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Accelerating Learning for All, PreK-8.

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Preface



WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

This book arose out of our shared passion to ensure all students' needs are met while actively eliminating opportunity, access, and expectation gaps. The idea of accelerating learning for all students is a new concept that has bubbled up into mainstream education due to the ongoing impacts of two important events: the COVID-19 pandemic and the current civil rights movement. In the variety of roles we have held, including classroom educators, gifted coordinators, school leaders, district administration, and state-level leaders, we have experienced the struggles our educational system faces as it strives to ensure all students learn and grow daily. Unfortunately, opportunity, access, and expectations gaps persist, and some students never move beyond being dependent learners, reliant on others to learn. When COVID-19 dramatically shifted the educational landscape in early 2020, these challenges were further exacerbated, and we saw an even greater need to take the practices typically reserved for advanced and gifted learners and utilize those strategies to accelerate learning for students. While serving students experiencing poverty, multilingual learners, migrants, immigrants, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students, students identified as gifted, and students with disabilities, as classroom teachers we implemented these strategies to ensure opportunity, access, and high expectations for all. We embraced these strategies with all of our students and saw great success in student engagement, growth, and independence. Now as leaders, we support other educators and leaders in applying these strategies with great success across all populations of learners.

The current educational environment is ripe for change, and this book will help educators put equity into action through the implementation of strategies proven to deepen and accelerate learning aligned to culturally responsive teaching strategies. Providing all students with authentic, engaging learning opportunities focused on strengths, accelerating learning, and high expectations, rather than on deficits and filling gaps, can change the educational trajectory for all students within our schools.

GOALS

The purpose of this book is to provide educators with straightforward information about strategies that work to accelerate learning for all. Not only do these strategies have a strong research base, but we have personally implemented them with great success to address inequities, expectations, and access gaps for the students in our classrooms. In addition to our own personal implementation, we have also helped other educators implement them. Throughout this book, we'll be sharing stories while keeping in mind Zaretta Hammond's (2014) words: "Our ultimate goal is to position dependent learners so that they will take the intellectual risk and stretch into their zone of proximal development" (p. 81). Reaching this goal should not be contingent on a student's zip code, background, or how they perform on assessments. To engage students in their learning and provide equity across the system, the strategies in this book must be widespread and available to all learners. By providing concrete strategies to move students toward becoming independent critical thinkers and problem solvers, this book will support educators in accelerating learning for all of their students.

AUDIENCE

This book was written for practicing and pre-service educators from preschool to eighth grade in all content areas who work directly with students. Additionally, *Accelerating Learning for All, PreK–8: Equity in Action* will also support instructional coaches, specialists, and administrators at school, district, and state levels. These non-classroom educator roles are vital in providing necessary support for all students through professional learning and job-embedded coaching. Special education teachers, interventionists, counselors, gifted teachers, and special teachers, such as art, music, and physical education, will all benefit from the strategies in this book. These educators provide expertise in how to meet the unique needs of students and are a critical part of building a strong, collaborative team approach to nurturing and developing student strengths, which is essential to an equitable and inclusive classroom and/or school. This book is designed in such a way that it can serve as an anchor text for ongoing professional learning communities (PLCs) or whole staff professional development.

CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

Each chapter will introduce new strategies and skills for educators to begin implementing. Each strategy we share within this book was intentionally selected to support educators in creating a culturally responsive classroom, one grounded in high expectations for all students, and asset-based instruction where students take ownership of the cognitive load of their own learning. Additionally, the book is laid out so each chapter and the strategies within the chapters build on one another. Therefore, we encourage educators to start with the introduction and work through the book, trying strategies and building on existing practices.

To assist with ease of understanding and implementation, each chapter is laid out in similar fashion:

1. **Setting the Stage**—The Setting the Stage section is designed to provide educators with the background knowledge required to successfully implement the strategies within the chapter.
2. **Why It Works**—The Why It Works section dives into the effectiveness of the strategy using both a practitioner and research lens. An element of research used throughout this book is John Hattie's effect sizes. Effect sizes are defined as how much an intervention affects the outcome. The larger the number, the greater the connection between the intervention and outcome (McLeod, 2019). Hattie's work synthesizes thousands of research studies to show the impact of factors on educational outcomes for students. Therefore, these effect sizes serve as a way to understand supporting research in a quick snapshot, so more attention can be paid to providing educators with concrete steps to implement the strategy.
3. **Taking Action**—The Taking Action section explores the nuts and bolts of how to implement the strategy for all learners. In this section, we will share how we implemented the strategy by sharing how we approached it with our students. This includes sharing how we introduced and used the strategies within our own systems.
4. **Differentiation**—The Differentiation section provides concrete advice and strategies on how to differentiate for groups of learners typically found in classrooms. The focus of the differentiation strategies in this book relies less on

labels and more on student learning behaviors. This is intentional to help break away from using labels that put students into a box and often may limit adult expectations of students. It is important to note differentiation strategies are also embedded in other sections of the chapters.

5. **Assessment**—The Assessment section lifts up methods educators can use to monitor students' learning toward success criteria. Like differentiation, assessment strategies are also included in other sections of the chapters.
6. **Tips for Ongoing Success**—The Tips for Ongoing Success section provides practical tips for implementing the strategy or strategies in the chapter to support accelerating learning for all.
7. **Reflect, Stretch, and Implement**—The final section in each chapter is called Reflect, Stretch, and Implement, and it supports educators in their own personal reflections, goal setting, and utilization of the strategies.
8. **Conclusion**—The Conclusion section wraps up the chapter by re-grounding educators in how and why the strategy accelerates learning for all students.

When thinking about implementing these strategies into curriculum and instruction, it is important to think about whether the strategy is a Tier 1, 2, or 3 strategy. Tier 1 strategies focus on supporting all the students within the classroom. Tier 2 strategies focus on supporting small groups of students. Tier 3 strategies focus on supporting individual students. Throughout this book, strategies will be labeled as Tier 1, 2, or 3 to support educators with the implementation of these strategies. Most of these strategies are introduced as Tier 1 strategies because the goal is to raise high expectations for all students.

The strategies introduced in this book can be used across all classrooms and content areas. Throughout the chapters, examples will highlight how a particular strategy might be approached in a content area or particular grade level. When needed, specific considerations are added for primary educators because students in those grade levels are still learning to write and navigate school. For all educators, implementing any strategy relies heavily on professional knowledge of content as well as of who students are and their learning behaviors.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

Each chapter builds on previous chapters, and the same is true with each strategy. Each strategy in this book can be layered over one another to create a rigorous, authentic learning environment for students, thus creating a comprehensive framework of strategies utilized to accelerate learning for all.

CHAPTER 1—CREATING A FOUNDATION: IMPLEMENTING STUDENT VOICE

Students need educators who will build strong relationships and provide each student with the opportunity to discover the joy of learning and thinking at high levels through collaborating with one another. Hammond (2014) says it best: “Too often though, we ignore the quality of our interactions with students and instead focus primarily on the curriculum. In culturally responsive teaching relationships are as important as the curriculum” (p. 72). This chapter will focus on strategies to build those relationships with your students while ensuring their thinking is visible in a classroom environment conducive to accelerating learning for all.

CHAPTER 2—RIGOROUS ASSESSMENT

Rigorous assessment explores how to use assessment to understand how students learn while setting rigorous, standards-based goals and honoring the knowledge and skills all students bring to the classroom. Assessment is a key driving force for high expectations in equitable education. This chapter will focus on supporting educators in understanding important terminology, establishing high expectations, assessing learning behaviors, and evaluating and creating rigorous, standards-based assessments.

CHAPTER 3—CONCEPT-BASED INSTRUCTION

Concept-based instruction is a strategy where students continually connect their learning to an abstract concept. The concept and its accompanying generalizations can serve as a method for engaging all in developing skills to become autonomous learners. This strategy shifts the focus away from a content-only approach, instead focusing on understanding a determined concept and the relationships between the concept and the content-specific knowledge. In this chapter, educators

will explore how to effectively implement this instructional strategy within a classroom in support of accelerating learning for all students.

CHAPTER 4—THE DEPTH AND COMPLEXITY FRAMEWORK

The depth and complexity framework is composed of eleven prompts, each represented by a visual, to support critical thinking and differentiation. The prompts provide a common language across a classroom, grade level, and school, creating a shared understanding of what rigor in a classroom can and should look like and sound like. In this chapter, educators will learn how to implement the depth and complexity framework to provide a pathway for differentiation that is both efficient for the educator and effective for the students. Strategies include using the prompts individually, utilizing multiple prompts concurrently, developing questions, layering prompts over existing curriculum, and using them in conjunction with concept-based instruction.

CHAPTER 5—RIGOROUS QUESTIONING

Questioning is one of the most complex, high-leverage instructional strategies used daily in classrooms around the world. By intentionally thinking about and developing questioning methods within the classroom that support all students thinking at higher levels and engaging actively with critical thinking, all students can move into deeper learning, thus becoming owners of their learning. In this chapter, educators will explore ways to ensure the questioning strategies used are grounded in critical thinking and metacognition. Strategies will focus on keeping the cognitive load on the students, ensuring equitable accountability for all students, and supporting all students in moving from dependent learners to autonomous, engaged learners.

CHAPTER 6—CURRICULUM COMPACTING

Curriculum compacting is a long-standing strategy used most exclusively as a way to meet the needs of advanced and gifted students in which educators identify and remove content already mastered by the student. In this chapter, educators will be introduced to the strategy as a way to support the learning needs of all students and will walk readers through how to efficiently and effectively implement it within the classroom.

SPECIAL FEATURES AND TOOLS

This book contains many tools to support educators in implementing the strategies within each chapter. Beginning with the introduction, the Equity Lens Tool is introduced, which will be used throughout the book as a grounding practice both prior to implementation as well as during implementation. Each chapter also includes a tool for self-reflection and observation specific to each chapter's focus. These tools will provide the support necessary to effectively put these strategies into practice.

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Introduction

*A lifelong learner is one
who loves the moment,
seeks truth, friendship,
knowledge and wisdom.*

*This person accepts self and others,
and realizes the chance to make this a better world.*

*A lifelong learner discovers new paths
for growth, joy,
knowledge and friendship.*

The journey begins today . . .

—George Betts

SETTING THE STAGE

Consider the story of Tamra, who struggles with basketball. She has mixed feelings about the game but essentially, for a variety of reasons, must play. So, the coach observes Tamra and recognizes her lack of basic skills. To teach her the foundational skills she needs, the coach pulls Tamra off to the side with two other players, and they practice dribbling the ball. They dribble with their left hand. They dribble with their right hand. They dribble the ball with both hands. They walk and dribble. All practice long, they dribble. Practice after practice this continues. The coach checks in on them, makes sure the players' form is correct, and provides constructive feedback, all while balancing his time between the small group and the rest of the team. Tamra and the other two players in her group look up from their dribbling to watch the other players on the team practicing different drills and playing scrimmages, and Tamra thinks to herself that if she works even harder, she'll learn how to dribble and be able to join the rest of the team. She wants to belong, and she wants to be successful. But within a week, she begins to think

she'll never be good at basketball, so why try? Within a week and half, she tells her family she hates basketball, she isn't good at it, she'll never get it, and she wants to quit. She has given up on herself and doesn't believe hard work will ever equate to the skills and outcomes she desires.

It's always interesting to take expectations and instructional strategies and overlay them onto athletics rather than the classroom. How fictional is Tamra's scenario? We don't know a single educator who would stand by and agree Tamra should practice only dribbling. Would the coach observe Tamra beginning to become disengaged, raise expectations, and let her experience playing the game? Tamra's example lifts up the need for educators to know their students' strengths and areas of focus, provide them with access to high expectations regardless of their readiness levels, support them in developing a sense of belonging to fuel engagement and motivation, and engage with authentic applications utilizing what they know, understand, and are able to do.

Enter the strategies within this book. These specific strategies have been used for years to support high-performing students, but seldom have they been used to accelerate the learning of all students. In this book, we will focus on sharing the strategies we have found to be most impactful when used to support the learning and growth of all students. By expanding opportunities, high expectations, and access through the implementation of these strategies, educators can address the gaps and inequitable educational outcomes for the students they serve. The high expectations embedded within the strategies in this book will help students become autonomous learners. Betts and Kercher (1999) explain an autonomous learner "is one who solves problems through a combination of divergent and convergent thinking, and functions with minimal external guidance in selected areas of endeavor" (p. 14). For the purposes of this book, an autonomous learner refers to a student who has become independent, taking ownership of their own learning, and therefore is no longer reliant on the educator or their peers to guide their learning. This is especially critical in the work educators do to support students of color, culturally and linguistically diverse students, and students experiencing poverty (Hammond, 2014). This book will help educators implement strategies to put equity into action and truly change outcomes for all students. In this book, equity is defined as providing all students from the earliest of ages with authentic, engaging learning opportunities focused on strengths and accelerating learning rather than focusing only on deficits and filling gaps. "Equity is about understanding that who our students are, how they are,

where they are, and why they are can and must be leveraged to accelerate their learning outcomes” (Seale, 2022, p. 6). “To do this, as educators, we must know our students. We must know their strengths, their needs, their cultural background, their communities, and their families. We must know all their multiple identities that shape their every experience” (Davis et al., 2021, p. 5). Intermediate and middle school educators, never fear. It’s never too late to start implementing because these strategies can change the educational trajectory of your students regardless of their age.

EXAMINING IMPLICIT BIAS

The strategies within this book can and will change outcomes for students, but this cannot be done without acknowledging and examining our own bias. Understanding implicit bias, “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Staats, 2015, p. 29), will allow educators to eliminate the false ceilings, unnecessary barriers, and assumptions that limit the students being served. Confirmation bias, an “unconscious tendency to seek information that confirms our preexisting beliefs” (Staats, 2015, p. 31), can be a driving force behind many instructional decisions and result in both students and educators failing to meet their potential. To combat the implicit biases everyone brings with them into the classroom, educators must make a conscious effort to identify the implicit biases they hold. There are several online resources to assist in identifying implicit biases, and one is from Project Implicit through Harvard University, which can be found at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>. They have a variety of tests to understand personal implicit biases across a multitude of topics to build personal awareness to promote growth.

Once identified, educators can focus on building their understanding and learning more about groups or individuals for whom stereotypes or biases may be driving initial reactions or responses. A commitment to acknowledge and intentionally reflect on bias is necessary to change outcomes for students. The Equity Lens Tool in the next section will support this ongoing practice of reflection and mindful recognition of implicit bias.

EQUITY LENS

Implementing the strategies in this book will positively affect your students’ learning, and when educators approach implementation with an equity lens, the impact grows exponentially.

Culturally responsive teaching, which requires a fundamental shift to an asset-based approach to instruction, is imperative at all times in all classrooms. The strategies in this book enable educators to intentionally embed students' cultures in curriculum and instruction, identify and target potential barriers that negatively affect student growth, reflect on biases and assumptions, and so much more. To support this, educators should use the Equity Lens Tool in Figure 0.1 before and during each strategy. The Equity Lens Tool is a set of guiding questions to help educators as they begin planning, and these questions also serve as reflection points along the implementation journey. As it is a value add for every strategy, we have embedded it into the introduction rather than into each chapter.

FIGURE 0.1 • Equity Lens Tool

This Equity Lens Tool should be used when implementing each of the strategies introduced in this book. The questions serve to provide you with space to reflect on your systems, instructional practices, and curriculum. It will also support you in exploring ways to shift your instruction and classroom management to ensure that all students have the opportunity for their cultural values to be incorporated into the classroom and for their strengths to be nurtured. It is when these conditions exist that learning can be accelerated with students moving from dependent to autonomous.

As you begin planning for implementing the strategy, reflect on each question, and take notes in the second column. Revisit this tool as you begin implementing the strategy and throughout implementation as touchpoints to help guide your growth. Add additional notes as needed throughout the process.

REFLECTIVE PROMPTS	REFLECTION/NOTES
What systemic barriers might limit the impact of this strategy? Are there barriers to making this strategy inclusive? (These might include lack of technology or internet connection, rigid curricular or instructional guidelines, etc.)	
What barriers might arise for my students when I implement this strategy? How will I eliminate these barriers? (These might include lack of independence, readiness levels below grade level, etc.)	
What cultural values are present in the classroom/school? How do the students' cultural values align to this strategy?	
Looking at the resources utilized within the strategies, which resources act as mirrors for students (where they can see themselves) and which resources act as windows for students (where they can see others)?	

What data do I have to use in my decision-making for instructional practice? Am I using data to confirm my assumptions or broaden my understanding of my students? What data am I missing to ensure I have a full picture of my students? What qualitative data have I gathered or do I have to support the quantitative data?	
What does success look like for my students, and how will I monitor it? What does our data tell me about which students are thriving with current instructional strategies and who is not?	
What implicit biases and personal experiences might I have that I need to be mindful of as I implement this strategy? How can I leverage my experiences to create an inclusive classroom?	
What assumptions might I hold about students? How do these assumptions affect my instructional practices and expectations? How might these assumptions be affecting my students' performance?	
How have students and families been included in meaningful ways to support learning?	
Who can serve as an accountability partner to support my ongoing efforts to build and/or strengthen equitable classroom/school practices while implementing this strategy?	

To engage all students in their learning, the strategies in this book must be implemented with an equity lens as a guide, as widespread as possible, and available to all learners. We must change our thinking from *Once you have shown me you can, you get these specialized opportunities* to *You will continually have these specialized opportunities to show what you are capable of when given the chance and the level of support you might need*. Remaining with the status quo, instructional practices focused on remediation will continue to perpetuate current gaps and inequities within our school system. The loss of human potential and talent through disengagement and disenfranchisement in our schools affects every aspect of our society. The education system has big problems to solve and needs everyone's best thinking to solve them. This includes all our students' best thinking, present and future.

Let's recall Tamra. In the example, she had yet to be provided with high expectations, authentic application, and the

opportunities to try other skills. Maybe if she had, an untapped talent for defense or shooting would have been discovered. Tamra will never become a better basketball player by spending all her time working on remedial skills she is not passionate about. She is a dependent learner, reliant on the coach for guidance and direction, unable to move beyond the basics because she has not been given the tools to do so. Even basketball players who are not the most skilled can learn to love the game, and, once they do, their engagement and effort to learn skyrocket. Wilt Chamberlain and Shaquille O'Neal were arguably two superstars of their day in the NBA, yet both are notorious for being horrible free throw shooters. Wilt scored more than 100 points in one game yet only shot 51.1% from the free throw line. Shaq was not much better with a free throw percentage of 52.7%. Not unlike Tamra, these two superstars of the game had areas of their game that were not as strong as others. Yet, their other skills were recognized and nurtured, allowing them to develop and grow into superstars of the game. Imagine if they had been relegated to practicing only free throws. The strategies in this book will develop students' strengths so that they can become superstars in their own right.