

## Introduction

### from Teaching English Learners and Students with Learning Difficulties in an Inclusive Classroom: A Guidebook for Teachers

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# Introduction

**“If students are not learning the way we teach them, we must teach them the way they learn.”**

— Kenneth Dunn

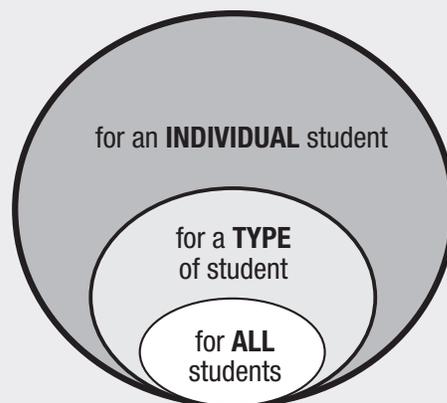
Diversity within the classroom is increasing as more English learners enter our education system and more students with special needs are welcomed into general education classrooms. In this guidebook, we offer a unified, doable approach for teachers to adapt to this increasing diversity of students in their classrooms.

Effective teachers continually explore and experiment with new ways to engage all students in successful learning; they see the changing demographics in their classrooms as a challenge to be met, not a problem to be avoided. They learn to tailor instruction to meet students “where they are” and to help them all progress toward the same set of academic standards. Each student is at a unique point of readiness to learn any lesson, each learns best in a unique way and has personal interests, so it is imperative that teachers find personalized ways to help each student be a successful learner.

The reality in a classroom of 30 students with diverse learning needs is that the teacher does not have time to teach each student individually. The teacher can have a positive impact on students by planning a lesson for all students, embedding very doable strategies from this book that are effective for all students, and then making *minor adjustments* for certain students.<sup>1</sup> The teacher might personalize a lesson by selecting one or a few concrete examples of a concept that taps into one student’s interests (e.g., anything about airplanes and airports) and another’s culture or primary language.

This guidebook is intended to help teachers bring together and enhance effective practices that they may have learned previously. For teachers who have participated in professional development and read

## Diverse Ways of Teaching and Learning



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books and articles related to working with English learners or students with learning disabilities (what we refer to as learning *difficulties*), we expect that many of the strategies presented here are at least somewhat familiar. Our approach to teaching English learners and students with learning difficulties is in harmony with popular models such as Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP).<sup>2,3</sup> These models involve teaching in the content areas in a manner that researcher Arieh Sherris calls “task-based,” which “focuses on the knowledge, skills, and academic language within a content area.”<sup>4</sup>

This guidebook proposes a very doable, practical, everyday approach backed by research and other evidence for effectively teaching diverse learners, particularly English learners and students with learning difficulties in the general education classroom or in an academic special education classroom. There is no expensive program to buy, no new materials that must be purchased, no rigid step-by-step directions for implementation, and no entirely new ways of teaching. Many teachers say they have used some or all of the strategies in this guidebook but have not used them often enough or sustained their use. We hope this guidebook will help teachers return to these effective strategies, make refinements in them, implement them more frequently, and continue building on them as the benefits to their teaching and to students become obvious.

This book is based on two prior guidebooks for science and mathematics teachers who have English learners in their classrooms.<sup>5</sup> A common thread among the strategies in the prior two guidebooks is making instruction visible and repeating key concepts so that the English learners who find it difficult to process oral English rapidly can access the content of the lesson and grade-level learning standards.

Howard Gardner and others have convinced us that there are multiple intelligences and that students have preferred learning styles and interests. It has been suggested that about two thirds of students in classrooms today have a preference for a visual and spatial style of learning, “thinking in pictures,” and struggle with the words to describe those pictures.<sup>6</sup> Many students with learning difficulties are visual-spatial learners, hence many of the strategies that we recommend are particularly effective for visual-spatial learning. Workshop participants and a review of literature in special education have affirmed our belief that the strategies in this guidebook are applicable to all learners, particularly English learners and students with learning difficulties. We make the case that the strategies act as “language scaffolds” while English learners are developing English vocabulary and skills, and they act as “cognitive processing scaffolds” for students with learning difficulties who need extra support processing language and concepts and retaining and retrieving information.

## **WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK**

We wrote this guidebook for middle and high school teachers who are looking for a practical, evidence-based approach to help English learners and students with certain learning difficulties to access the content reflected in state standards. We also wrote this book for school and district leaders who are looking for a sustainable schoolwide or districtwide practice that respects diversity and celebrates inclusion. The information about students with learning difficulties (chapter 2) and English learners (chapter 3) is meant to help general education teachers who want to effectively teach all diverse learners in their classrooms and to help special education teachers better understand dual status students.

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Although the classroom examples in this guidebook are situated at the middle and high school levels, we believe the ideas are equally applicable to primary grades, and it is our hope that elementary school teachers will be able to adapt the strategies and examples to fit their students and context. Although the examples in this guidebook are from language arts, mathematics, science, and social science lessons, we know teachers of other subjects, such as art, music, and culinary arts, who have enthusiastically and effectively adapted in their classrooms the strategies we recommend. Throughout this book, we speak of a teacher in a general education classroom that includes English learners and students with learning difficulties; however, we recognize and encourage a more effective inclusion model in which the general education teacher *co-teaches* with a bilingual or special education teacher.

## **TEAM LEARNING AND SUSTAINING PRACTICES**

This guidebook can be used best as a common resource by teams of teachers who share the same students. Although one teacher in a school can benefit from this book, using it alone would be like trying to paddle a one-person raft upstream for a long time – it would become extremely difficult to refine and sustain practice over time. When a team of teachers at a school uses the guidebook for a “book study” in a professional learning community context, it is like sharing the paddling and navigating of one large raft downstream. Also, a student needs to experience the same effective practices for many years to graduate from high school prepared for a meaningful career or postsecondary education. An educated adult is not the result of one teacher at one grade level but of a long process of high-quality teachers working as a K–12 team.

Just as many students “come alive” in social learning activities, many teachers also feel efficacy and energy when part of a team working together in a professional learning community and seeing beneficial results in the classroom. We recommend meeting in such teams at least twice a month to ensure a continuous sharing and learning process reflecting the key components of a professional learning community: shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. As an alternative, or in addition, a teacher can join or create an online personal learning network (PLN) to chat and blog within an interest group and to access resources.<sup>7</sup>

The proposed approach in this guidebook combines the science of teaching – integrated, research-based strategies used very frequently with a defined purpose and understanding – and the art of teaching wherein teachers infuse their passion to teach with their professionalism to collegially and continually teach better and share their unique personalities and life experiences with their students. With long-range planning and support of school and district leaders, this approach can become part of the school culture, sustaining common core practices through professional learning communities and a balance of whole-school and individual accountability. Professional learning that is effective and sustains new practices is built on principles such as shared values and goals, collective responsibility for student achievement, self-directed reflection, consistent time and place to work as a team, and strong leadership that supports teamwork.<sup>8</sup>

## **THESE STRATEGIES ARE A HANDFUL**

The general approach and strategies in this guidebook are intended to anchor, or at least connect to, a variety of other strategies and techniques found in others’ books, articles, and professional development

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sessions that work best for a specific student or address the complexity of a learning situation in much greater depth. In choosing particular strategies to recommend in this guidebook, we used the following criteria:

- » The strategies have been identified in the research and/or professional literature as effective for general education students, English learners, and students with various learning difficulties. (Appendix A provides a chart that cites the main sources of research we have found that support the strategies recommended in this guidebook.)
- » The strategies are doable – they are relatively simple to learn to use, and they can be used daily, throughout the day, in any discipline.
- » The strategies are interconnected – one strategy flows into or can be embedded in another strategy, so a teacher can interweave them throughout a lesson as a whole approach to teaching diverse learners who can all “get it,” just in different ways.

Occasionally we offer examples involving one student who is an English learner or one who has a learning difficulty or one who has dual status. The names used are fictitious, except for Tony, who is an English learner with autism and language processing difficulties and appears in examples throughout the book. We hope this use of individual students helps to personalize what we say academically. And, of course, we also welcome teachers to think about one or more special students from their own classrooms while reading this guidebook.

## ENDNOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Fisher, D., Roach, V., & Frey, N. (2002). Examining the general programmatic benefits of inclusive schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 6(1), 63–78. See p. 74.

<sup>2</sup> Chamot, A. U., & O'Malley, J. M. (1994). *The Calla handbook: Implementing the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach*. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.

<sup>3</sup> Echevarría, J., Vogt, M., & Short, D. J. (2008). *Making content comprehensible for English learners: The SIOP© model* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

<sup>4</sup> Sherris, A. (2008, September). Integrated content and language instruction. In *CALdigest*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from <http://www.cal.org>; another source is Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Cary, NC: Oxford Applied Linguistics.

<sup>5</sup> Carr, J., Carroll, C., Cremer, S., Gale, M., Lagunoff, R., & Sexton, U. (2009). *Making mathematics accessible to English learners: A guidebook for teachers*. San Francisco: WestEd; Carr, J., Sexton, U., & Lagunoff, R. (2007). *Making science accessible to English learners: A guidebook for teachers*. San Francisco: WestEd.

<sup>6</sup> Silverman, L. K. (2002). *Upside-down brilliance: The visual-spatial learner*. Denver: DeLeon Publishing. Research by Linda Silverman on validating an assessment of visual-spatial learning style with students in grades 4–6 indicated that about 30 percent were predominantly visual-spatial and 30 percent had a slight preference. This information is accessible from [http://www.gifteddevelopment.com/Visual\\_Spatial\\_Learner/vsl.htm](http://www.gifteddevelopment.com/Visual_Spatial_Learner/vsl.htm)

<sup>7</sup> The Educator's PLN – <http://edupln.ning.com> – is an example. Facebook can be used as a PLN. For information on Moodles, wikis, Twitter, blogs, Nings, and RSS feeds, see Huber, C. (2010). Professional learning 2.0. *Educational Leadership*, 67(8), 41–46.

<sup>8</sup> National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2011). Team up for 21st century teaching and learning. *ASCD Express*, 6(19). Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/ascdexpress>