Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Teaching to Diversity: The Three-Block Model
of Universal Design for Learning

Reviewed by

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Jennifer Katz's recent text, *Teaching to Diversity: The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning* is a much-needed text for pre- and in-service teachers. Although Canada is poised to become a leader in inclusive education, there is still much to be realized on the front lines. This text provides a foundation that both beginning and seasoned teachers can use to create inclusive classroom environments by utilizing a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework.

Based on prevailing research, Katz has created a three-block model as a framework for enacting inclusive education. The first block is to establish a compassionate learning community. As she sees it, we have a responsibility to teach "personal, moral, and ethical responsibilities within diverse communities" (p. 43). The section on creating a "Respect for Diversity" classroom is extremely useful with nine lesson plans to sequentially develop a community that acknowledges diversity and understands the importance of including the contributions of all members. The lesson plans are easy to follow, adaptable to multiple grade levels, and would provide an excellent foundation for the beginning of every school year. To further aid in establishing a welcoming and workable classroom climate, Katz outlines "7 Principles of Democratic Classrooms," explaining how to arrange class meetings and walking the reader through the exact procedures that she, herself, has tried and tested. Using the familiar t-chart "looks like/sounds like," she outlines how to develop partnering and small-group work skills among students, noting that most children do not automatically come to school knowing how to be good listeners, coaches, and problem solvers.

Chapter 4 is extremely valuable for any new teacher who struggles to incorporate a myriad of prescribed learning outcomes into meaningful plans and lessons. Katz guides the reader through the process of integrating subject areas so that students grapple with the "big idea" concepts (essential understandings), advocating to "start at the end" (p. 65) when planning a unit of study. The chapter includes an example of how to create rubrics that span several grade levels, using the previous grade learning outcomes to establish a baseline for what all students should already know. The rubrics illustrate a continuum of learning, reflecting the philosophy of inclusion, which honours the wide range of abilities within each classroom. She also incorporates different multiple intelligences into the unit so that throughout group, centre, or individual work, each child completes an activity using their dominant intelligence. An interesting aspect of the section on assessment is how she uses multiple intelligences in student reporting, addressing the themes of assessment *for* learning, *as* learning, and *of* learning. She also includes a sample class profile.

Throughout the discussion, Katz maintains that the units of study are for *all* students. "Students with significant or even severe disabilities may appear to be unable to join in, or activities may appear inappropriate for them. This is simply not true" (p.87). She provides a real-life example of a gifted student and how she made adjustments so the child could be a part of each and every lesson. It would also be useful for the novice teacher to have detailed examples of how very low-functioning children could take part in the unit plans and daily lessons. However, assuming, the learning outcomes would be modified considerably in some cases, Katz does not address this.

The last two chapters are interesting additions to the book. In Chapter 6, Katz talks about leadership and policies. She is frank in stating that she has no direct experience as a school administrator, but she does not shy away from suggesting systemic changes that are required in order to ensure equitable access to instruction for all children. She emphasizes that "policies must not leave room for exceptions, loopholes, subjective decisions" (p. 161), providing examples of policies that are far too general and open to interpretation. Katz encourages educators to be "leaders for change," rather than waiting for the system to change from above. The final chapter focuses on Aboriginal education and is co-authored by Myra Laramee. This chapter begins by reviewing the racism experienced by Aboriginal people in Canada. It goes on, more optimistically, to demonstrate how inclusion and UDL fit well with Aboriginal experiential learning.

Katz is refreshing in her acknowledgment that our culture, and therefore public schooling, is in a state of transition and has not yet arrived to be a fully inclusive education system. There is a need to build capacity at all levels, particularly within the classroom. She maintains that leaders must "make clear their [teachers'] job is to teach all the students in their classroom, and I do mean all" (p.5). In the same vein, she points out the overuse of teaching assistants; she would prefer hiring more well-trained teachers, noting that the "neediest learners [are often] taught by the least-trained people and involved in the most rote paper-and-pencil styles of learning" (p.8).

There are a number of other noteworthy features of this book. Katz presents student vignettes to highlight the points made in her main text. Two particularly poignant ones are shared at the outset to explain her impetus for incorporating UDL in her classroom. The most striking aspect of these vignettes is that, while the subjects were only eight and 11 years of age, "they were already casualties of the system" (p.3). Other important features of this book are the mindful incorporation of brain research and the "spotlights" which appear in the margins of the text, highlighting web or other useful resources.

Overall this book has much to offer both the pre- and in-service teacher. There are many useable strategies and lesson plans that can be put to use immediately in any classroom. The three-block model provides educators with a structure for transforming classrooms into settings that honour diversity and support the inclusion of all children.