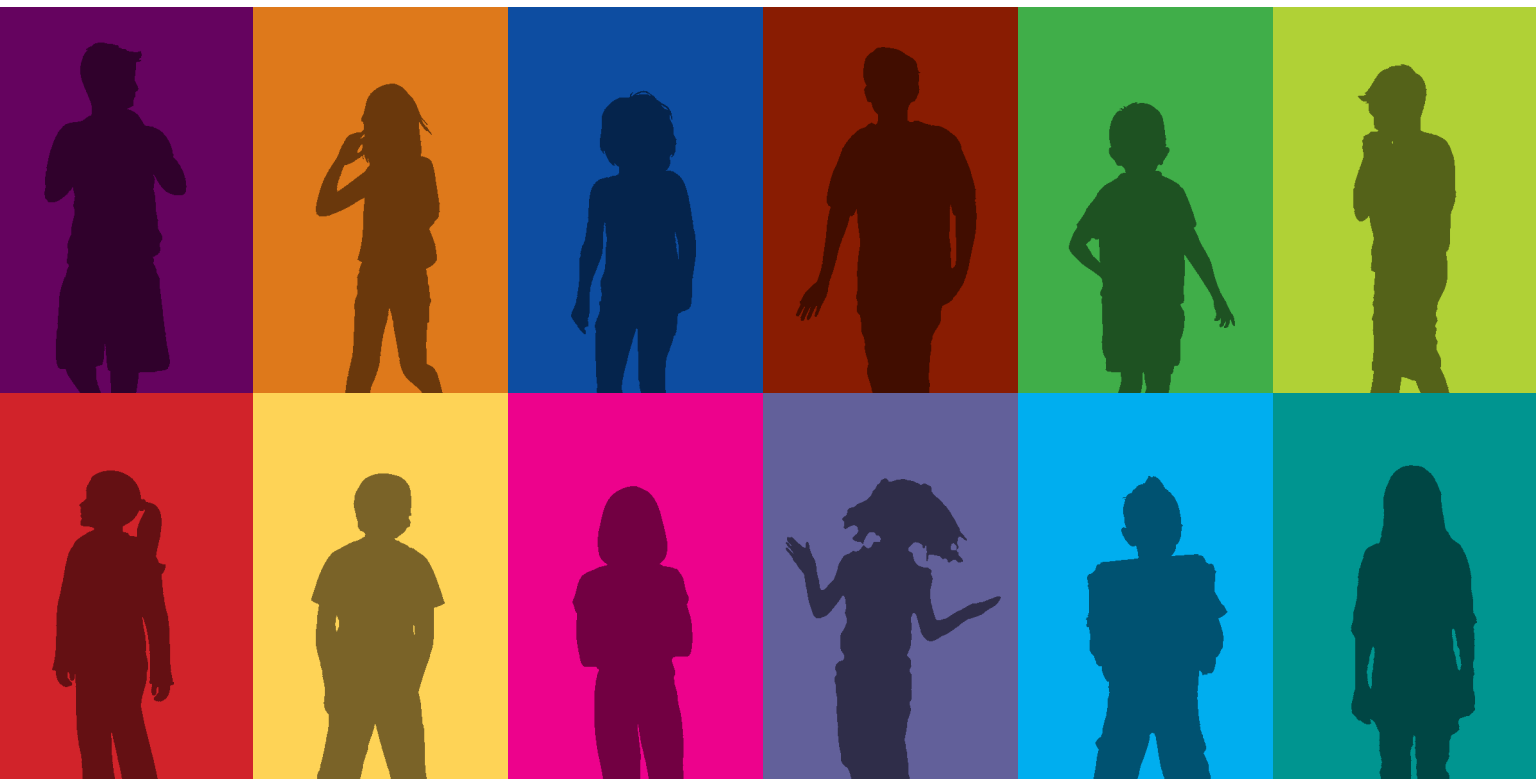
TEACHING TO DIVERSITY

The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning



Jennifer Katz
Foreword by Faye Brownlie

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PORTAGE & MAIN PRESS

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Dedication

To Jorel, whose journey has shown more wisdom, insight, and resilience than we will ever know, and to all the children—past, present, and future—who have taught me more than I can ever teach them, thank you for your many gifts, with a prayer for a more peaceful and loving world for you to grow up in.

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Foreword

For many years I have believed that, as teachers, we each need to have a mental model for learning, a model that we can articulate and apply to our everyday work of teaching and learning in classrooms, a model that we can use when collaborating with our colleagues to improve learning opportunities for all our students. Without this personal model, we can too easily be swayed by slick packaging, charismatic speakers, teacher-proof programs, out-of-school directives, and the proclamation "evidence-based." We are working in challenging times: teachers have never had more choices; at the same time, we have never had more diverse students in our classrooms; nor have we or our students ever had such easy and rapid access to information. How do we balance the demands on our time and attention? How do we make the wise choices that best inspire student learning?

Enter the voice of Dr. Jennifer Katz. She is a passionate educator. She cares deeply about making a difference in the lives of her students, which is clear from the outset in her book, *Teaching to Diversity*. She presents her model of what counts in learning, and describes what she as a teacher does in order to cultivate this learning—for all students—in inclusive classrooms. Peppered throughout the text are vignettes of complex students who have pushed her thinking. We can all identify with these students—we have met them and others in our own classrooms. And thus we begin our journey to discover the "three-block model" of "universal design for learning" (UDL), a model based on accessibility and choice, on discovering students' talents and needs, and on linking them explicitly to key curriculum goals.

In my model of learning, UDL and "backwards design" are the organizing frameworks. To this model, Jen adds the lens of "multiple intelligences" (MI) and MI centres. Block One is the backbone of her UDL model. Naming it "social and emotional learning," she centres it on building community. Who can argue with the premise that all learners learn better when they know themselves, respect themselves, are resilient, and embrace an inclusive classroom that values diversity? In her classroom, each school year opens with her "respecting diversity" (RD) program, a sequence of nine easy-to-follow lessons to develop self-awareness and other-awareness in students. The RD program uses MI not only to help teachers teach or students learn more effectively, but also to build community in the classroom, creating a bond among students that moves that community forward, not just the individuals within it. The implications of this are considerable. Curriculum is designed to connect to the lives and interests of the students. Also in Block One is curriculum design, following a "backwards design" model.

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Knowledge of the curriculum is critical; planning is key; learning is organized in large chunks—term-by-term, built from integrated curricula, grouped learning outcomes, essential questions, and inquiry. Lessons move from modelling, through guided practice in centres, to individual performance. While the approach may initially seem daunting, it is based on the premise that teachers are professionals, and as professionals, they are prepared to personally and collectively design the work they will do with their students.

Block Two, Inclusive Instructional Practice, is presented in two chapters, including a sampling of specific lessons to teach collaboration. If all students are to belong and learn in the classroom, then all participants in the classroom must actively work on including others, by helping others be the best they can be at all times. In Block Three, Systems and Structures, the focus is outside the classroom itself, and considers how we can better work together to improve learning for all students. Specific examples of what administrators have done in schools to support teacher collaboration and inclusive education are presented.

I believe that all students can learn. I also believe that we, collaboratively, have the skill and the knowledge to teach all students—and the responsibility to do so. This belief resonates throughout *Teaching to Diversity*. Repeatedly, reference is made to creating and maintaining a compassionate classroom, a classroom where students learn that they are stronger and smarter together, and that all voices count. Special attention is called to First Nations learners and to our responsibility to improve learning for them.

Jen has a clear vision of her mental model. She offers it to us, to continue to add to our own models and to make a greater difference in the learning and the lives of all our students. You may not agree with all that Jen says, but she is sure to cause you to ponder and reflect upon your teaching—and isn't that what professionalism and learning are all about?

—*Faye Brownlie*

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Faye Brownlie, a friend and mentor, who, after co-teaching in my classroom, urged me to make the move to the university and to write this book, helped me find a publisher, and took time out of a hectic schedule to write the Foreword. I am grateful for her time, her wisdom, and her support. To Myra Laramee, who spent beautiful summer afternoons cloistered with me in her living room, sharing her experiences and her expertise, *Megwetch*. To all the Portage & Main staff—Annalee, Catherine, Marcela—and my editor Jean, thanks for supporting my passion and perfectionism, and for persevering!

Thank you to the Faculty at the University of Manitoba, in particular, Zana, Charlotte, Rick, John, and Bob, who both formally and personally have supported this work. To Alan Schroeder, John Van Walleghem, Karen Priestly, Ron Sugden, Joan Zaretsky, Terry Price, Bobbi Ethier, my graduate students, and all the members of the Manitoba Alliance for Universal Design for Learning, the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, and the Canadian Research Centre for Inclusive Education, who have taken on this work and helped disseminate it—thank you.

I am profoundly grateful to all my colleagues who opened their doors and shared their classrooms and students with me. Your dedication to the well-being of "our kids" is inspiring. I hope this book brings support, inspiration, and joy to your teaching.

To all the family, friends, mentors, and spiritual teachers who have guided my spirit, nurtured my heart, and enlightened my soul, my heartfelt thanks. A special thank you to Reb Zalman, Reb Nadya, Reb Shefa, and Reb Victor for helping me to connect my past with my present, and my spiritual life with my profession, I am eternally grateful. I have been blessed with a sisterhood of incredible women who have mentored, nurtured, and prodded me to grow and learn. To Gina Rae, Ida Ollenberger, Kathyrn D'Angelo, Marion Porath, and Pat Mirenda, my thanks for your love, your support, and your ability to extend my thinking and pose the right questions. To my sister, Vivi, my soul mate, David, and to my soul sisters Lisa, Andi, and Dafna, there are no words for what your friendship and support mean to me. This work would not exist but for you.

This project, as with all of what I do and how I live, is dedicated to the two guiding women in my life: my aunt Sheila, who introduced me to my love for special children and gave me the confidence to believe I could make a difference, and my mother who for forty-five years has dried my tears, listened to my stories, and shown me how to live life with love, integrity, compassion, service, and spirit. I do my best to share your legacy.

Introduction

Student/Teacher Vignettes

T.

ST-V 1

In December of 1996, in my first year as a learning assistance teacher, my principal walked into my office, plunked a thick file on my desk, and said, "He'll be here in January. Do something." That night, with a cup of tea in hand, I read the contents of the file, a biography of another lost child. His file, I would realize years later, told an all too common story, but at the time, I had no idea how far along my own professional journey this child would move me.

From the file, I could see that T. was officially in grade 6, and was by heritage half African-American, half Caucasian. The early records noted that he was verbally precocious and mechanically adept, and he had challenged adults immediately, even in his kindergarten year. His teachers, confused by his ability to express advanced ideas and concepts articulately, mistook his difficulties with short-term memory as a negative attitude when he would reply to questions with a shrug and say, "I don't know."

Although he could take apart and put back together any electronic device, he could not do the same with words. By grade 3, he was on a modified educational program. Dressed as a rapper with a hood pulled low over his head, he covered his challenges with a fast retort, verbal inflections down pat. And yet, his grade 4 teacher had noted that he was deeply sensitive, that he would offer insightful and empathetic responses to stories in which a child struggled with discrimination, loss, or other emotional stress. No formal testing had been done; however, T. had attended many small-group intervention programs, all with little success.

Behavioural goals around anger management began to appear in his IEP, and by grade 5, could be summarized by the idea that as long as he didn't hurt anyone, he could choose to go, and do, where and what he wanted. He had spent his time with an educational assistant playing educational games on a computer, shooting hoops in the gym, and drawing cartoons. He had neither participated in, nor received a mark for math in two years.

Cole

ST-V 2

T.'s file reminded me of Cole, another student I had been puzzling over that year. Cole's test results showed him to be in the 92nd percentile of performance IQ and in the 34th percentile for verbal ability. Although he was unable to retell a story in sequence, he could easily state the main idea of the passage and was able to give sophisticated abstract and inferential answers to comprehension questions. He could tell you that the theme of a book was about discrimination, but could not describe the main events.

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Cole struggled with the concept of sequencing — of the beginning, middle, and end of events or of stories. For instance, in one of his stories, he ended each page with "and they lived happily ever after," confusing the end of the page with the end of the story. He could tell you that the character was suffering from depression, but could not use ordinary details to describe the character.

Cole's spatial skills were phenomenal. He could solve every manner of visual puzzle (e.g., Rubik's cube, the 3-D game of pentominoes), but his drawings looked like those of a 3-year-old. He built amazing replicas of buildings and ancient wonders out of scraps, but could not write a factual report. Cole could spout poetry off the top of his head, only shrugging when asked where the ideas came from, but when he wrote a poem down, it was illegible even to him. He knew enormous amounts of trivia, especially about spiders and sorcerers, but he could not remember how to spell basic sight words.

Emotionally, Cole had great difficulty controlling his moods: sometimes, he could be excited and overly silly; at other times, when he was frustrated or upset, he referred to his evil twin, Ole, as "taking him over." Cole said, "Ole lives in a mental institution; you know, that place where crazy people go." When asked whether he felt that he was crazy, he said, "Oh, yes. Crazy just means different from normal." On bad days, he would descend into crying and sometimes escalate into withdrawal and depressive or suicidal statements like "I wish I was dead" or "God is mean. He made school." He would mumble under his breath about hating school, hating "my life," and wishing God never invented him or school. Cole showed high anxiety when presented with social or written tasks. He would often begin crying and pull his shirt over his head, telling familiar adults that he was "just nervous."

Author's Note

The stories of T. and Cole were the reason for beginning my journey into universal design for learning (UDL). Soon, my interactions with diverse students became the impetus behind the development of my Three-Block Model of UDL. As my readers explore the chapters of this book that set out the rationale and criteria for the model, they will encounter more student/teacher vignettes, bearing the pseudonyms of students whose stories illustrate the value of developing compassionate learning communities and incorporating the principles of UDL in their classrooms, schools, and education systems.

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Chapter 1

Diversity in Education

T. and Cole faced severe challenges in literacy skills, but had unusual strengths in areas not emphasized in school curricula. Like many students in our schools today, they had talents that are valued in the real world but, in school, they were made to feel like failures. Their families had been told their children had severe learning disabilities, were not at grade level, and had behaviour problems. Both had tried to fit in, but failed. One had externalized and become a behaviour problem. The other had internalized and become withdrawn. The oldest was 11 years old, the other 8, yet they were already casualties of the system.

When I taught in a Jewish private school, my class was about as homogeneous as it is possible to find: the children all came from one ethnic group, were all Caucasian, all middle-class or above, and they all had English as their first language. Nevertheless, some students learned best when they could see the teacher model a process first, while others had to work out the process for themselves in order to understand. Some students could remember the words to a song, but not to a poem. A few students needed quiet time in order to learn; some had to talk aloud with other students in order to clarify their thinking. The students' background knowledge about any topic introduced also varied—some had travelled there, seen that, had a parent who worked in the field; others hadn't a clue. There were children whose families were in distress, children who weren't getting enough sleep, children who were depressed. No matter where you teach, no matter what age group you teach, diversity will exist in the classroom.

Diversity Defined

It is important that we all recognize that *diversity* does not refer only to children with exceptional needs, nor does it refer only to ethnic, racial, or linguistic diversity. Diversity encompasses all children—their diverse personalities, ethnicities, languages, family structures, and learning styles all contribute to the makeup of a diverse classroom. Even a group of so-called typical learners from Caucasian, middle-class families are diverse in how they learn best.

Diversity is neurological. Diversity is societal. Diversity is human. Teaching to diversity requires that teachers create a learning climate in the classroom and devise activities that allow all children to feel safe, respected, and valued for what they have to contribute. Poet Carl Sandburg, when asked what he thought was the ugliest word in the English language, answered *exclude,* adding "Everyone wants to belong."

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Diversity and Social and Emotional Learning

In recent years, education systems in both Canada and the United States have undergone significant reforms, one of which is the movement toward inclusive education which places children of diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, socioeconomic status, and learning abilities together in regular classrooms. To teach such a range of individual students in one classroom, we must build a compassionate learning community that recognizes the deeper needs of all people, including a sense of safety, a sense of belonging, and the feeling of being part of something meaningful. Such a learning community leads participants to lifelong understanding of who they are, why they are here, and what they have to contribute (Palmer 2007).

Learning cannot be separated from living. The human mind cannot learn when overcome with a sense of anxiety, alienation, and stress (Grover, Ginsburg, and Ialongo 2007). To build a less violent and more compassionate world, we need to nurture a deeper sense of self in our children while expanding their ability to empathize with and value diverse others (Miller 1998/99). Parker Palmer describes a "system of education so fearful of things spiritual that it fails to address the real issues of our lives—dispensing facts at the expense of meaning, information at the expense of wisdom. The price is a school system that alienates and dulls us" (1998/99, 6).

Spotlight

The Collaborative for Academic, Social & Emotional Learning (CASEL) has many valuable resources related to social and emotional learning on their website — http://casel.org/

At the same time, the demand to prepare students to be "knowledge workers in a globalized world" apparently means expanded curricula, technological knowledge and skills, and higher literacy rates than ever before. Teachers struggle to balance the demands on time and energy, both their own and that of their students. To combat alienation and the increasing rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicide (Modrcin-McCarthy and Dalton 1996) and at the same time meet academic and curricular demands, schools must explore instructional frameworks that integrate a spiritual paradigm within academic learning.

By *spiritual*, I do not mean *religious*. Rather, I use it to mean teaching to the heart as well as to the mind, exploring the deeper meanings of what we learn, connecting with the community we learn and live with, and coming to know ourselves. In his book *The Courage to Teach* (2007), Parker Palmer describes such spiritual questions as "Does my life have meaning and purpose?" "Do I have gifts that the world wants and needs?" and contrasts them with such discipline-specific questions as: "Why does a historian care about the dead past?" and "Why does a biologist care about mute nature?" The answers always lie within our relationships to ourselves, our community, and our world. It is within this wide-ranging form of inquiry learning that compassionate classrooms evolve.

Education Defined

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online, *education* is described as deriving from the Latin root *educare* which means *to rear* or *to lead forth*. *To teach*, however, is

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defined as *to cause to know*, *to know how*; *to show how*; *to guide*; *to make to know the consequences of*. It appears that *education* includes more than instruction in academic subjects; and *teaching* includes more than just content delivery. Education must develop the whole child and cultivate all the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary for a person's successful integration into society. Inclusive practices that aim to educate students in the full sense of that word must promote their social, emotional, and physical development in addition to their academic achievement.

In recent years we have witnessed a growing proportion of school-age children demonstrating social-emotional behavioural problems that interfere with their relationships, their academic achievement, and their potential to be contributing members of their community (Greenberg, Domitrovich, and Bumbarger 2000). This and other recent findings indicate that schools are among the most effective socialization institutions in our culture, and among the most influential in guiding the social and emotional learning of elementary school children (Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait, and Hertzman 2011).

Schools provide a unique opportunity for encouraging the development of social competence because many of the students' interpersonal interactions occur in a setting in which adults can intervene and, thus, foster positive growth and development. A growing number of studies suggest that children's social and emotional learning can be fostered by intervention efforts in classrooms and schools (Graczyk et al. 2000; Greenberg et al. 2001). Given the data indicating the rising rate of children at risk (Greenberg et al. 2001), school-based programs and instructional paradigms that develop all children's social and emotional learning must be a priority for educational researchers and teachers.

Social Inclusion and Social Exclusion

Social inclusion or exclusion has become a rising concern around the world. Organizations like Ontario's Laidlaw Foundation advocate for and conduct research on marginalized populations in Canada, in particular recently, on children and youth at risk. Research studies they have conducted note the rising number of Canadian children living in poverty, suffering from hunger, and excluded from opportunities to fully realize their potential.

Spotlight

For more information, visit www.laidlawfdn.org/working-paper-series-social-inclusion

Social inclusion recognizes the need that all people have for belonging, for acceptance, and for opportunities to participate fully and equally in economic, social, cultural, and political institutions. Inclusion also means recognizing and valuing diversity, engendering feelings of belonging that lead to social equality through the participation of diverse populations, including the disadvantaged. In education, at all levels, the terms *inclusion* and *inclusive* are used increasingly to mean that all students have the opportunity to learn and grow in learning communities alongside their peers.

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The United Nations, through the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and Canada, through the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, make *equality* a constitutional right—yet, in practice, schools on Aboriginal reserves are terribly underfunded (Wotherspoon 2002), which makes it difficult to hire qualified teachers, to purchase resources such as computers and multi-levelled books, and to provide specialized services to children with exceptional needs. Despite the policies of inclusiveness in every province and territory, more than half of the children with disabilities spend more than half of their learning time outside of the regular classroom (Canadian Council on Learning 2007).

UN: www.un.org/en/documents/udhr
CDN: http:laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter

Schools have a key role to play in ensuring that all students receive the education that will enable them to become thoughtful, caring, and productive citizens, where they have the opportunity to explore the gifts of diversity and learn to relate with diverse others while reflecting on the gifts they have been given. Inclusive schools offer students the experience and enrichment of learning first-hand about other cultures, races, and languages. It is a powerful experience to see how a student with disabilities perseveres through challenges to overcome them and contribute to the world. In human history, segregation has never been a positive—for anyone. So how do we create truly inclusive schools? According to the Laidlaw Foundation, there are five criteria for successful social inclusion (Wotherspoon 2002).

1. **Valued Recognition:** Conferring recognition and respect on individuals and groups.
2. **Human Development:** Nurturing the talents, skills, capacities, and choices of children and adults to live a life they value and to make a contribution that both they and others find worthwhile.
3. **Involvement and Engagement:** Having the right and the necessary support to make, or be involved in, the decisions affecting oneself, one's family and one's community, and to be engaged in community life.
4. **Proximity:** Sharing physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions, if desired, and to reduce social distances between people.
5. **Material Well-Being:** Having the material resources to allow children and their parents to participate fully in community life.

Let's briefly explore each of these from a teacher's point of view. When we consider the first criterion, we must ask ourselves how we can help students to value themselves as well as others; that entails having roles that are valued—socially and academically. In chapter 3, we discuss the "respecting diversity" (RD) program for ways of addressing the issue of equality in roles.

When we examine the second criterion, human development, in a school setting, we need to recognize that all students are diverse in the ways in which and the rates at which they learn—emotionally, physically, and intellectually.

In my opinion, the third category, involvement and engagement, is the key to identifying the ways in which teachers can support student learning in school

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settings. All students must become involved and engaged in both the social and the academic life of the classroom. Being included in the classroom, but being asked to sit at the back of the room with an educational assistant is not real inclusion, neither is being enrolled in a separate classroom or learning assistance centre and just visiting a regular classroom, or working on a modified program in a regular classroom.

The fourth criterion is proximity. When some students are in a separate room down the hall or in the basement, they cannot learn and grow together—and here we are making the most progress. Many schools have begun to place students with disabilities, students who are learning English, and other marginalized populations in classrooms together, if only physically—however, it's a beginning.

The fifth and final criterion, material resources, is the most difficult one for teachers to resolve because the lack of resources is grounded in issues of poverty and marginalization. Students who come to school having not slept or eaten struggle to learn. Students who are witness to or victims of violence have levels of stress and trauma that affect their brains and their capacity to learn. Students who don't have school supplies or access to books or computers at home are at a disadvantage relative to students who may come from literary and intellectual environments. Such disadvantages affect their literacy, background knowledge, and general cognitive development. Even amid funding cuts, many schools do what they can to address such needs: hot breakfast and lunch programs, head-start and early literacy programs, adult literacy programs, and homework clubs are just a few of the community-based services that schools try to provide.

Teachers can also bridge the gap by relying on the concept of "cultural capital." Cultural capital is what parents hand down to their children—experiences with literature, language, field trips, travel, and intellectual discussion of beliefs and values, languages, and relationships. We can become more inclusive by valuing what our students do bring—their languages, experiences, talents, and cultural richness. More and more children's books are written in a variety of voices, featuring characters who come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. We have both fiction and nonfiction literature that honours a variety of cultures, celebrations, and nations. Many teachers who have a significant proportion of Aboriginal students in their class seek out such literature—all of us could do so and enrich everyone's classroom. The more we share what the diversity in our classroom and society offers us, the more we bring people together.

We can also intervene early, consistently, and intensively with children who lack such cultural capital. Programs for the Early Years should immerse children in language, literacy, and community experiences—we cannot assume that they have ever been to a museum, to the seashore, to a play in a theatre, or even on a trip outside the place where they live. In the Early Years (ages 3, 4, and 5), direct teaching of pre-reading skills, social register, and voice is crucial. And reading many, many books to children while teaching them what a book is—that it holds a story, that the words of the story are in the black squiggly lines that we read going from left to right—can help deprived children catch up to those children who have been read to since they were babies. It is very difficult for a young child, upon

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entering grade one, to be asked questions about a story when the child has never before heard the language and syntax of a story.

In the Middle Years, students still need to learn about voice and social register. We can teach them usage labels such as "school language" and "social language" without devaluing how they communicate with their friends, family, and community. Children need to learn how to switch back and forth, just as they do when they switch from talking to a buddy to talking to their mom or dad. Even in secondary school, students from disadvantaged populations do not have the networks that many other students do to help them find that first job, explore career possibilities, and so on. Schools can play a role in helping the kids who do not have similar connections by providing career fairs, work experience courses, visits, and mentorships with educators in postsecondary settings and professionals in the field.

Social inclusion involves sharing the wealth, which does not mean taking from one group to give to another. I believe all children have the right to feel good about themselves and about what they contribute, to experience a sense of belonging as well as the joy of learning and connecting with others, and to have many doors opened through which they might choose to walk. We are a wealthy country, and there is enough for everyone. It can be done.

Diversity and Academic Complexity

When I speak to teachers, I ask them what the hardest part of their job is. Inevitably they say, "Teaching to the range of students." By that they mean "delivering a complex curriculum to a group of students with diverse academic abilities." The education system used to offer a simple answer—we streamed kids and, gradually, we excluded them. In the early years, kids learned together but as their talents became evident, we quickly placed them into ability groups, sometimes as early as grade one (reading groups, for instance). In later decades, we kept kids in school, but sent them to streamed classes, vocational training, and learning assistance centres, based on our beliefs about intelligence and learning. We modified their programs so that they worked on math when the other kids did, but theirs was a separate math curriculum, usually practice activities on worksheets under the supervision of an educational assistant. This meant that the neediest learners were being taught by the least trained people and involved in the most rote pencil-and-paper styles of learning.

The learners who were advanced in some way were also streamed or excluded, that is, sent to advanced placement and international baccalaureate programs, or gifted classes and other enriched opportunities. Such classes might be intellectually stimulating, but they are also socially isolating and frequently less culturally diverse. As a result, recently, the move toward inclusive education has grown beyond its roots in social justice into an awareness of the need for inclusion at all academic levels.

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Academic Inclusion and Academic Exclusion

Academic inclusion in education is an approach to educating all students together. Under the inclusion model, all students are placed in their home schools, and services are delivered in the classrooms and in the school. The classroom teacher takes primary responsibility for all students enrolled in the class. Inclusive education differs from previous models of integration or mainstreaming, which were concerned principally with disability and the needs of special education students. But *inclusion* is not just about children with special needs; it is concerned with all students accessing their right to the very best education regardless of race, religion, language, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or disability.

Earlier models presumed that students "earned" an education, when they were "ready" to be given the privilege of entering the school and their classroom. We kept them in separate settings, ostensibly to get them ready, which few ever did. In contrast, *inclusion* is based on the assumption that all children have the right to be a part of the life of the classroom—socially and academically, and that schools need to create programs that accommodate and celebrate this diversity. In other words, we fit the program to the kids, not the kids to the program.

Academic *exclusion* refers to denying the opportunity for an education, in the fullest sense of the word, to some individuals or groups of students:

1. the denial of enrolment in neighbourhood schools
2. the lack of exposure to curriculum and instructional activities
3. the absence of interactions with qualified teaching personnel and services
4. the separation from peers during learning activities

For many years, some students were denied enrolment in their neighbourhood school. If a brother or sister could attend that school but the disabled child could not, that was discrimination, pure and simple. Imagine how it felt for them to see their siblings off to the neighbourhood school, while they had to be bussed to another school.

As regards lack of exposure to curriculum content, I worked in a room with eight students who each had one of the autism spectrum disorders (ASD). For their lessons, we did not include Shakespeare, or world events, or chemistry experiments; instead, we spent a lot of time on vocational training, functional math, and basic literacy. One of the students from that class, an adult now, is attending the university in which I teach—in spite of us, not because of us. When he found me and walked into my office 16 years later, he told me the day of my birthday (in that earlier class, he had memorized everybody's birthday), and sat down to chat. Perry, as I will call him, was always capable of far more than we bothered to teach him, but we were too busy managing behaviour and focusing on life skills to see it.

Time and time again as I have worked in inclusive systems, I think back to those kids in special education and wonder "What if?" I hear teachers who work in segregated classrooms say, "Well, my kids are too low for ... that (whatever that is)" and I shudder because I would have said the same thing some years ago,

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but I was wrong and so are they. In that class, we had students who entered the program at age 6; some were nonverbal and some not toilet-trained, so the belief was that they were "low functioning." In contrast, I more recently had a student named Peter with a similar profile in my first school in a "full inclusion" district. Peter had entered kindergarten as nonverbal, not toilet-trained, and rocking and flipping his hands. By the time he was in grade 7, he was the lead in the school play. Was he cured? Of course not, but he could read and write, he had an excellent memory, he loved video games, and he could communicate with his parents and his friends—a demonstration of the power of peer modelling, which has been greatly underestimated in special education.

A downside to inclusive educational programs is that, in the transition, we have sent children into inclusive classrooms without having provided enough professional training for the classroom teachers and resource teachers, but with educational assistants for children with special needs. The lack of training meant that many teachers believed that the EAs knew their assigned child best so they handed over responsibility for their program—to staff who are not trained teachers. We must get better at building capacity in our classroom teachers, and we must make clear their job is to teach all the students in their classroom, and I do mean all. Not only are students with disabilities often being taught by untrained personnel, they are also segregated from interacting with, and learning from, their typical peers—a situation that has serious outcomes, for all involved.

In the early days of the inclusion movement, arguments for it were often made on the basis of social justice, which has led some to believe, unfortunately, that children with special needs are in school just to be socialized and that, as long as they're happy and maybe even have a friend, we've done our job. All children should be happy and have friends, but they can do that at home or in the community. All kids come to school in order to learn. Recent research shows us that many children, previously deemed unable to learn, greatly exceed our expectations when given appropriate educational opportunities and peer models (Crisman 2008). Individuals and groups have often been academically excluded when they were assumed to be, and then deemed to be, incapable of learning at a chosen standard.

Philosophically, most teachers agree that inclusion is the right thing to do. However, saying so does not eliminate the challenges that inclusion poses. How do you teach reading in a classroom where some students are reading complex novels while others still can't decode fluently and still others don't even speak English adequately well? How do you teach math when some students have had after-school tutoring and can compute faster than the classroom desktop, and others don't know what division is? How do you teach about ecosystems when some students have travelled around the world with their biologist parents and others have never seen snow, planted a garden, or been to the seashore? And how do you deliver an increasingly complex and varied curriculum while supporting students' social and emotional well-being? How can we set up our classrooms in such a way that all students learn, play, and grow together—in celebration of their diversity, not in spite of it?

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There is a way, although not to solve all of society's ills. It's not a perfect panacea, but it is do-able, it is efficient, and it won't have you on stress leave by October. One way to educate (in the full sense of the word) diverse children is in one classroom together. It can be done, and this book pulls together, in an organized way, the key pieces of what I have learned and implemented over the past fifteen years on my journey to explore and implement a "universal design for learning" framework that includes all students in compassionate learning communities. I hope it helps you.

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Chapter 2

A Framework for Teaching to Diversity

The concept of universal design comes from the field of architecture. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, architects were exploring the concept of accessibility to accommodate people with physical disabilities. Retrofitting buildings with ramps or elevators was not cost-effective, nor was there the space or time to do it effectively. Because building entrances are an important feature of the design, architects want to provide a specific experience for those entering the building. They design entrances to evoke a particular emotional experience, or to have people learn something upon entry about the purpose of the building—for instance, the grandeur of a hotel lobby or the stark efficiency of a bank. When people in wheelchairs have to enter from a side entrance or the back door, as often happens with retrofitting, they are denied the intended experience.

Architects began to push for buildings to be designed so that all people could enter a structure at the same point, if not in the same way. The term *universal design* was coined by Ronald Mace, an architect who challenged traditional architects to better attend to the needs of all people rather than design for only the able-bodied. As architects began to do so, they discovered that many people benefited from the additional options. In the Vancouver airport, for example, people can enter the building using an elevator, an escalator, a ramp, or stairs. All points of entry converge in the same place.

Although a ramp was originally meant for people with disabilities to use, it also serves parents with strollers, travellers with rollerboard suitcases, and many others who, at times, cannot negotiate a flight of steps. Ramped curbs are another excellent example of access initially designed to allow people in wheelchairs a degree of independence in travelling around the city. But many unintended populations benefited—parents with strollers, kids on skateboards, the elderly. All enjoyed the advantages of the new design, and the experience of those capable of stepping up onto the curb was not diminished. This concept is key to the transfer of universal design to education.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal design is, I believe, the concept that can help make inclusive education work. The question is: "How do we provide accessibility to the learning, the curriculum,

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and the social life of the classroom for diverse learners without taking away from the experience of those who can step up onto the curb?" In other words, how do we diversify our curriculum, instruction, and assessment in such a way that students who have previously not been able to participate can be actively involved—without dumbing down the curriculum? What are the ramps we can use in education?

Ronald Mace along with Molly Story and James Mueller in *A Brief History of Universal Design* (1998) define the concept as "the design of products and environments to be usable to the greatest extent possible by people of all ages and abilities" (Burgstahler 2009, 1) They outline seven principles for the universal design of products and environments:

1. **Equitable use:** The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities. In education, this means the instruction is planned to involve all students.
2. **Flexibility in use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities, background knowledge, and attention span.
3. **Simple and intuitive use:** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current ability to concentrate.
4. **Perceptible information:** The design communicates necessary information effectively, regardless of environmental conditions or the user's sensory abilities. In education, for instance, visual, written, and kinesthetic models of instruction reach a range of students.
5. **Tolerance for error:** The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions. In education, this means both instruction and assessment recognize differences in student comprehension, pace of learning, and need for repetition of the instructions along with the actions.
6. **Low physical effort:** The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue. In education, the instructional design for presenting the curriculum reduces busy work that wastes time and mental energy, and focuses instead on the big ideas.
7. **Size and space for approach and use:** Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use—regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

Educators have adopted these principles to design universally accessible curriculum for diverse students with a wide range of abilities, ethnicities, language skills, and learning styles by using multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement.

However, we also recognize that what works for architecture cannot perfectly fit an educational model. Thus, educators have developed a different set of criteria for evaluating universal design for learning beyond those of universal design in architecture (Burgstahler 2009). In doing so, they have identified eight important factors to consider when planning instruction and activities for students.

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1. **Class climate:** Adopt practices that reflect high values with respect to both diversity and inclusiveness.
2. **Interaction:** Encourage regular and effective interactions among students, and between students and the instructor. Ensure that communication methods are accessible to all participants.
3. **Physical environments and products:** Ensure that facilities, activities, materials, and equipment are physically accessible to and usable by all students, and that all potential student characteristics are addressed in the safety considerations.
4. **Instructional standards:** Maintain high expectations for all learners, and provide supports to help them reach these standards.
5. **Delivery methods:** Use multiple instructional methods that are accessible to all learners.
6. **Information resources and technology:** Ensure that course materials, notes, and other information resources are engaging, flexible, and accessible for all students.
7. **Feedback:** Provide specific feedback on a regular basis.
8. **Assessment:** Assess student progress regularly, using multiple accessible methods and tools, and adjust instruction accordingly.

Dr. Burgstahler at the University of Washington elaborates on these factors in her "Do It" series: www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/instruction.html

Not since John Dewey urged educators in 1916 to teach "the whole child" has there been such a promising call to action, and now through universal design for learning, teachers have the challenge but also the tools to create classrooms that focus on students' social, ethical, and intellectual development (Silver 2005, 163).

Insights through Brain Research

Research has shown that teaching and learning activities have the capacity to change brain function and, indeed, brain structure by producing adaptive responses in social and intellectual functioning (Davidson 2008; Goleman 2006). The brain is like a muscle; when asked to do a particular task or function repeatedly, it gets stronger and lays down wiring to handle that task faster the next time. Imagine the brain as a new-built house: in the early stages (to age 4), only the outer walls have been built. It is like one big room—for any task you ask of it, the whole brain gets involved. As children grow through the elementary years (ages 5 to 12) and into adolescence (the teens), the brain's inner walls begin to rise, separating into rooms for specific functions.

Dr. Davidson's videos on the Edutopia website are fascinating. Watch www.edutopia.org/richard-davidson-sel-brain-video

Thus, there is an area for language processing, another for numerical reasoning, a third for processing musical tones, and so on. The brain, like a contractor or architect, makes decisions about how to use space and function. The more you cook, the larger the kitchen needs to be. The more a child is exposed to a particular stimulus (music, for instance), the more wiring the brain lays down

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to efficiently process and use that stimulus. While the brain can build new rooms and lay new wiring throughout a person's lifespan, it is much harder to do once the walls have been raised. That is why it is easier for a young child to learn a new language than for an adult to accomplish the same task.

It is vital, then, that children be exposed to a wide variety of stimuli when the brain's walls and wiring are being formed so that they have all of these options available to them later in life, and that they learn to live in diverse communities and relate to diverse others through their childhood and adolescence, as they will do as adults. Worldwide, it has become imperative to develop truly inclusive learning communities (Katz, Porath, Bendu, and Epp 2012).

For more information, visit the CAST website at www.cast.org/udl/

The brain has three significant neural networks: recognition networks, strategic networks, and affective networks (Center for Applied Special Technology, CAST 2011).

1. **Recognition networks** are responsible for the acquisition of factual knowledge and information processing, and because we gather information through all of our senses, we have multiple recognition networks. Providing students with multiple means of representing information in visual, auditory, tactile, and multi-sensory formats is crucially important in the development of these networks.
2. **Strategic networks** are developed when we are learning how to learn. Giving students specific instruction in different modes of learning gives them options for ways of representing their understanding of what they have learned, and provides them with strategies for overcoming challenges.
3. **Affective networks** are responsible for motivation, attention, and perseverance. To activate affective networks, students must be empowered to make choices and be provided with opportunities to challenge themselves and discover new ideas.

In short, then, we must teach in a variety of ways, give students choice within their learning, and give them opportunities to show what they know in a variety of ways.

Seven Ramps for Brain-Based Instruction

There are seven significant ramps that facilitate an inclusive classroom, all of which are drawn from brain research. More detailed information, instructions, and resources are given in subsequent chapters, but brief descriptions of these ramps follow:

1. **Technology:** The original application of universal design for learning placed great emphasis on the use of technology to allow access to the learning for students who found traditional text-based learning rather challenging. Students could use computers to assist them in reading and writing tasks, audiobooks, and other forms of technology that allowed them to be included in the daily activities of the classroom. The staff of CAST developed a website and resources dedicated to assistive technology

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and strategies in education, especially for those with disabilities. There is no question that technology can be a powerful tool for allowing multiple means of processing and demonstrating knowledge. However, it is one tool, albeit a powerful one, in a box with many tools.

When the technology is not available within the regular classroom and students have to leave and go to the computer lab or a resource room, it no longer facilitates inclusion. Sending a student to another room to use technology, separated from their peers, is like sending people in wheelchairs to a separate building—it is not creating access, it is segregating. UDL is not about "special education"; it is about "full education." Consequently, I have scattered "spotlights" on the uses of technology throughout this book as I believe they should be scattered throughout the curriculum of all learners and throughout the day—used when appropriate as part of varied methods of teaching and learning.

2. **Gradual release:** Research on best practices for all learners indicates that students learn best when given independence gradually. This concept leads to the "three-part lesson" or "gradual release" of responsibility for learning. Think about how a parent teaches a child to ride a bike. First, the child watches while the parent does it. Second, the parent runs alongside holding onto the bike while the child pedals and steers. Finally, the parent lets go and allows the child to carry on independently. This process can be described as the "I do, and you watch. Then we all do together. Then you do, and I watch." sequence. Too often, teachers forget the vital second stage. They model a sample question and response on the board, then set students to work independently, missing the "we do" phase in which students work together, with teacher facilitation, to familiarize themselves with the process. This is where cooperative learning and other small-group approaches find their place. Within a unit and within a lesson, it is best to begin with some teacher modelling and move to cooperative discovery before asking students to independently apply their learning. There are times for constructive inquiry learning that reverses these two stages. Based on students' needs and goals, support can be provided to some while others work more independently.

In inquiry models, teachers might present a problem or scenario and let their students discover the information, concepts, and skills they need to resolve it. See also chapter 4, pages 72, 78, 85, and 111 for more on inquiry

3. **Flexible groupings:** Activities for different student groupings—whole-group, small-group, partner, and individual projects—provide opportunities to include and support all learners. When we differentiate instruction and place students in learning teams, students who have language challenges, or problems in writing out their ideas, or other types of learning difficulties can still participate in the learning process when they have peer support for using appropriate vocabulary and in recording ideas. They can thus be seen as contributing group members when their strengths are called on—for instance, in building a model or representing a concept visually.

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The classroom peers of students who have more significant behavioural and cognitive challenges can help these students develop such group interaction skills as turn-taking and teamwork based on the strengths of each member of the team (e.g., "I'll do the writing and you draw the pictures."), and appropriate methods of disagreeing.

For students who are developing higher order thinking skills, being exposed to diverse points of view helps them develop critical thinking and analysis skills. In teamwork, they have more opportunities to recognize that their own interpretation may differ from another's, which prompts them to determine whether that other person's viewpoint changes their thinking, or whether they can defend their own opinion if they still hold it. Such exchanges of opinions and ideas help students analyze their own thinking critically. Of course, they also need time alone to reflect on and process their thinking (metacognition), and independently develop conceptual schemata and evaluate ideas.

4. **Integrated curriculum:** Research has revealed that the brain is like a parallel processor in that it operates like the hard drive on a computer (Caine and Caine 1990). When new information is presented, the brain looks for where this new information fits in with what it already knows, or with other new information coming in, and decides where to file it or delete it from memory. Nothing stays in memory if it's not connected to prior knowledge or current life experience, unless attached to novel and clearly critical ideas or emotions. So, if we want students to pay attention and remember what we are teaching, we have to find ways to connect their learning to their lives by activating students' prior knowledge and experience, and imbuing it with a level of emotional interest that engages the student. Similarly, teachers who make connections between subjects help their students see how what they are learning in science is connected to what they are learning in social studies, or how reading skills support them in learning about both content areas. We want students to generalize their developing skills and knowledge across disciplines, so we need an integrated curriculum. The brain is programmed to be alert to relevance: if it's not relevant to students' lives and interests, they're not interested.
5. **Choice, risk-taking, and safety:** The brain has an emotional threshold: too much emotion or too little, and it cannot process. If students are too anxious or too bored, they tune out. To get around such obstacles, give students choice. When they are involved in the decision making, they are likely to choose topics or formats that are within their realm of experience, which gives them some confidence—when interested, they are not overly anxious. To build student choice into your planning, devise a unit assessment that allows them to choose their preferred format for presenting their understanding of the topic. When teaching a particular skill or format (e.g., essay writing), give students choice in the topic.

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The social and emotional climate of a classroom is a key factor affecting brain development in children. Multiple areas of the frontal and prefrontal lobes of the brain are involved both in processing social and emotional information and in decision making. Because these same areas are also involved in the development of critical and analytical thinking, children's academic learning is affected when they are overwhelmed, according to Brian Dwyer (2002). He points out that training in the related social and emotional learning (SEL) skills has been shown to regulate brain response, such as reducing the reactive response of the amygdala and lowering the release of cortisol, a stress hormone that limits our ability to process, pay attention, and remember. Students who are trained in SEL can recover more quickly neurologically from a negative stimulus such as an incident of bullying or test anxiety, which allows them to regulate their thinking, to problem solve, and to respond more appropriately (Davidson 2008).

Focusing only on academic instruction to help students improve performance is therefore unlikely to lead to success (Adelman and Taylor 1984; Noddings 1995). Addressing students' social and emotional development should not be an add-on to the curriculum but rather an integral and necessary process for helping all students succeed.

6. **Authentic assessment:** The purpose of assessment is to determine the level of student mastery of a given concept or skill—either to guide further instruction as in assessment *for* learning, or to guide evaluation as in assessment *of* learning. When we want to know what level of mastery a student has achieved, it is best to assess a child through their strengths. For instance, if I want to know what a student has learned in a study unit on Ancient Egypt, it doesn't matter whether they demonstrate their learning through a written report, an oral presentation, or a role-play. I am not assessing their writing skills; I am assessing their knowledge. If I assess achievement only through a written test, I am biasing the assessment toward verbal-linguistic learners; a student who may have in-depth knowledge of ancient Egypt but has difficulty with written output will be penalized. The use of rubrics that allow for multimodal assessment is key when teaching diverse learners.
7. **Differentiated instruction:** As I began my master's program in special education, I came upon the theory of multiple intelligences. Psychologist Howard Gardner at Harvard, in his now well-known book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983), detailed the multiple ways in which the brain processes information, solves problems, and creates products. Although I had been focused on educational pedagogies that facilitated the inclusion of students with exceptional needs in regular classrooms, his concept fit with my own beliefs.

Spotlight

Gardner's Project Zero research group continues to conduct research and training for professionals in mental health, education, and medicine. For more information, visit www.pz.harvard.edu/

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The phrase "multiple intelligences (MI)" recognizes the different ways in which the human brain processes information. Gardner's proposition of multiple intelligences explores the types of information processed by the brain, and the ways in which people acquire knowledge, solve problems, and represent their knowledge and understandings. Gardner, who worked with patients who had had brain injuries, wanted to determine their processing pathways, and map them within the brain. He identified the following eight different intelligences, that is, eight different ways in which the brain processes a specific type of information and uses it to solve problems and demonstrate understandings.

Multiple Intelligences

Verbal-Linguistic

Verbal-linguistic intelligence is the capacity to develop verbal skills and sensitivity to the sounds, meanings, and rhythms of words. People with this capacity demonstrate strength in the language arts—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In traditional classrooms, students who demonstrate verbal-linguistic abilities have always been successful because traditional teaching has used methods and materials focused on these abilities.

Visual-Spatial

Visual-spatial intelligence is the ability to visualize in detail, the capacity to think in images and pictures, accurately and abstractly. People who demonstrate visual-spatial intelligence learn best visually and by organizing things spatially. They like to see what they are asked to deal with in order to understand. They enjoy charts, graphs, maps, tables, illustrations, art, puzzles, and costumes—anything eye-catching.

Logical-Mathematical

Logical-mathematical intelligence is the ability to think conceptually and abstractly, and the capacity to discern logical or numerical patterns. People who display an aptitude for numbers, reasoning, and problem solving are deemed to have logical-mathematical intelligence. In traditional classrooms, children with this ability typically do well where teaching is logically sequenced and students are asked to conform to very convergent, repetitive types of tasks such as math drills or spelling tests.

Bodily-Kinesthetic

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is the ability to control one's body movements and to handle objects skillfully. Bodily-kinesthetic students experience learning best through activity: games, movement, hands-on tasks, and building.

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Musical-Rhythmic

Musical-rhythmic intelligence is applied to the ability to produce and appreciate rhythm, pitch, and timbre. Many people learn well through songs, patterns, rhythms, instruments, and musical expression. People who can remember the words to a song better than a poem know what this kind of learning is like.

Interpersonal

Interpersonal intelligence is the capacity to detect and respond appropriately to the moods, motivations, and desires of others. Learners with this capacity are noticeably people-oriented and outgoing, and they do their learning best cooperatively in groups or with a partner.

Intrapersonal

Intrapersonal intelligence is the capacity to be self-aware and in tune with inner feelings, values, beliefs, and thinking processes. People with highly developed intrapersonal intelligence are reflective, metacognitive learners who are especially in touch with their own feelings, values, and ideas. They may tend to be more reserved, but they are actually quite intuitive about what they learn and how it relates to them.

Naturalistic

Naturalistic intelligence is the ability to recognize and categorize plants, animals, and other objects in nature. Naturalists love the outdoors, animals, and field trips. They notice details such as characteristics and behaviours in the natural world. More than this, though, these students' detailed minds love to pick up on subtle differences in meanings across the curriculum.

The following ninth intelligence has been proposed.

Existential

Existential intelligence describes the sensitivity and capacity of a person to probe the deep questions about human existence, such as how we got here, why we die, and the meaning of life. These people ask "Why are we here?" and "What is our role in the world?" They want to know why what they are studying is important in the bigger picture, and what the philosophy is behind ideas and expectations.

MI Framework for Differentiating Instruction

Cultures differ in the value they assign to these different areas of intelligence. For instance, whether a hunter's kinesthetic prowess or an author's linguistic prowess is held in higher esteem is a cultural value, not a neurological one. Both involve the brain's ability to process information, coordinate it with the environment, and produce an outcome or product of use to the individual. Both can be creative and unusually well-developed—or damaged by brain injury.

A teacher who uses an instructional framework that respects multiple intelligences and accommodates multimodal learning and assessment will stimulate

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all the brain's major areas and methods of processing, allowing students more career options as they grow up. To someday become an architect, a child needs visual stimulation, the opportunity to work with 2-D and 3-D images and models, the experience of rotating images in their mind, instruction to pay attention to visual detail, and the understanding that emotions, information, and function can all be expressed visually. Such a child might be successful in a text-based learning program, but might not develop all his or her potential abilities, thus missing options that might have opened up if the child had learned about the concept of visual-spatial intelligence. Not only are struggling learners able to benefit from differentiated instruction, but the students who are successful in the current, verbal-linguistic style of teaching and learning also expand their thinking and skill sets.

Differentiating instruction, whether through differentiated content, process, or product, allows diverse learners to work through their strengths, develop skills in areas of challenge, and learn at their unique developmental pace. Gardner's proponents argued that all intelligences were of equal value for, after all, what society could survive with only verbal-linguistic prowess?

Education systems have traditionally placed greater emphasis on verbal-linguistic intelligence and logical-mathematical abilities over all other forms. Both T. and Cole, the students I described in the Introduction, had become victims of this imbalance in their experience of education. I determined to change that, and I couldn't do that in someone else's classroom. I wanted to see if I could shift the classroom balance by valuing and emphasizing all of the intelligences. So I left my position as a resource teacher and went back into the classroom. Thus began my journey to UDL.

Bringing It All Together

Twenty-five years of research describes what works in inclusive practice. So why has it not been fully implemented? The answer seems to be the narrow focus often taken by government ministries, school districts, researchers, and administrators who have all tried to choose one ramp to focus on in an effort to not overwhelm teachers. Key strategies such as "differentiating instruction" "understanding by design" and "assessment for learning" are mentioned in policy and practice internationally. Many teachers have discovered, however, that application of one piece of inclusive practice rarely has the desired impact. It is like performing surgery without the anaesthetic—painful.

Teachers seeking the big picture end up at professional development workshops that explore only one piece of the puzzle, so they don't see how all the pieces fit together. It can seem overwhelming to consider implementing all of these pieces at once—for instance, understanding by design, differentiating instruction, inquiry, assessment for learning, and so on. But it is possible to provide a comprehensive framework for K to 12 in a practical, research-grounded, efficient manner.

In proposing a three-block model for UDL, I have tried to synthesize decades of research on inclusive educational practice. I did not invent the pieces of this

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framework, with the exception of the Respecting Diversity program described in chapter 3. As a classroom teacher, I attended professional development workshops on the many strategies designed to support diverse learners: differentiating instruction, inquiry, assessment for learning, literature circles, performance assessment, student self-assessment, democratic classrooms, class meetings, positive behaviour support—all of which had their resident gurus and inspired me to believe they would lead to positive change, but I always left wondering: How do they all fit together? How does one teacher do them all?

As I proceeded into my PhD, my questions expanded to: How do I make inclusion work? What are the foundational best practices of a truly inclusive learning community? How does one create such a community? In this book, I try to synthesize the research to provide the answers to these questions. I describe a three-block model of universal design and suggest a step-by-step approach to implementing it. This framework includes:

1. building compassionate learning communities, that is, ensuring social and emotional learning influences the climate of school and classroom;
2. inclusive instructional practice; and
3. systems and structures that support inclusive learning communities.

My Three-Block Model meets all the criteria set out by Burgstahler (2009) as well as those found to be effective in the literature on inclusive learning.

Block One: Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning involves developing schools that are compassionate learning communities in which all students feel safe and valued, and which give them a sense of belonging; such learning communities are socially inclusive classrooms. I created the Respecting Diversity program for the beginning of the school year to establish an inclusive classroom climate. The program falls within the guidelines of a universal design for learning framework in that the program not only promotes social and emotional learning but also promotes respect for diversity by providing opportunities for students to understand their learning profiles and by supporting multiple modes of presenting curriculum.

Block Two: Inclusive Instructional Practice

The second block of the Three-Block Model is the "inclusive instructional practice" section in which physical environments are designed so that all students have access to all the activities presented in the classroom. We use an assortment of differentiated instructional methods to address multiple intelligences and different learning modalities. We develop course materials to address the needs of all students in the classroom. Teachers devise assessment rubrics that reflect multiple developmental levels of understanding, and that can be used to assess multimodal expressions of understandings. Teachers provide regular feedback and assess individual learning progress as and when needed. Students benefit from this

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feedback because knowing what is expected of them means that everyone has the opportunity to work to their academic potential. We embed accommodations in the program so that learning supports are always available for students without their being singled out negatively. Our goal is to create academically inclusive classrooms.

Block Three: Systems and Structures

We have to make significant changes in some of the policies and practices in our current school systems. Creating inclusive learning communities requires changes to educational policy, budgeting, staffing, training, and interactions with communities—indeed, a major reworking of the whole system. Across the country, the process has begun and is being implemented to varying degrees of success. Inclusive policies already exist in every province and territory across Canada. School boards and divisions as well as individual schools and staff members are aware of the expectations, and have the goal of working toward it. However, such support services as teacher training, staffing practices, and reallocations of budgets have not yet been comprehensively revamped.

In chapter 3, I focus on Block One, Social and Emotional Learning, which includes building compassionate learning communities. The next chapters focus on Block Two, Inclusive Instructional Practice, that is, first planning and adapting the curriculum (Chapter 4), and then the practice of teaching, assessing, and reporting (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 is focused on Block Three, Systems and Structures.

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Figure 2.1 Universal Design for Learning: The Three-Block Model

BLOCK THREE CHAPTER 6

Systems and Structures

- Inclusive policy — no "except"
- Hiring administrators with expertise and vision; learning community
- Distributed leadership
- Professional development (PLCs)
- Staffing to support collaborative practice:
  - collaborative decision making
  - team planning time; scheduling in cohorts and teams
  - resource allocations (e.g., of EAs) to classrooms and cohorts, not individuals
  - co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessing
  - consistent, authentic assessment across classes and with co-developed rubrics
- Budgeting
  - change from segregated practices and allocations of funding resources
  - assistive technology
  - multi-levelled resources

BLOCK TWO CHAPTERS 4 AND 5

Inclusive Instructional Practice

- Integrated curriculum
- Student choice
- Flexible groupings and cooperative learning
- Differentiated instruction
- Differentiated assessment
- Assessment for learning; class profiles; strategic teaching
- Technology
- Discipline-based inquiry
- Metacognition, assessment as learning
- Understanding by design; essential understandings
- Social and academic inclusion of students with exceptionalities

BLOCK ONE CHAPTER 3

Social and Emotional Learning: Developing Compassionate Learning Communities

- Respecting Diversity (RD) Program
- Developing self-concept
  - awareness of, and pride in, strengths and challenges
  - sense of belonging
  - goal-setting and -planning; building a vision for the future; self-efficacy; hope
  - leadership skills; opportunities to lead
- Valuing diversity
  - awareness of the strengths and challenges of others
  - valuing of diverse contributions to community
  - sense of collective responsibility for well-being, achievement of all
  - empathy, perspective-taking, compassion
- Democratic classroom management
  - collective problem solving; recognition of rights and responsibilities
  - promotion of independent learning; student choice and empowerment; leadership
  - increase in student engagement and ownership

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Chapter 3

Creating a Community—Block One: Social and Emotional Learning

Ideally, all children would learn to be compassionate, kind, and responsible citizens of their communities, and the schools would have a role to play in this process. However, debate continues over the extent to which schools can, or should, devote time to social and emotional learning (SEL) while their primary responsibility is for academic learning. What is not recognized in this debate is the link between social and emotional development and academic success. As research shows, strengthening students' sense of self in their school community actually increases their motivation to learn and their aspirations for greater knowledge and academic achievement (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, and Walberg 2004).

Students' social and emotional learning improves their attitude, their behaviour, and their performance in school, including their performance on standardized tests (Malecki and Elliott 2002; Porath 2003). If students are stressed out, unhappy, and thinking about what's going to happen at recess, they're not learning. If they think they are going to be made fun of, they won't ask the questions in class that show they do not understand.

Students' sense of belonging also impacts their attendance, and they cannot learn if they're not in class. Teachers cannot fix all the issues that their students face or that their neighbourhoods face. However, we can create a safe haven. Schools should be the place where students feel safe and cared for, valued and respected. When they feel that way, students will come to school because it's a better place to be than hanging out on the street corner or, sometimes, at their home.

Link between Emotion and Academic Achievement

Stress causes the release of a hormone called cortisol. Cortisol helps us function in times of crisis, such as when a car sideswipes ours and we have to brake suddenly to avoid an accident. That shaky feeling we have afterwards is the effect of cortisol activated in our bloodstream in face of a crisis. When stress becomes chronic, cortisol remains in the bloodstream affecting our ability to concentrate, to remember, and to feel joy or connection. We become irritable, unfocused, and even obese—yes, cortisol has been directly linked to abdominal fat (Moyer, Rodin, Grilo, Cummings, Larson, Rebuffé-Scrive 1994).

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all have to do with a child's readiness to begin to learn, or live, a teaching as well. Graduation ceremonies persist in our schools, even for kindergarten. When we make our classrooms places of spirit and ceremony, transformation happens in our learners. Learning transcends memorization and application practice, and becomes growth worthy of celebration and relationship.

As students in my classes came to see the deeper meanings of concepts and connected them to their own lives and world events, they began to react emotionally, and passionately. They developed fundraisers for a variety of causes, and ceremonially presented a cheque to representatives of these charities or organizations. When Cory began to read, one of the other students insisted that his mother let him use his allowance to buy a bookstore gift card for Cory. We celebrated students meeting their goals, discovering new truths about themselves, and community achievements. When I have used these teachings across boundaries of faith, nationality, culture and lifestyle, the teachings have helped me bring people of diversity to recognize that there is a different movement of energy when focused on similarity, not on difference.

The Three-Block Model of UDL provides us with a bridge to effective Aboriginal education and social and academic inclusion. We can connect our themes to key teachings of the local community, invite Elders in to teach related perspectives and beliefs, allow students to operate from strengths, and take a mentoring role in their learning. By focusing first on the building of community, the valuing of our youth, and the internal characteristics we want to nurture in our children, we embody the Aboriginal values expressed in the Seven Teachings.

Myra once quoted an Elder she knew who said, "We all want the same things for our children." I think it would be a great experience for all our students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, to see the depth of Aboriginal spirit and culture, from which we all can learn something.

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Appendix

Multiple Intelligences Surveys

The following pages contain blackline masters for a 4-part survey originally developed by Walter McKenzie, a teacher intrigued by Howard Gardner's outline of "multiple intelligences," who posted the survey on his website <www.surfaquarium.com> for other educators to use or adapt—and I am one educator who has adapted it (see chapter 2, beginning on page 19, and chapter 3, beginning on page 31) for use in my Respecting Diversity Program.

I made the adaptations in order to provide questions in Part 1 at three different levels (Early Years, Middle Years, and Adolescents) for students to describe their current learning profile. Students' responses to the statements in Part 1, which are grouped in Garner's nine categories of intelligences, guide them in self-awareness and provide an opportunity for students to gain a deeper understanding of each intelligence as they mark their likes and interests.

The follow-up activities in Parts 2, 3, and 4—which are the same for all three levels—guide students in summarizing and graphing the results of their work on Part 1.

To summarize: each of the three levels of Part 1 has 3 pages, but each student at all levels will also need a copy of the page containing Parts 2 and 3 and the page containing Part 4. The last page provides an example of how to prepare the bar graph in Part 4, and teachers might just provide a few copies as a model to groups of students.

Early Years Survey: Multiple Intelligences, Part 1
Middle Years Survey: Multiple Intelligences, Part 1
Adolescent and Adult Survey: Multiple Intelligences, Part 1
Part 2 and Part 3 (same for all 3 levels)
Part 4 (blank bar graph) (same for all 3 levels)
Part 4 Example (same for all 3 levels)