Every Child Deserves a Special Education

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Five Mindframes That Ensure All Students Learn

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Bring Lee Ann Jung to your school or district! Learn more at LeadInclusion.org.

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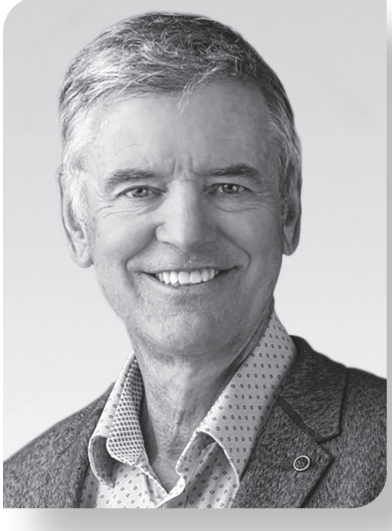


John Hattie, PhD, is an award-winning education researcher and best-selling author with nearly thirty years of experience examining what works best in student learning and achievement. His research, better known as Visible Learning, is a culmination of nearly thirty years synthesizing more than 2,500 meta-analyses consisting of more than 150,000 studies involving more than 300 million students around the world. He has presented and keynoted at more than 300 international conferences and has received numerous recognitions for his contributions to education. His notable publications include *Visible Learning; Visible Learning for Teachers; Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn; Visible Learning for Mathematics, Grades K–12;* and *10 Mindframes for Visible Learning*.

Introduction

We make a bold claim in the title of this book: *Every child deserves a special education*. Let's consider each of these words:

- Every child—not just some of the students and not just students who have been assessed and identified as having a disability
- Deserves—it's a right, inherent in public education, not reserved for some and not others
- Special—one that meets students' needs and challenges them to achieve greatness
- Education—meaning that students learn from the experiences we provide

And we believe this with all our hearts. Every one of our students, and your students, deserves an education that is special, one that has an impact, and one that they will remember. Thankfully, there is compelling evidence about what makes a special education. At the most basic level, a special education ensures that students are learning.

The question is, What truly makes a difference in student learning? Although the answers aren't always simple, we're fortunate to have an extraordinary evidence base that sheds light on this question. The *Visible Learning Meta*^{X} database, developed over 35 years, contains thousands of meta-analyses representing thousands of studies and millions of students (Corwin, 2024). It's updated a few times each year with new research, and to date, it identifies more than 450 influences on student learning. These influences are grouped into nine categories: student, home, school structure, classroom, curricula, teacher, teaching strategies, student learning strategies, and technology and out-of-school strategies.

However, the evidence doesn't stop at strategies and methods—it also tells a story about the power of educators' thinking about their work. Yes, we have teaching methods, but how we think about what we do significantly impacts the outcomes that follow. In the language of *Visible Learning*, these are called *mindframes*. Related concepts might include habits of mind, dispositions, or mindsets (Costa & Kallick, 2008; Zingoni & Corey, 2016). As the Peak Performance Center (2024) notes,

> Your mindset is your mental attitude or set of opinions that you have formed about something through experience, education, upbringing, and/or culture. You can have a mindset on a particular event, topic, item, or person.

Merriam-Webster defines a mindframe as "a mental attitude or outlook." The dictionary refers to mindframes as more than fleeting thoughts—they are deeply ingrained ways of thinking that influence behaviors and decisions. Mindframes and mindsets develop cyclically throughout our lives. We have thoughts based on our experiences. Those thoughts become our beliefs, which in turn impact our attitudes. Together, our thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes influence our actions and behaviors. These actions and behaviors create new experiences, which, in time, impact our thoughts, and the cycle starts again.

Consider this example of a challenge you might experience as a teacher with a particular student's learning: A colleague suggests that the student's struggles could stem from their diagnosis—let's say, intellectual disability. This provides an explanation for the challenge you're experiencing, which can shape your thinking. The risk is that you start to believe this is a common occurrence—that students who have intellectual disabilities are challenging to teach. This may, in turn, influence your attitude about inclusive classrooms, perhaps reinforcing the idea that some—or all—students with disabilities should be educated in separate settings designed to meet their particular needs. In a team meeting, this belief may lead you to recommend such a placement. In the classroom, it could result in lowered expectations for this student or reliance on a paraprofessional as the primary person to interact with the student.

Now, let's reimagine that scenario. This time, when you experience the challenge with that student's learning, a colleague describes how success might look for the student and suggests how various supports, such as technology, curriculum, and personnel, might be leveraged to

improve outcomes. You review the student's prior performance and goals and identify times and places in your classroom that will allow the student to learn and practice activities that build the skills needed to reach these goals in the inclusive classroom. Your belief is, "This can work," and your attitude becomes, "Let's try!" You design instruction that incorporates the necessary supports, and soon you notice that these systems also benefit other students.

Your experience shifts: the student begins contributing positively to the classroom culture and makes meaningful progress toward Individual Education Program (IEP) goals. In IEP meetings, you share success stories and propose additional support for continued growth. In the classroom, you foster intentional peer engagement and carve out time for individual sessions with the student while the rest of the class works collaboratively and independently. You recognize that students facing the greatest learning challenges need regular access to expert instruction, and you make this a priority.

Developing your mindframe would take a completely different trajectory in these two scenarios. This book aims to use the *Visible Learning* research to identify the specific mindframes of educators who make a lasting difference. Explicitly cultivating these mindframes can help educators examine their experiences and actions, jumpstarting a cycle of reflection and growth that reshapes their thoughts, beliefs, and practices.

In this book, we focus on mindframes for those educators who support the learning of students with IEPs. That includes classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, advocates or special education teachers, related service providers, and leaders. But note from the title of this book that we believe that all learners deserve a special education, meaning engaging, effective, and impactful teaching and learning. As we will describe throughout this book, the systems of support we implement for specific students with specific documented needs are generally good for all students. When we intentionally implement support more universally, the positive impact extends far beyond any one individual student.

Before we dive into the mindframes that support effective inclusive classroom practices, it's important to understand how they connect to a larger framework. These mindframes align with and build on broader principles that guide teachers, families, leaders, and students in creating successful and supportive school environments. Figure i.1 illustrates how these mindframes work together (Hattie et al., 2024).

FIGURE I.1 Mindframes

MINDFRAMES

When it comes to impacting students' learning, it's less about what educators do and more about how we think about what we do. Educators' ways of thinking or mindsets, beliefs, and attitudes significantly influence the quality of education students receive. Visible Learning focuses on specific mindframes that influence how students, teachers, families, and leaders think. You can use these as a self-assessment tool, identify areas of strength, and plan on your own where to go next.

LEARNERS

I am confident that I can learn.

I set, implement, and monitor an appropriate mix of achieving and deep learning goals.

I strive to improve and enjoy my learning.

I strive to master and acquire surface and deep learning.

I work to contribute to a positive learning culture.

I know multiple learning strategies and know how best to use them.

I have the confidence and skills to learn from and contribute to group learning.

I can hear, understand, and action feedback.

I can evaluate my learning.

I am my own teacher.

TEACHERS

I am an evaluator of my impact on student learning.

I see assessment as informing my impact and next steps.

I collaborate with my peers and my students about my conceptions of progress and my impact.

I am a change agent and believe all students can improve.

I strive for challenge and not merely "doing my best."

I give and help students understand feedback, and I interpret and act on feedback given to me.

I engage as much in dialogue as in monologue.

I explicitly inform students what successful impact looks like from the outset.

I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others.

I focus on learning and the language of learning.

LEADERS

I am an evaluator of my impact.

I see assessment as feedback to me.

I collaborate regarding my conceptions of progress and my progress.

I am a change agent.

I strive to challenge.

I give and help teachers understand feedback.

I engage as much in dialogue as monologue.

I explicitly inform teachers what successful impact looks like.

I build relationships and trust.

I focus on the language of learning.

FAMILY/CAREGIVER

I have appropriately high expectations.

I make reasonable demands and am highly responsive to my child.

I am not alone.

I develop my child's skill, will, and sense of thrill.

I love learning.

I know the power of feedback, and that success thrives on errors.

I am a parent, not a teacher.

I expose my child to language, language, language.

I appreciate that my child is not perfect, nor am I.

I am an evaluator of my impact.

BELONGING, IDENTITIES, AND EQUITY

We strive to invite all to learn.

We value engagement in learning.

We collaborate to learn and thrive.

We cultivate fortifying and sustaining environments for all identities.

We acknowledge, affirm, and embrace the identities of all our students.

We remove barriers to students' learning, including barriers related to identities.

We discover, correct, and disrupt inequities.

We embrace diverse cultures and identities.

We recognize and disrupt biases.

We create equitable opportunities and eliminate barriers to opportunities.

Each of the mindframes in Figure i.2 can and must be applied in inclusive classrooms. The first, and most critical, mindframe for all involved in education focuses on impact. The decisions that educators make should have a positive impact on students' learning. If not, educators need to change how they think and what they are doing to increase their impact. This is true regardless of whether a student has a diagnosis or an IEP. No matter their starting point or diagnosis, every student deserves to gain at least a year's growth given a year's input. Educators must understand what "at least" a year of learning looks like and then monitor their impact to ensure that they provide students with at least a year of learning. The notion of "at least" is key here, as many students (with and without IEPs) need more than a year's growth. It is almost a certainty, however, that if educators and students do not have high expectations for this rate of growth, it's unlikely to occur.

This connects directly to the second mindframe, which emphasizes the importance of assessment from multiple sources—such as tests, student work, assignments, and teacher and student judgments. Gathering, analyzing, and acting on this evidence is essential for improving student learning outcomes. Students risk stagnation without the teacher's belief in the value of assessment or a commitment to using it to guide instruction. They may be left repeating concepts they already understand, missing opportunities to build new skills, and losing any sense of progress or growth in their learning.

The mindframes apply to all educators but hold particular significance in inclusive classrooms. Dialogue—among educators and with students—is crucial, and collaboration with colleagues can amplify our impact on student learning. When educators develop a sense of collective responsibility, students benefit from the expertise and support of all teachers, not just those assigned to their classes. These mindframes remind us to move beyond outdated notions of "my students" and "your students." Instead, they reinforce the idea that all students are *our* students.

Relationships and trust are at the heart of another critical teacher mindframe. As others have noted, trust is the currency of the classroom (e.g., Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Strong teacher-student and

student-student relationships create an environment where taking risks, making mistakes, and learning from errors is safe. Contrary to the misconception that students succeed simply because they like the teacher, the psychological safety created by strong relationships accelerates learning. This is why teachers need to develop strong growth-producing relationships with all of their students, especially those who aren't doing well in school. As Good (1987) showed decades ago, when teachers believe that students are low achieving, their actions toward those students are different. These actions harm relationships and hinder learning. For example, students labeled as low-achieving

- are criticized more often for failure,
- receive less feedback,
- are called on less often,
- have less eye contact with the teacher,
- have fewer friendly interactions with the teacher, and
- experience acceptance of their ideas less often.

FIGURE I.2 Mindframes for Teachers

1. I am an evaluator of my impact on student learning.
2. I see assessment as informing my impact and next steps.
3. I collaborate with my peers and my students about my conceptions of progress and my impact.
4. I am a change agent and believe all students can improve.
5. I strive for a challenge and not merely "doing my best."
6. I give and help students understand feedback, and I interpret and act on feedback given to me.
7. I engage as much in dialogue as monologue.
8. I explicitly inform students what successful impact looks like from the outset.
9. I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others.
10. I focus on learning and the language of learning.

Source: Hattie and Zierer (2025).

Leaders, like teachers, also operate within critical mindframes (see Figure i.3). These mindframes apply to all students, both with and without IEPs. Just as teachers must evaluate their impact, leaders need to remain acutely aware of the effects of their decisions and take action when those effects fall short. Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping the climate and culture of every classroom and the school as a whole. They must engage in meaningful dialogue, build trusting relationships, and set the tone for inclusive and effective practices across their schools.

Two mindframes are particularly important for the leaders' work in inclusive schools. The first is that they are clear about how student success looks. At first glance, this may seem to center on ensuring that all students gain at least a year of growth for a year of school. Although this is, indeed, important, the concept of success extends beyond academic progress. Success can and should include the development of peer relationships, social skills, self-regulation, listening, and a host of other foundational learning skills. This is especially true for students with disabilities who may have missed opportunities to develop these essential skills earlier in life. Leaders carry the opportunity and responsibility of helping teachers and teams define success broadly and recognize the value in developing all of these skills alongside academic outcomes.

The second key mindframe for leaders involves shifting the conversation from one that focuses on teaching to one centered on the language of learning (Mindframe 10 for Leaders). Teaching strategies are important, but the focus must also include what and how students are learning and accomplishing each day, each week, each month, each semester, and each year. Just as teachers have success criteria for their classrooms, leaders should know what success looks like for the overall learning culture of their schools. By leading discussions about the learning taking place, leaders can build a shared understanding and collective responsibility for ensuring that every student has opportunities to succeed.

FIGURE I.3 Mindframes for Leaders

1. I am an evaluator of my impact.
2. I see assessment as feedback to me.
3. I collaborate regarding my conceptions of progress and my progress.
4. I am a change agent.
5. I strive to challenge myself and others.
6. I give and help teachers understand feedback.
7. I engage as much in dialogue as in monologue.
8. I explicitly inform teachers what successful impact looks like.
9. I build relationships and trust.
10. I focus on the language of learning.

Source: Hattie and Smith (2020).

In addition to mindframes for teachers and leaders, there are also mindframes designed for students and parents (Figure i.1). The key to parent mindframes is that parents see themselves not as first teachers (many do not have the specific skills of teachers) but as first learners—as parents learn, have expectations, deal with mistakes, and enjoy the struggles of learning, their children mimic this. Further, there are mindframes that focus on equity, identities, and belonging (see Figure i.4). These were identified through several rounds of research feedback from scholars worldwide using a process called Delphi. A team of educators drafted these mindframes and iteratively revised them based on extensive input from the research community (Law et al., 2024).

These mindframes explore the beliefs of educators regarding students who have often been marginalized, such as those from various racial/ethnic groups, religions, sexual orientations and gender identity groups, and disabilities. Like the mindframes presented earlier, the mindframes for equity, identities, and belonging apply to all students. But in this case, they represent thinking that needs to be ingrained into educators such that fairness becomes the norm in every classroom and school. Specifically, the students' concept of "this teacher is fair" is paramount.

Simply said, implicit biases that teachers may have about some groups of students impact their ability to learn. The students may be incorrect, and the teacher is fair, but their viewpoints or mindframes are critical—we need to know them before we can improve or modify them.

Factually speaking, there are inequities all around us. The challenge is to recognize them and then do something about them. For students with disabilities, referrals for services are inequitable (Katsiyannis et al., 2023), placement decisions are inequitable (Morgan et al., 2022), service delivery is inequitable (Friedman-Krauss & Barnett, 2023), discipline is inequitable (Zhang et al., 2004), and we could go on. Inclusive mindframes require that educators identify *and* disrupt these inequities.

The mindframes focus on embracing difference and disrupting bias. This is challenging work but necessary for our students' well-being. We all have biases, and we need to recognize and address them. And we need to embrace the wonderful diversity that exists in our world. It sounds like a slogan, but it's true: Diversity is our strength. We need diversity of people's experiences, ideas, and beliefs to make us all stronger.

Relatedly, educators with equity mindframes recognize that there are barriers for many students that must be addressed. We need to increase the opportunities to learn and eliminate as many barriers as possible for all students. This applies equally to students with disabilities who face a number of barriers to their learning and participation. Equity mindframes demand that we recognize these inequities and work to eliminate barriers.

There are also mindframes related to the identities of our students. In the past, differences were something to hide, to feel ashamed of, and to be embarrassed about. That has to change and is changing. Differences, including those that fit the definition of disability, are part of the human experience, and all people are well served when they embrace their identities, including how they experience the world. Disability identity can be described as a "sense of self that includes one's disability and feelings of connection to, or solidarity with, the disability community" (Dunn & Burcaw, 2013, p. 148). In an investigation of the aspects of disability identity, Forber-Pratt et al. (2020) noted the following four factors: internal beliefs about one's own disability and the disability community; anger and frustration with disability experiences; adoption

of disability community values; and contribution to the disability community. Educators who embrace this mindframe help students integrate their differences into their identities.

Another powerful mindframe focuses on belonging and requires that educators invite all students to learn. We interpret this to mean educating students with identified needs in inclusive classrooms, with support, such that they can learn alongside their peers. Unfortunately, a prevalent counter-mindframe maintains that students with more significant needs are "better off" with others with the same label or need. The idea seems to be that educators can customize the learning experiences based on the needs of their students. But the reality is that it doesn't work this way. The evidence is clear: students learn better when they are educated in inclusive settings. As we will explore later, inclusive education positively impacts learning outcomes, with an effect size of 0.32. And this is based on 445 studies that involved more than 4.8 million students.

FIGURE I.4 Mindframes for Equity, Identities, and Belonging

1. We discover, correct, and disrupt inequities.
2. We embrace diverse cultures and identities.
3. We recognize and disrupt biases.
4. We create equitable opportunities and eliminate barriers to opportunities.
5. We cultivate fortifying and sustaining environments for all identities.
6. We acknowledge, affirm, and embrace the identities of all our students.
7. We remove barriers to students' learning, including barriers related to identities.
8. We strive to invite all to learn.
9. We value engagement in learning.
10. We collaborate to learn and thrive.

Source: Law et al. (2024).

In the following chapters, we organize the narrative into five mindframes for inclusive classrooms that compel us to plan for not only a diverse pool of learners in our schools but also the diversity within each learner. As we present these mindframes for inclusive education, it is important to clarify who we're talking about. The answer is both specific

and expansive. Studies conducted with students who have disabilities or IEPs are central to these conversations, as these students face some of the most significant barriers to learning. However, these are not the only students who experience barriers and benefit from the mindframes we outline. Many learners have substantial needs that fall just short of qualifying for formal support; some face greater barriers in some subjects than in other subjects, or with some teachers and not others; and some face long-term barriers, while others have short-term needs (e.g., as a consequence of death in the family or an extended illness). Students face barriers related to language acquisition, trauma, moving, family dynamics, and the list goes on.

Although many of these students do not have a diagnosis or an IEP, their needs are just as pressing—and the mindframes explored in this book are equally effective for them. In fact, what we've learned from designing practices that work for students with disabilities provides valuable lessons for serving all learners. Inclusive practices—those that prioritize access, equity, and engagement—are not limited to one group. Instead, they have a ripple effect, improving the educational experience for everyone in the classroom.

Far from abstract, the five mindframes we present are pragmatic, actionable approaches anchored in a robust foundation of research. For each mindframe, we provide specific learning intentions and success criteria and a range of teaching scenarios for illustration and reflective practice. We'll invite you to assess your understanding of each mindframe. As we progress through each chapter, remember that these mindframes are more than lenses for viewing a change in methods—a change in *doing*. They are catalysts for changes in *thinking* that will lead to better learning experiences and outcomes for students.

Every Child Is Special

1

Learning Intentions

- I am learning about student variability and the value of inclusive environments.
- I am learning about Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a framework to anticipate and address barriers to student learning.

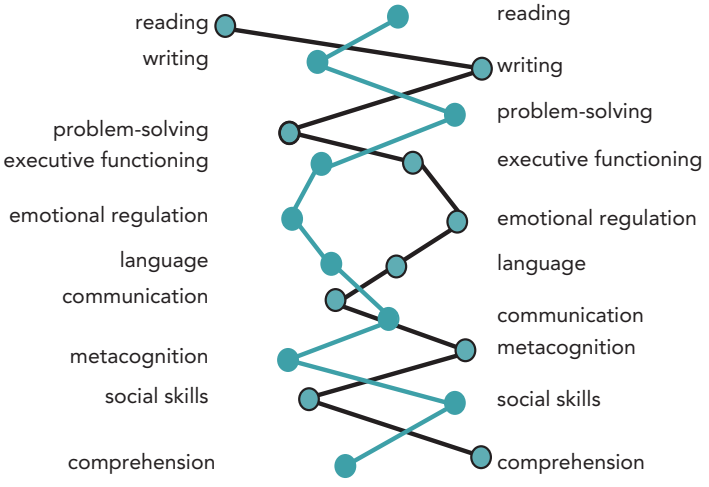
Success Criteria

- I can describe variation in terms of a jagged profile that we all have.
- I can describe how instructional design grounded in UDL principles benefits all students.
- I can plan my instruction from the assumption that there will always be variance in my class.

Each of us is a magnificent "proprietary blend" of interests, abilities, values, needs, and experiences that make us who we are as beautifully unique individuals. We can see some of the variation between people, like in their height or facial features. But the most complex and interesting diversity lives within our minds. This pattern of variation we each have is as dynamic as it is unique. The areas in which you excel today might require nurturing tomorrow, and the challenges you face now could turn into your greatest strengths down the line.

In his 2016 book, *The End of Average*, Todd Rose explores the complexity of human variation. He introduces the concept of a "jagged profile" to illustrate the variation *between* and *within* individuals. The two students in Figure 1.1 have some similarities in their profiles; maybe they even have the same grades. But these two students also have jagged profiles—just as we all do—that make them unique. This notion of a jagged profile avoids the use of words loaded with positive or negative attributes; other terms could be mosaic minds, talent tapestry, capability canvas, the skill-scape, or talent terrain—although we prefer the term *jagged profile*.

FIGURE 1.1 Jagged Profiles



When thinking about students' jagged profiles, elements like literacy, problem-solving, behavior, and critical thinking may come to mind because those are the ones that lead to grades or formal feedback. However, other parts of our profile are equally important, such as metacognition, emotional regulation, executive function, and compassion. For many of our students, one or more points on their jagged profiles diverge significantly from the typical range. They could be soaring past expectations or facing hurdles that require extra support. Needs for support or challenge can appear in academic, social, or emotional domains and signal us to take notice and make a plan. Consider the variety in these student profiles:

- **Liam, seventh grade:** Liam is a prodigy in coding, often losing himself in the world of algorithms and programming languages. His room is decorated with tech posters, and he dreams of creating the next big video game. Liam struggles with emotional regulation and becomes easily frustrated when things don't go as planned. He has a wicked sense of humor and loves sharing tech jokes with his friends.
- **Logan, sixth grade:** Logan has an intellectual disability and learns best through videos and hands-on models. He is curious and loves exploring how things work, often taking apart gadgets at home to see what's inside. Logan enjoys outdoor activities and has a gentle, kind-hearted nature. His enthusiasm for life is infectious, and he thrives when he can use his senses to understand the concepts being taught.
- **Ava, third grade:** Ava has needs in spatial reasoning and benefits greatly from support with geometric concepts. She has a vivid imagination and loves creating intricate drawings and building elaborate structures with her Lego sets. Ava is a quiet, observant child who enjoys solving puzzles and playing strategy games. She excels when learning is connected to visual and tactile experiences.
- **Emma, fifth grade:** Emma has debilitating social anxiety, making it challenging for her to interact with peers and participate in class. She is currently working with a counselor to gain new interaction strategies. Emma is an avid reader and finds solace in the pages of fantasy novels. She has a gentle demeanor and is incredibly empathetic, often volunteering to help animals at the local shelter.
- **Muhammad, second grade:** Muhammad needs support with reading but shows extraordinary musical aptitude. He is ready to compose and explore complex music theory and is often seen with his keyboard or guitar. Muhammad has an infectious enthusiasm for music and loves performing for his family. His vibrant personality shines through his music, and he eagerly shares his melodies with others.

- **Mia, first grade:** Mia has significant short-term memory needs and requires support to learn strategies for following routines and instructions for everyday tasks. She has a rich imagination and loves storytelling and role-playing games. Mia enjoys all types of visual art, often creating elaborate projects to decorate her room. Her energetic personality and love for all things creative help her engage with learning.
- **José, tenth grade:** José has executive functioning needs but demonstrates unparalleled storytelling abilities. He needs opportunities to craft narratives with professional-level depth and complexity. José is a charismatic teenager with a passion for writing, often staying up late to pen his thoughts and stories. He is also a member of the drama club, where his storytelling skills shine on stage. José's ability to generate intricate tales captivates his audience, and he benefits from structured support to manage his time and organize his ideas effectively.

Each of these students qualifies for special education services, but as we can see, this is where their commonalities end. There aren't any substantive needs that are the same for this group of students. When we see students as "special education students," rather than seeing each student's jagged profile, we run the very real risk of leading to sweeping and formulaic decisions based on labels instead of making intentional decisions that respond to each student's strengths, interests, and needs. The ramifications are far-reaching, affecting both how students see themselves and the opportunities they have in school. The most ubiquitous example of this type of sweeping decision based on the label of "special education student" is found within the confines of the resource room, where students with IEPs are grouped together, regardless of their specific needs.

From the Classroom

An Inefficient Grouping

Ms. Jackson walks into her special education resource room with a mixture of determination and frustration. It was the same routine at 1:15 every day when she gathered her crew of nine eighth graders,

each with their own unique needs. The only common thread among them is that they have IEPs.

As students trickle in, Ms. Jackson greets each one with a kind smile. The bell rings, and the room buzzes with activity. Ms. Jackson begins circulating the room, addressing questions and helping with assignments. She's a skilled interventionist, but she's expected to help each student keep up with assignments, often sacrificing deeper support for their specific needs.

She glances at Alex, focused intensely on his reading passage with concern apparent in his brows. "Ms. Jackson, I'm having trouble with this part." She knows Alex needs more than just homework help; he needs a structured reading intervention for which she simply doesn't have the time.

Priya raises her hand, confused by the math problem in front of her. "I don't understand this math problem at all." Ms. Jackson moves toward Priya. "Let's untangle it together, Priya." She offers explanations, but she knows that Priya's struggles with number sense run deeper, and she wishes she could provide the targeted support Priya deserves.

Then there's Liam, who's having a particularly rough day. "This is stupid!" he yelled, his emotions spilling over. Ms. Jackson wishes she could dedicate time to teaching Liam the emotional regulation strategies he needs to cope with overwhelm, but how can she take time to teach him strategies when the others in the room have different needs?

As the day progresses, Ms. Jackson's feelings of frustration and defeat grow. In her heart, she knows that her students can do much more than just complete assignments. They deserve a chance to receive tailored interventions to develop essential skills.

In Ms. Jackson's class, students were grouped together because they were "special education students." But Alex, Priya, and Liam all need different types of support or intervention. It makes logical sense to group students who share the same needs for intervention flexibly. Grouping students with varying needs in a special education classroom for support time creates an impossible situation for teachers. It prevents students from accessing the skills-based intervention they truly need.

It's a massive mistake to ignore the individual points within students' jagged profiles and see them as fitting neatly into the broad categories of having an IEP or being gifted. The language of this error rings loudly through the halls of our schools when we hear "special education kid" alongside its many variations: "IEP kid," "Inclusion student," or "Ashley's kids." **Let's set the record straight: There's no such thing as a "special education kid."** Sure, there are students who receive special education services, but special education isn't something a student *is*. There isn't a *type* of student who is a special education student. All students are general education students. And all deserve to receive an education that responds to their jagged profiles. All students are special.

Recognizing the jagged profile of each student requires us to be agile educators for all students. We look at both the quantitative assessments and the qualitative insights—those nuanced moments in the classroom, the candid chats at parent-teacher conferences, and the students' own reflections on their learning experiences. Armed with these rich understandings, we make decisions about what each student needs. So, what about that student battling emotional storms? Time for focused emotional support. And the young writer who's penning stories like the next Margaret Atwood? We've got to step it up and give these students challenges worthy of their talents. Each student's needs should inform the selection of high-leverage strategies; for the most part, these strategies can be applied to all students or as options for all students. When we take this dynamic approach to understanding our students, we honor our students' unique profiles, respect their individuality, and set the stage for them to achieve phenomenal growth. This does not mean that we have to individualize all learning experiences for each student continually. Rather, we can design universal approaches that meet many needs, bringing efficiency to our efforts and broadening the scope of our support.

Necessary for Some, Good for All

Ramps, curb cuts, lever door handles, elevators, wider doors, braille, and audible signals at crosswalks are all around us. But unless you require these accessibility features, they are probably not something you think about all that often. Other than braille, every item on that list

is a feature that benefits everyone. You've absolutely benefitted from an elevator, whether or not you use a wheelchair. The same goes for ramps, wider doorways, larger bathrooms, and crosswalk signals. You've used and benefited from every one of those accessibility features, and, at times, you may have *needed* them.

This principle of universal design—creating solutions that are necessary for some but beneficial for all—extends beyond physical spaces and into educational practices. When we take the time to dive into special education research, we find a vault of information for enhancing teaching quality for all students. Just as accessibility features in buildings benefit all of us, the mindframes in this book make an enormous difference for students with disabilities but also benefit every student. Rather than seeing the wisdom from special education research as a specialized toolkit for a specific group, we aim to use the lessons learned from special education research as a roadmap for elevating instructional quality across the board. Our aim is to highlight actionable insights that can transform each classroom into a more effective learning environment.

Indeed, the evidence shows that the practices that work for those receiving special education services are beneficial for all, but going about this the other way doesn't have the same effect. When we design our instruction, especially initial instruction, for those who engage and learn easily, we leave all the students who don't learn as easily behind. Some students will even learn when given poor instruction. Thus, the most authentic evidence of the quality of instruction is found in the students who *don't* have the easiest time learning—not in the students who are going to learn no matter what.

Special education research is where we have uncovered the highest leverage practices that work for the most intractable educational challenges. The majority of these effective strategies that work for those with the greatest needs can bring powerful results when brought into the classroom and used with all students. The way reading instruction has evolved over the years is a perfect example. Some students learn to read with little evidence-based reading instruction at all—they seem to develop the ability from just being exposed to print and interactions with well-meaning adults. But we can't look to those students for evidence about teaching all students to read. When we study reading instruction

practices with students who have the most difficulty learning to read, we discover what works. When we bring those practices that work with those students who have the biggest needs into every classroom to use with every student, now we're getting somewhere!

Special education strategies shouldn't be relegated to a corner reserved for a select few. Instead, these universal strategies benefit every student, irrespective of their needs. This book is about realizing that these methods and insights aren't just "necessary for some" but can be game-changers for all. With these excellent teaching practices, we can meet most of the needs on everyone's jagged profile. Strategies like small group instruction or using mnemonics are necessary for some and great for everyone. This doesn't take away the fact that some students have unique needs. The orientation and mobility needs of a blind student are an example. Educators still have to address those needs. But when we do a great job with UDL, we can focus our individualization efforts at those times when they are *really* needed rather than trying to individualize everything.

Imagine a classroom where instruction is crafted with the highest leverage practices that address the biggest needs in mind, where teachers plan inclusively from the beginning and work together. That's the power of tapping into the wisdom of special education. Special education research is a pathway guiding us toward a limitless future for *all* learners. Next, let's discover the influences that can supercharge our inclusive toolkit.

Thinking Strategically

High-leverage practices are the foundation of the most impactful teaching, offering powerful tools to address diverse student needs and boost learning outcomes. However, truly effective teaching involves more than adding additional strategies; it requires that we

1. understand our students' jagged profiles, including their strengths and assets,
2. anticipate the diverse challenges they might experience,
3. select the optimal strategies related to (1) and (2),

4. proactively implement these high-leverage practices that address the possible barriers to learning, and
5. continually evaluate the impact of our choice of strategies on the learning lives of our students.

Strategic thinking means planning, true to UDL, with the assumption that student variability is the norm, not the exception (CAST, 2024).

Imagine a teacher planning for the upcoming math instructional unit by paying attention to the variation in their students. They recognize that some students might feel they can't do it, others might find it boring, and some might already be ahead of the curve. Thinking strategically, this teacher provides students with multiple ways to engage with the material. Rather than primarily using whole-group instruction, the classroom becomes a hub of collaborative group activity, with students using visuals and models to grasp complex concepts, engaging in hands-on activities, and exploring applications of math. Digital tools are available for students to learn at varied paces, catering to those who need more time and those ready for advanced challenges. By anticipating these varied needs, the teacher ensures that all students are engaged, supported, learning, and challenged. Notice that the teacher didn't create different difficulty levels but enabled multiple ways to access and matriculate through the material to support every student's learning journey.

High-leverage practices rooted in special education research are key in this strategic approach. These practices, proven effective for students with significant learning needs, can elevate the quality of instruction for all students when thoughtfully integrated into the classroom. The goal is to embed these practices into the core of our teaching methods, ensuring our instruction is inclusive, effective, efficient, and adaptable. The result is an inclusive learning environment so robust that fewer students need specially designed instruction or adaptations. By recognizing the diversity within our classrooms and planning proactively, we can leverage the best practices from special education and all education research to benefit all students. As we delve into mindframes for inclusive education throughout this book, remember that thinking

strategically is critical, adaptive expertise should become the norm, and we are devoted to thinking evaluatively about what we do.

Summary

Labels and disability categories aren't what makes a child special. *Every* child is indeed special because of their unique profiles of abilities, interests, personalities, and needs. The profiles for some students are so multidimensional that they have significant needs for support in one area and just as significant needs for challenge in another—and on some days but not on others, in some subjects and not in others, in some contexts but not in others. These profiles are fluid! The notion that students with learning needs are outliers is outdated. The truth is, the farthest points on the jagged profiles can be crowded places! Diversity isn't a challenge to be managed; it's our greatest asset in a rich educational environment—and society. Our responsibility and privilege as educators is to recognize this individuality and respond with proactive, inclusive, and evidence-based instruction that has a marked positive impact on learning and achievement.

High-leverage practices rooted in special education research are invaluable to this strategic approach. These practices, proven effective for students with significant learning needs, elevate the quality of instruction for all students when thoughtfully integrated into classrooms. By embedding these practices into our teaching methods, we create robust, inclusive learning environments where fewer students need specially designed instruction or adaptations.

As we continue through this book, remember that effective teaching involves more than simply implementing these strategies. It requires anticipating challenges, understanding student variability, and thinking strategically to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. In embracing the mindframe that every child is special, we commit to seeing past labels and view variation as a normal part of the human condition. In doing so, our task is clear: We must design every unit and every lesson with an eye on the jagged profile.

Learning Check

I can describe the variation in terms of a jagged profile that we all have.

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5

I can describe how instructional design grounded in UDL principles benefits all students.

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5

I can plan my instruction assuming there will always be variance in my class.

STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
1	2	3	4	5