Seen, Heard, and Valued

To my children, Spencer and Maisie, for lending your personal stories and thoughts on inclusive practices as contributions to this work. The lessons learned from you have taught and inspired me more than has any academic pursuit.

Seen, Heard, and Valued

Universal Design for Learning and Beyond

Lee Ann Jung

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Contents

Foreword

Inclusion and belonging are topics near to my heart. In fact, the first book I ever wrote was for the PEAK parent information center and it focused on inclusive practices for students with disabilities. The field of inclusive schooling practices has come a long way since then and I'm pleased to see universal design for learning taking center stage. Early on, advocates for inclusive schooling practices focused on creating accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities such that they could access the regular classroom. Today, we realize that classrooms must change to ensure that all students are successful.

I very much appreciate the central message of this book, namely "what's necessary for some is good for all." That motto is more than a platitude; it serves as the guiding philosophy of the book. The examples throughout the book allow educators to create changes such that a wide range of students benefit and the educational enterprise is improved.

There are a few things that make this book unique. First, Lee Ann mobilizes the Visible Learning database, providing effect sizes and information about the various influences that are used to provide evidence for each of the recommendations. In doing so, the suggestions are grounded in research and are harder to dismiss by individuals who are stuck in an outdated mental model of schooling.

Second, Lee Ann provides concrete examples of how to implement universal design for learning by exploring:

1. how we ***engage*** our students and sustain their interest and persistence,
2. how we ***represent*** our instruction in ways that are accessible, helps us connect with students and improves their understanding, and
3. how we give options to students for their ***expression*** of learning.

In doing so, Lee Ann uses a commonly known framework but breathes new life into it. The examples and activities help readers re-think the support they provide to all students and simultaneously ensure that the students who challenge us most are not neglected or forgotten. In fact, this is one of the great aspects of this book. Equitable and inclusive schooling requires that we

embrace the variation that exists in our schools and build systems of support for all students to learn.

Third, Lee Ann tackles the assessment and grading question that has plagued inclusive schooling practices for decades. When I first began to support students with significant disabilities in regular high school classrooms in 1992, we were not sure what to put in the gradebook. Some educators said that it wasn't "fair" for the student to get a letter grade without some sort of mark to indicate that there were modifications provided to the curriculum. In fact, some argued that students who received a modified curriculum should not earn a high school diploma. And a few even suggested that they should not participate in graduation ceremonies because they did not demonstrate the same levels of success as other students. Having said that, none of them were arguing against students with disabilities being educated in regular classrooms, as was the case in many schools at the time. We just had a roadblock with grading. But that issue is solved in this book as Lee Ann provides options for students to demonstrate their understanding and offers suggestions for determining mastery of students' learning.

In short, this is a useful resource and one that allows us all to consider the systems of support we create. As the late Dr. Maya Angelou suggested, do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better! The time is now; we do know better.

—Douglas Fisher

About the Author

Lee Ann Jung, PhD, is founder of Lead Inclusion, Clinical Professor at San Diego State University, and a consultant to schools worldwide. A former special education teacher and administrator, Lee Ann now spends her time in schools, working shoulder-to-shoulder with teams in their efforts to improve systems and practice. She has consulted with schools in more than 30 countries and throughout the United States in the areas of universal design for learning, inclusion, intervention, and mastery assessment and grading. Lee Ann is the author of 7 books to date, numerous journal articles, and book chapters on inclusion, universal design, and assessment. She serves on the advisory board for Mastery Transcript Consortium, as section editor of *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Education*, and on the editorial board member for several professional journals. In her community, Lee Ann is a board member for Life Adventure Center, a local nonprofit with a mission of healing for those who have experienced trauma.

Contact Lee Ann at www.leadinclusion.org and follow her on Twitter at @leeannjung.

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Introduction

To meet the needs of all *students, we have to meet the needs of* each *student.*

—Johnny Collett

WHY DO WE SUCCEED?

Whether you're a classroom teacher, an administrator, or a specialist, like a counselor, ELL teacher, or special education teacher, as an educator, you've chosen to devote your career to serve your world by educating young people. As a dedicated, service-oriented person, you look for ways to continually reflect and improve upon your practice and achieve higher outcomes with all of your students. And right now, you are carving out a bit of your own time to read about and reflect on ways to bring equity in outcomes to your classroom and school. In all likelihood, you aren't paid the salary you deserve, and your students probably don't thank you for your service, but by all other measures you are a successful, independent adult and vitally important to your community. Congratulations, and thank you for what you do! But how did you get here? Why did you succeed, while some of your peers struggle as adults? What was true of your circumstances and your efforts that caused you to arrive where you are today?

I remember as a child hearing stories of a community business owner bragging that he'd pulled himself out of poverty through tireless hard work. His family lived in abject poverty, but as a 19-year-old, without a high school education, he walked confidently into a bank, took out a loan, and started his own business—one that thrived in the small town until his retirement. In some ways, it's fortunate that this man had the confidence to believe he could succeed because without such a belief in his abilities, he would've never walked into the bank.

Living in poverty, this business owner wouldn't have described himself as being privileged. But he was white and male, and the year was 1959 in which the young man took out the small business loan in the Deep South. At that time, it's without a doubt that no Black teen would've been given such consideration. I'm pretty sure a Black teen wouldn't even have been welcomed inside the bank. Was it his effort or his privilege that gave him success? Should his hard work be discounted or minimized? Absolutely not.

But should he feel so arrogant as to believe it was solely his own efforts that created success, devoid of fortune, albeit seemingly imperceptible to him? Also, no. His effort contributed and was necessary, but without the context of privilege in which this effort was situated, no amount of hard work could have gotten him there.

The concepts of "internal locus of control" and "self-efficacy" are essential to understand as we think about successful outcomes. Internal locus of control is a person's belief that they have a great deal of control within themselves over what happens to them (Rotter, 1966). Self-efficacy is a person's belief that they have what it takes to make positive outcomes in their lives happen (Bandura, 1994). This business owner's internal locus of control and strong self-efficacy were instrumental in his success, but also played a role in his denying the privilege that gave him the *opportunity* to walk into the bank. Instead, he and others in the community harbored resentment toward others for lacking the ability to "pull themselves up by the bootstraps," blind to the lack of privilege afforded to many others living in poverty. Without the privilege of being a white male, he may not have gained the qualities of internal locus of control and self-efficacy that were active ingredients in his effort. In other words, his privilege not only opened doors for him but is likely an enormous contributor to why he even had the gumption to *try*.

As educators, we serve a student population who experiences the full gamut of support, risk, privilege, protection, trauma, and resilience. We wouldn't be in the field of education if we didn't believe we could meaningfully and significantly mediate how these experiences impact our students. Our entire purpose, almost universally, for choosing education as a career path is to "make a difference." To realize this purpose, we embrace our jobs as vastly broader than only teachers of content, and instead identify as *mentors* who guide young humans to successful adulthood. And each one of us, from preschool teacher to higher education professor, plays a role in the chain of nurturing and adding to positive and protective factors students experience. But, frankly, "making a difference" is not measured in the performance of students who were going to succeed anyway. The most substantial difference is measured in our minority subpopulations of students, including our BIPOC students, LGBTQIA+ students, those who are new to the language of instruction, students with learning differences, those experiencing poverty, students who need behavioral support, those with disabilities, students who have had poor previous instruction, and those who have endured trauma. And we make a difference when we see, name, and diligently work to minimize marginalization in our school community for all subpopulations.

In your school, are each of these subgroups of students engaging, trying, and achieving at the same level as the full student population? Do they all have a sense of inclusion and belonging in the school community? Do they have an internal locus of control and strong self-efficacy? If not, there is an opportunity and an obligation to understand where the inequities are and to devote resources as a school to grow the equity and inclusion therein.

Throughout the book, we use dials like the one here to connect to Hattie's research (Hattie, 2016) on the influences in education on students' outcomes, focusing on those influences that have the potential to accelerate learning, or those with an effect size (Cohen's *d*) above .40. Cohen's *d* is expressed in terms that are similar to a standard deviation. So, the influence of self-efficacy has an effect size of .65, then that influence makes 65% of a standard deviation difference in the child's learning. This difference is one that matters!

Without an actionable course, calls for a whole-child approach, equity, and inclusion have only the weight of platitudes. The purpose of this book is to take these broad and lofty terms and outline specific strategies for educators to intentionally bring equity in learning outcomes to their classrooms, schools, and systems. We are going to dig into the research on the reasons that students engage and persist and succeed and pair this research with universal practices for every classroom to connect with and reach each student and meet their needs. Through case stories and examples, you will reflect deeply on classroom and school practices and how to engage and support each student along a path to lifelong learning. We will follow Ms. Talbert as she works to increase the equity in her classroom.

REFLECTION

When you think back to your childhood, you can certainly identify contributing factors that led you to do well in school, to graduate, and go on to attend college. Were there certain people and events or conditions that affected your success? What were the challenges that got in your way at times? When you encountered tough times in your

life, what, or who, helped you get through that and to persist toward your goal? What are your own, innate and learned qualities that shaped you into a successful adult? Is your success something that you created mostly through hard work, or do you see chance and other outside influences as a big part of your achievement? How might your success have changed if your demographics were different?

CHAPTER ONE

Planning for Variability

Variability Is a Natural Part of the Human Condition

Learning Intentions	Success Criteria
I am learning about the false dichotomies that are present around us and how that has impacted how students are served.	I can give examples of dichotomies we use in speaking about characteristics of people and explain why these are false dichotomies.
I am learning about student variability and its effects on how we facilitate academic and social-emotional instruction and support.	I can describe the many types of student variability and how these affect the way I teach or provide support.
I am learning about what the research says about how we can improve our instruction to meet the needs of more learners.	I can use evidence from research to support the need for universal design for learning (UDL).
I am learning about the role of UDL in the first tier of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS).	I can articulate why in the use of universal design for learning, intervention isn't the place to start.

Every classroom is filled with amazing individuals who vary wildly and interestingly in who they are as people. Their many experiences and genetics make them who they are—each one unique and wonderful. We have students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds, various cultural backgrounds, and differing family and social experiences. There is neurodiversity, variability in gender identity, sexual orientation, and varying degrees of family support for students who are LGBTQIA+. Students in our classrooms have experienced varying degrees of trauma, some for whom you will never even know have experienced this. Students vary in their preferences, strengths, skill levels, and interests in the academic content. Some students are strong with math, others are talented artists, some light up when it is time for science, and others love nothing more than to get lost in the world a fictional work. For every student who loves science, there is another who is afraid of it, and another who finds it uninteresting. Some students read many grade levels ahead, and some have dyslexia. Some students speak multiple languages but struggle in the language of instruction that is new to them. Students also vary in their social-emotional skills, development, and learning. Classrooms include students who persist for long periods of time, as well as students who give up if they believe learning is too hard. There are students who are confident in their ability to learn and those who are discouraged and struggle to believe they can succeed. There are students who

move easily between activities, classrooms, and content areas, and others who have great difficulty with these transitions. Each of the aforementioned and all other areas of diversity are ever present and ***normal***.

This diversity of strengths and interests in our classrooms and what makes students who they are is an asset! There is power in our diversity. This diversity presents the opportunity for students to learn from and with one another, to gain an understanding of the interdependence within society, and to see and celebrate one another's unique qualities. This diversity is in no way a limitation as long as we design our instruction and assessment with this variability in mind. Our planning for variability is a celebration of the collective experiences our group shares because of this diversity. Honoring and celebrating diversity means that we reject models of instruction that are oriented toward the experience of the majority, as these traditional models marginalize every student in our class who doesn't fit that mold. Instead, we plan our instruction so that it's flexible enough to perfectly fit the needs of each student in our class. And this diversity creates the space and imperative for us to grow as teachers, honing our practice to facilitate success and belongingness of *all* our students. It's time we widen our view of "normal" to include the *full range* of our students. *Every student is normal in every way, because variation is normal.*

EVERYTHING IS A SPECTRUM

There was a time in the not-too-distant past when the predominate beliefs of the general public was that most human conditions fit into specific categories, often dichotomies—false dichotomies. Examples of this simplistic and misinformed thinking include gender, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, extraversion, and race as having clearly distinct categories: you were either straight or gay, you were either male or female, you were an introvert or an extravert, and you either had a disability or you didn't. Even race within the sociology textbooks was incorrectly thought of as being distinct categories of white, Black, and Asian. But this is not the way the human condition works! Variation is universal.

Interestingly, the fields of psychology and education view autism spectrum disorders (ASD) as just that: a spectrum with much variability. But really, *all* human conditions are also expressed on a spectrum. Gender, sexual orientation, ability, extraversion, and race, and the like include a continuum with gradations, not simply defined in categories. The way schools have traditionally conceptualized neurodiversity as dichotomous, combined with the strong focus on academic support, often to the exclusion of other types of support, have created enormous gaps in meeting the needs of *each* student. Meeting the needs of *all* students does not mean *most students*; it means *each student*.

Support Driven by Dichotomies and Labels

Until the mid-2000s, the way additional academic support was delivered to students in most schools largely hinged upon labels. If a student met the eligibility criteria to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) because of a learning disability, for example, then that student received interventions and supports to address the learning disability. For students who were struggling to learn to read but did *not* have an IEP, though, no special education services were available. The same was true if a student's IQ score was too high to have an intellectual disability label and an IEP. Labels had clear dichotomous definitions, and a student either qualified completely or didn't qualify at all. But do you know of students who narrowly missed qualifying for an IEP? Do you know students who didn't quite fit the criteria for specific learning disability? Or ASD? Have you ever known a student whose academic performance was affected by depression but did not qualify for an IEP? Of course! We all do.

This distinction between who qualified for services and supports and who didn't was designed in the 1970s as a way to protect students with disabilities and ensure they received the supports they needed to access a free and appropriate public education. These are important rights provided to students, but this often doesn't coincide with needs. Therefore, the labels sometimes have led to exclusion and a parallel system that prevented many students from equitable access and

learning. What was missing was an understanding that qualifying for an IEP, or living in poverty, or being new to the language of instruction is not synonymous with needing support in school. But until the idea of differentiation caught on and became standard best practice, the idea was to teach to the large group, and for students who struggled, there must be a need or problem with the student—not a need or problem with the instruction.

We all know that a student may benefit from academic intervention and not fit within a traditionally marginalized population, and students don't necessarily need academic intervention because they are a member of any demographic group. But for a long time, the system did not have a way to deliver support and intervention to any students except those with IEPs. So, students who did not fit the disability definitions oftentimes couldn't access supports, were tracked into "lower level" courses, or were inappropriately labeled as having a disability.

Historically, the flow of funding simply didn't allow for what now is seen as the common-sense approach: providing intervention to any student who needs it. And students who need support do not automatically need a label. Also, we don't wait to provide intervention until a student is significantly behind grade level. If a student is at risk for reading failure, we don't wait and see how that goes, but rather provide intervention *now*.

Further, academic support is not the only type of support our students need. Many times, a student who seems to need intervention with learning doesn't need academic support at all. For those who are lagging behind academically because of being new to the language of instruction, anxiety, lack of belonging, stress of living in poverty, depression, trauma, and the like, the solution is much more complex than, for example, delivering a reading intervention. Students need to be in an environment that is safe, embraces diversity of all kinds, one that is engaging and accessible, promotes belonging, and celebrates the many ways students can show their skills and understanding—no single way is "right" or "best."

An additional way that the dichotomous thinking and parallel systems have affected students is the settings in which students receive support. It remains true today that students who have IEPs and students who are novices in the language of instruction are frequently given support in a setting that is separate from the classroom to which they belong (National Council on Disability, 2018). Students are given support in resource rooms for students who have IEPs, in separate ELL rooms, and even when "included" in classrooms, it's often the case that students with these needs are seated together and given support by a paraprofessional/classroom assistant who is devoted to that group.

In this noninclusive scenario, students who have needs are segregated, and students without IEPs or an ELL label who need support can slip through the cracks. I work in schools all the time who want to make this change and are looking for next steps. We will delve into this inclusion challenge deeply, with alternative models of delivering support inclusively in Chapter 6 on flexible support.

TWO CORNERSTONE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Don't Use Labels as Passports to Support

During the 1990s, the research on various academic interventions continued to grow, and two important lessons were learned that would shape the trajectory of education quickly. First, more and more researchers validated the idea that delivering intervention by label wasn't the secret to success, but rather delivering support by *need* was really the answer. In other words, grouping all the students who have ASD together to teach social skills didn't make as much sense as grouping all the students who had the need for that particular social skills support. Not all students who have the need for the intervention have ASD, and not all students who have ASD needed that social skills support. Thus, this focus on labels as the passport to support is not effective (not labeling students: $d = .61$).

The same is true for students with language needs, emotional needs, or any other need. In fact, lots of students need extra support in learning to read, and only a small portion of those students have a neurological difference that we call specific learning disability. For many students having difficulty learning to read there is an environmental explanation, such as being new to the language of instruction, social-emotional needs, low literacy exposure, or—we don't like to admit this one—poor previous instruction. The good news is that the academic intervention that works for the student who does have a learning disability also works for almost any student who needs reading intervention. Our focus has also, traditionally, landed squarely on these *academic* needs. But we have all seen the awakening in schools in recent years to see the critical importance of social-emotional development. There is now an intense demand for resources to promote social-emotional development in our students.

Use a Multi-Tiered System of Support

The second important lesson from this line of research was that we can accomplish exponential results if we bring some of our strategies that were once reserved for special education and school counseling into all classrooms using a Multi-Tiered System of Support. Most special educators will tell you that they may or not be experts on any given content area, but rather are experts in pedagogy. Special educators and counselors will tell you that many strategies and skills they use are ones that can benefit all students in the school. And that's what the research continued to show. If we use these strategies with all students, fewer students need special interventions. The use of mnemonics is a good example of this. Using mnemonics is an evidence-based special education strategy that pairs something simple to remember (like an acronym or phrase) with something larger or more difficult to remember. From music, do you remember "Every Good Boy Does Fine"? EGBDF as letters on a

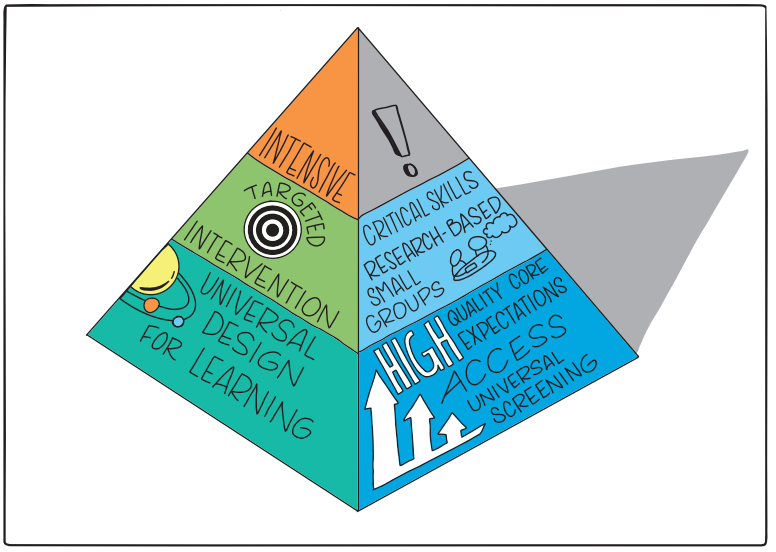
scale are difficult to remember at first, but with the sentence, it's much easier to recall. Well, we don't only use this strategy in special education—it's something lots of teachers use to facilitate memory. Graphic organizers, a strategy probably every elementary and middle-school teacher uses, also have their roots in special education.

This research, primarily out of the early reading research and learning disability research, formed what we now know as Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI²). In 2004, with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004), the compelling research on systems of intervention and support finally made its way into legislation. Soon after, the acronym RTI² began to infiltrate the language in schools across the United States. Books and conferences popped up seemingly weekly to assist schools in quick-start success with this newer way of approaching support. As to be expected, with the variability in implementation and context came variability in success.

The Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework is one that guides decision-making and has a primary goal of *prevention* of poor outcomes (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). The most important component of the MTSS framework is its foundation—the practices we put into place in *every* classroom with *every* student. Using this model of making decisions about how to enhance our classroom instruction, intervene when needed, and increasing the intensity of intervention has an enormous impact on student outcomes (response to intervention: $d = 1.09$). But the focus often shifts to intervention first, rather than investing heavily in the foundation.

Although RTI² has its roots in academic support, researchers and schools began expanding this decision-making model to a broader spectrum of needs. MTSS give us a decision-making model for all types of supports, including social-emotional support. Such a focus in schools expands our priorities beyond academics and acknowledges that mental health, strong social

skills, and emotional well-being are critical to teaching and developing young people who are happy, healthy, belong, and successful in a variety of ways. Remember the role that internal locus of control and self-efficacy that contributed to the business owners' and your success? A concerted effort to develop these qualities in our students changes their lives.



MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

One of the most common requests I get from schools as a consultant is to teach faculty tiers two and three strategies. Schools want to know how to deliver powerful interventions to students who are struggling in the classroom, regardless of why. That's fantastic! But it also isn't the starting place. In the rush to implement the models of intervention that accompany RTI^2, the very foundation of the model is often forgotten—that second part of the research that teaches us how to gain exponential effects by changing what we do in *every* classroom. RTI^2 is more about what we are doing in every classroom than it is about how we take data and intervene. Implementing RTI^2 means creating warm, inclusive, welcoming, environments that deliver the highest quality instruction and respond with intervention when the instruction isn't fully successful with a student.

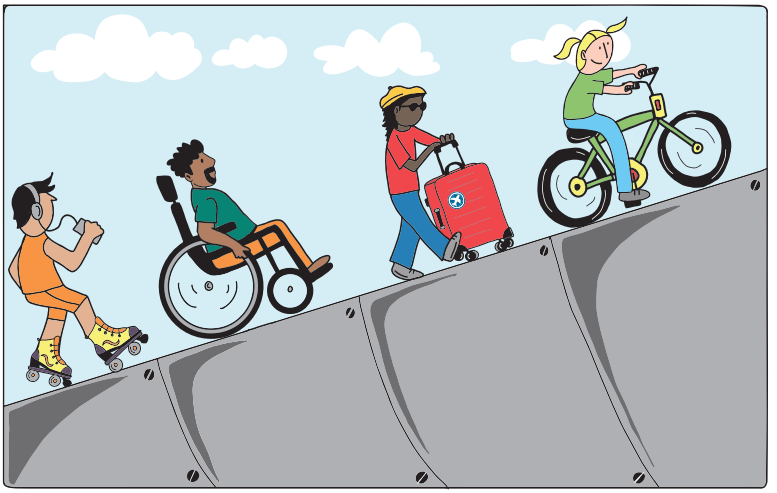
REFLECTION

Think about a group of students you currently teach or know. Which ones have needs that would or do "fall through the cracks" of the older dichotomous thinking about support being only for students who meet the eligibility requirements of having an IEP? Who are the students in your class you worry about in quiet moments of reflection? Which of these have IEPs? Are there any students with any unmet social-emotional needs? Academic needs? Make a list of these students, and complete this prompt.

STUDENT	IF THIS STUDENT COULD ONLY DO _____, IT WOULD CHANGE THEIR LIFE FOREVER.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

Next time you walk around town, take a look at all the ramps around you. They're at the entrances and within buildings, outside between sidewalks and the street, and in some homes. In the United States, this accessibility feature is required by law in public spaces. Without ramps, people who need wheelchairs or other mobility equipment are unable to move about town easily. When I travel to other countries that don't have accessibility laws, I don't see many people who use wheelchairs. We can find the same problem in historic buildings even in countries, like the United States, where accessibility laws are in place. In my own town, I've had conversations with people who use wheelchairs and heard the frustrations over wheelchair accessibility. One story that sticks out in my mind is of a friend who felt the most comfortable with a particular gym and trainer because the trainer figured out how to make excellent modifications to the workout movements. The problem was that the bus didn't go all the way to the gym, the sidewalk was uneven, and there were breaks in the crosswalk ramps. We all want independence, and yet my friend depended on other people to be able to access his accessible gym.



WHAT'S NECESSARY FOR SOME IS GOOD FOR ALL.

Crosswalk ramps are a necessity for people who use wheelchairs to cross the street. But people who use wheelchairs are not the only people who benefit from crosswalk ramps, right? Can you think of a time when you benefited from a crosswalk ramp? Sure you can! Did you think of these: riding a bike, roller skating, pushing a stroller, pulling a suitcase, delivering something with a hand truck. Once I was teaching a class on this, and someone answered the question with, "short dogs benefit." Funny, and true. We *all* use ramps on a regular basis. The lesson here is "what is necessary for a few is helpful to many."

The single most important first step to designing for equity and inclusion is deep, sustained work on the instruction that all students get in every classroom. I'm not talking about the individualized instruction that we give to some students, but the instruction that is universal—the general curriculum offered in our school. Our goal is to design classroom environments and instruction that are so welcoming, kind, responsive, inclusive, accommodating, supportive, and flexible, that no student feels unrepresented or disregarded, and the fewest students possible need special intervention and support. And when students need intervention and support, we want our classrooms to be so effective that intervention is rarely needed long term. "Delivering high-quality core instruction" is a ubiquitous phrase in any MTSS work or initiative, but the "how-to" and investment into what that means for classroom planning has to be fully developed for this most important part of MTSS to be solid.

Universal Design for Learning, or UDL, is a framework conceptualized by the organization, CAST, that guides proactive design of core classroom instruction and learning opportunity in a way that is effective for a broad range of learners (www.cast.org). The principles of the UDL framework challenge us to plan (1) how we ***engage*** our students and sustain their interest and persistence; (2) how we ***represent*** our instruction in ways that are accessible, helps us connect with students, and improves their understanding; and (3) how we give options to students for how they their ***express*** their

learning. Through the three principles of engagement, representation, and expression, we plan for the diversity within our classrooms by removing barriers to access learning. Many of the strategies in this book may cause you to think, "that's just good teaching." This is true! But the conceptual framework brings *intentionality* to our selection and use of strategies for the purpose of welcoming and meeting the needs of students with all types of variability within our classrooms with inclusion and equity. And with this intentional focus on the principles, we can always find specific ways to improve the reach of our instruction.

IS UDL DIFFERENTIATION?

Not all buildings were built with accessibility in mind. Those historic buildings that were built many decades or centuries ago, weren't designed to accommodate people who use wheelchairs. And to renovate a historic building to become accessible is a time-consuming and extraordinarily expensive operation. The same is true for accessibility of streets. The age and economic strength of a city or town are predictors of these features. But building a city or building with these design features from the outset of the planning is second nature at this point, requiring no more creativity or problem-solving than is required for the whole project.

Both UDL and differentiation respond to student variability. But UDL departs from differentiation in two important ways: When accessibility features are designed and for whom they are intended.

UDL is a part of our initial lesson planning as strategies we use for all students, based on *predictable* variability we find in our classrooms year after year. The strategies are designed to be used year after year (Ralabate, 2016).

Differentiation is added after lessons are designed and are intended to meet the needs of individual students in our class at a given time. Similar strategies may be used in the future, but they are individualized and applied for specific students (Tomlinson, 2014).

Differentiating with individual accommodations and modifications remain important components to an equitable classroom. But because instruction works best when we plan for *all* students and are agile to make changes when needed for *each* student, UDL and differentiation work in concert. Just like building design in which planning ahead is easier than renovations, universal design for learning is easier than differentiation. An investment in UDL makes our jobs easier in the long run.

There are many examples of universal design around us, our smartphones being a prime example. Fifteen years ago, you may have had a phone, a camera, a calculator, a video recorder, an audio recorder, a calendar, device for listening to music, a computer to browse online. If you traveled, you may have used GPS, or a map, and maybe books for translating languages. Perhaps you had all 11 of these items. But now, all of these needs are met with one device that most people already have. Because we have a customizable device with many options and functions, fewer people need something special. Sure, professional photographers still need highly technical cameras, and maybe you still prefer a physical calendar, but we would be hard pressed to find many people who own and use all 11 of those specialized items.

Think of UDL as the base design for our instruction—the smartphone with all the usual features and apps. UDL is the foundation for the entire classroom design. Our differentiated instruction is how we enhance that base design as needed—the specific additional apps and customization we add for a specific individual or group. Without UDL, we are left exhausted, trying to continually figure out how to differentiate and deliver support to meet individual needs and maximize strengths. By investing effort in UDL, we minimize special adaptations, because it was designed up front to work for many types of variability. Within a UDL framework, we have student variability in mind as we plan our instruction. In doing so, we embed the most high-leverage practices within every lesson in order to cast a broad net and meet the greatest possible needs. Instead of designing to the average, we "design to the edges" (Rose, 2016).

CASE STORY

Monica Talbert pondered the upcoming unit she was teaching in her senior social studies class. In the past, she'd been focused on the assignment, which was for students to write a paper. As she thought through what was most salient about this assignment, the essence of what was most important that students were able to do, she identified that her primary learning intention was that students learned to use evidence to support a claim. Although there was much more that she was teaching and that students were learning this was the essential skill she wanted every student in the class to have. Ms. Talbert was teaching her students this skill within the context of an advanced social studies course, but she wanted her students use this skill in all subjects and outside of school and across time. Many people require this skill in their careers, and everyone needs it just in life on a daily basis. Ms. Talbert was confident, that this is a worthwhile skill to teach.

As Ms. Talbert thought about the successes and challenges of students' writing their research papers in the past, she recounted many students who had incredible skills at persuasive speech because they truly had a deep understanding, not only of how to support a claim with evidence, but also of how to use evidence effortlessly within informal conversation. Looking back, she could see that these students, some of whom did not perform well on the written paper, had developed skills that far surpassed what most students achieved during the course. For some of the students who performed poorly on the paper, their speaking skills were at a level much higher than their writing skills. This was particularly true for several students who had IEPs she could remember, but was also true for many more. Ms. Talbert remembered Juan, who was in her class 4–5 years ago. English was a new language for Juan, and he had a hard time with the paper. But he was incredibly engaged in the content, had strong opinions, and he was able to adeptly support his opinions with evidence.

Ms. Talbert reflected on the profile of learners in her class this year relative to this skill. She made a list of students and jotted down strengths, interests, preferences, and needs for the students in her class relative to tasks and skills in the upcoming unit.

UNIT: SUPPORT A CLAIM WITH EVIDENCE	
Learning Intentions	**Success Criteria**
☐ I am learning how to research for information to support or refute a claim. ☐ I am learning to determine whether a source is credible.	☐ I can use multiple resources online to identify information relative to a claim. ☐ I can evaluate and determine the relative credibility of a source.

Student	Strengths	Interests and Preferences	Needs
Charlene	☐ Has confidence as a reader ☐ Has skills in using online resources to research ☐ Has a strong personality when speaking	☐ Prefers young-adult fiction ☐ Enjoys writing about personal experience ☐ Does not prefer speaking in front of the whole class	☐ Greater confidence in writing about nonfiction topics ☐ Finding a writing voice for persuasion ☐ Further development in organization and clarity
DeShawn	☐ Is confident with online research ☐ Has a strong vocabulary ☐ Has a developing voice in writing	☐ Prefers fantasy as a genre ☐ Prefers fiction writing about others (not himself)	☐ Developing persistence for engaging in nonfiction social studies work ☐ Further development in discerning the credibility of sources
Germaine	☐ Persists for long periods of time in reading and writing ☐ Has strong organization, vocabulary use, and clarity in writing ☐ Is confident with online research	☐ Enjoys reading about current events ☐ Interested in popular culture and psychology	☐ Engaging in broader social studies content ☐ Further development in discerning the credibility of sources
Jayson	☐ Is social and enjoys interacting with everyone in the class. ☐ Makes choices when given a few options	☐ Enjoys hearing short stories about people	☐ Naming people ☐ Using a pencil grasp when writing
Maciel	☐ Has a quirky humor in one-on-one conversation or with people he knows well	☐ Does not prefer speaking in front of other students ☐ Enjoys reading about current events from around the world ☐ Interested in nature and science topics	☐ Greater confidence in writing ☐ Increased organization and clarity in writing ☐ Stronger voice in writing ☐ Support with reading and writing in English

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Next, Ms. Talbert developed a class profile by summarizing the class strengths, interests/preferences, and needs. The class profile includes each item from the student profile, but listed only once.

CLASS PROFILE SUMMARY		
Strengths	**Interests and Preferences**	**Needs**
☐ Some have confidence in writing, but most do not. ☐ Some have a strong vocabulary. ☐ A few have strong research skills. ☐ Many have confidence in reading. ☐ Some have organization and clarity in their writing. ☐ Some have strong personality or humor in conversation in small groups or with familiar people. ☐ Some are confident speaking in front of others.	☐ There are preferences for both fiction and nonfiction. ☐ There are preferences for science and nature, fantasy, and popular culture and psychology. ☐ Several prefer small group and one-on-one conversations. ☐ Some prefer writing about themselves, others prefer writing about others.	☐ Most need greater confidence in writing. ☐ Many need increased organization and clarity in writing. ☐ A few need support with reading. ☐ A few need support with reading and writing in English. ☐ Many need to develop skills in research. ☐ Some need to further develop their writing.

As she continued to think about her students from years past, Ms. Talbert noticed that although the names change each year, there is always much of the same variability in her students. She thought about types of variability beyond academic variability in all the students she had in all of her classes. There was variability in race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and intellectual ability. There were four students she knew had experienced significant trauma, six who had social anxiety, ten who had IEPs for learning disabilities, and twelve who were newer to English. The strengths, preferences, interests, and needs spanned the spectrum of possibilities. Yes, there was nothing about this profile that was unique to the students she listed or to this academic year. What incredible variability there was!

Ms. Talbert realized that the requirements of the paper for the upcoming unit kept more than a handful of students each year from showing the depth of their understanding and skills. Through this exercise she realized there were certain changes she could no doubt make in her lessons to respond to this variability she could expect year after year.

ACTION

Student variability does not involve dividing students by category or label. Labels are not the key to understanding variability. What matters are individual strengths, preferences, interests, priorities, and needs. To create a class profile, we begin by listing these unique qualities for each student. Because any individual's list of strengths, preferences, interests, priorities, and needs is lengthy, it can be helpful to focus on these relative to upcoming learning. First, select an upcoming unit you are planning and record the learning intentions and success criteria for one lesson. Next, choose ten students to consider and include the strengths, interests, and preferences for each student relative to the upcoming learning.

LESSON:			
Learning Intentions		**Success Criteria**	
Student	**Strengths**	**Interests and Preferences**	**Needs**

Next, develop a class profile for the upcoming unit by summarizing the class strengths, interests/preferences, and needs relative to the upcoming learning intentions and success criteria. List each item from the student profile only once.

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LESSON:	
Learning Intentions	**Success Criteria**

CLASS PROFILE SUMMARY		
Strengths	**Interests and Preferences**	**Needs**

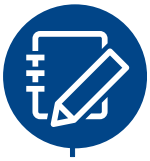
Because we can *assume* learner variability in every class, we can implement equitable and inclusive strategies without cataloging individual students' strengths, preferences, interests, and needs. But creating a class profile now will (1) help you explore the concept of variability and each of the principles of UDL within the context of students you have right now and (2) allow you to connect your universal instruction and individualized differentiation efforts later.

REFLECTION

As you examine the profile of learners for this unit, what do you notice? If you compare this group of learners to other groups you have had in the past, what are the similarities and contrasts? What are themes of learner strengths and needs you see year after year? How do you plan ahead for the patterns of needs you see each year?

SUMMARY

In some ways, it's natural to think in dichotomies and categories in grouping and sorting, even with people. But this way of thinking is overly simplistic and, in our schools, can cause a major disconnect between our practices and the strengths and needs students have. Dichotomies are not the way the human condition works. Thus, our services cannot be delivered dichotomously to "students who have needs" and "those who don't." Every student has needs! We have to look not only at individual students, but *within* individual students and respond to each one's strengths, interests, and needs. As overwhelming as that can feel to any educator, we know this is the goal—to meet the needs of all by meeting the needs of each. UDL, situated within an MTSS framework offers us hope in truly maximizing the equity in our educational practices, and outcomes for students.



SELF-ASSESSMENT

I can give examples of dichotomies we use in speaking about characteristics of people and explain why these are false dichotomies.	1 2 3 4 5
I can describe the many types of student variability and how these affect the way I teach or provide support.	1 2 3 4 5
I can use evidence from research to support the need for universal design for learning.	1 2 3 4 5
I can articulate why in the use of universal design for learning, intervention isn't the place to start.	1 2 3 4 5