"The first day of school was the worst day of my life": Best Practices in Inclusive Education for Refugee Youth with Disabilities

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Keywords: inclusive education, disability studies in education, refugees with disabilities, intersectionality, English Language Learners, presumption of competence, co-teaching, universal design for learning, classroom community, peer supports.

Abstract:

Refugee youth with disabilities are among the most vulnerable populations in American public schools and around the world. These students carry multiple labels (e.g., English Language Learner, disabled, poor, etc.) that may or may not be visible. This chapter utilizes first person narratives of refugee youth who carry such intersecting labels and identities in order to equip educators with the tools and strategies to facilitate access to and participation in general education classrooms. Rooted in a culturally responsive, disability studies philosophy, the chapter's recommendations (1) presume competence; (2) build classroom communities; (3) adopt co-teaching models; and (4) implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are accompanied by concrete, implementation strategies to ground theory in practice. This chapter privileges the voices of refugee youth, and recommendations come from their schooling experiences in order to support the work of administrators, teachers and supplementary service providers in U.S. public schools.

This chapter grew out of a series of interviews both authors conducted with refugee youth who carry multiple labels (e.g., English language learner, disabled, etc.). In the excerpt below "Safiyo," a teenager originally from Kenya, recalls memories of her first days of school in the United States:

Brent: So can you tell me about what your first day of school was like?
Safiyo: (pauses) My first day of school…
B: What is your first memory of school?
S: I still remember everything I go through, but my first day of school was the worst day of my life.
B: Really?
S: Because I didn't know anything and then when like the teachers are talking to each other I feel like I don't understand them but I feel like something like you know, and then I used to cry and I didn't know how to say bathroom like when I went to use the bathroom.

Recent estimates from the World Health Organization (2011) place the number of refugees with disabilities between 2.3 and 3.3 million, with a third of those being children

and youth. These vulnerable individuals exist on the margins of society and experience life at the intersections of gender, age, nation and disability (Reilly, 2008). According to the Women's Refugee Commission (2013), refugees with disabilities are "among the most hidden and neglected of all displaced people" (p. 1) and often at an increased risk of abuse, violence, exploitation and exclusion from humanitarian services (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)(2011). According to a United Nations report on international migration, more than 200 million people immigrated to more developed regions of the world in 2009 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009). This immigration wave accounted for 12.5% of the foreign-born population in the United States (Migration Policy Institute, 2009; United States Census Bureau, 2010). Of this population, it is reported that between 7% and 10% have identified disabilities (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2008). Refugees may have also acquired invisible disabilities (e.g., post-traumatic stress syndrome) as a result of being displaced (Bradley & Tawfiq, 2006; Loutan, Bollini, De Haan & Gariazzo, 1999; Silove, 2000; Dekel, Solomon & Bleich, 2004). Though research shows that refugees with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable populations on the planet, even after relocation, they face further marginalization and oppression in access to a high quality, equitable education (McBrien, 2005.) Because many refugee youth enter the U.S. public school system with limited English proficiency because English is not their first language, they are almost automatically given labels of "English Language Learners," (ELLs) funneled into supplementary language programs and marked from the start as needing to "catch up" to grade level expectations and performance (McBrien, 2005). These refugee youth may carry multiple labels (e.g., ELL, disabled, poor, etc.) and these

labels may or may not be visible. However, many of these students are included in general education classrooms and can be better supported with curriculum and pedagogy rooted in a culturally responsive, Disability Studies philosophy. With multiple points of entry and resettlement across the United States, disabled refugee populations need more opportunities to access general education services and educators require more nuanced understandings of the strategies and supports to facilitate this.

The field of Disability Studies grew out of Disability Rights activist movements in the 1960s and 70s as an academic framework that coalesced the lived, shared experiences of people with disabilities and relocated the "problem" in society, not in individual bodies (Charlton, 1998). As a counter-narrative that continues to evolve, Disability Studies challenges the dominant and historical understanding of disability as deficiency, incompetence, deviancy, or simply based in a pathological conceptualization of bodily difference (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2010; Ferri, 2006; Humphrey, 2000; Linton, 1998; Linton, 2005; Marks, 1997; Taylor, 2006; Young & Mintz, 2008). However, it is questionable to what extent Disability Studies' ideas are actively implemented or realized within schools and if teachers are adequately trained on how to do so. More often, historically based understandings of disability inform the workings of our schools, our systems of care and our civic spaces. Erevelles (2005) echoes this challenge, noting that the continued discrimination enacted against the five million students with disabilities in U.S. public schools, serves to contain them in special education programs that are "both separate and unequal" (Erevelles, 2005, p. 65). Additionally, divisions in teacher training programs and professional development initiatives persist (e.g., special education vs. general education vs. education of "diverse"

populations), creating and maintain different communities of practice for teachers of "different" students (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2013).

Increasingly disturbing trends show that children of color, or students that could be identified as culturally and linguistically diverse, are overrepresented in special education in the United States. That is, African-American, Hispanic and Native American students are more likely to be referred to or placed in special education programs, when compared with their White or Asian-American peers (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Ferri & Connor, 2005, 2008; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). Furthermore, these students are more likely to be educated in substantially separate (e.g., segregated) settings. In the specific case of Hispanic students who are identified as "English Language Learners" or as "Limited English Proficiency" (ELL or LEP), data show that in elementary school, they are most often placed in segregated English as a Second Language (ESL) settings and, as they move into high school, are also significantly overrepresented in special education classrooms (Connor & Ferri, 2005; Minow, 2001; Yates & Ortiz, 1998). However, within all of the overrepresentation/disproportionate representation literature, it's unclear whether these trends include *refugee* youth of color with disabilities. Teacher perceptions of refugee youth (many of whom are also students of color) are often consistent with "American Dream" rhetoric—they're read as working hard to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and take advantage of their newfound opportunities (Keengwe, 2010; Nieto, 2005), while American-born children of color face consistently deficit-based, pathologized assumptions about their value, work ethic and potential (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Nieto 2005). Therefore, our approach for this chapter is to contextualize specific

teacher competencies and implementable practices to best serve students who may experience multiple oppressions or carry multiple labels (e.g., refugee, disability, ELL).

We've culled our recommendations from contemporary research on best practices in inclusive, culturally responsive education scaffolded by Disability Studies values, and have placed the intended beneficiaries of our work in the role of expert informants, asking refugee youth what *they think* makes an ideal learning environment, a great teacher, a supportive classroom, etc. Each recommendation below was gleaned from qualitative interviews with refugee youth ages 8-18, who were resettled with their families in a northeastern U.S. city and attend urban public schools. Our corresponding strategies for how to implement said recommendations (detailed in the tables below) are purposefully broad to allow for refinement depending on the individual educational contexts of our audience. They are: (1) Presume competence; (2) Build classroom communities; (3) Adopt co-teaching models; and (4) Implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The chapter concludes with new questions to ask of future research and scholarship about refugee youth with disabilities and implications for educators.

"They thought I didn't speak English": Presuming Competence in all Students

"Amara"[1] is a spunky thirteen-year-old middle schooler who was resettled in the U.S. in 2009. Born in Kenya to Somali parents, she lives with her five siblings in a northeastern U.S. city and attends an urban public school. Bounding into our interview

[1] All names and other identifying information have been changed to ensure confidentiality

session wearing a colorful hijab and athletic sneakers, Amara shared with us what it was like entering second grade, knowing little English[2]:

> Amara: *... I really didn't do my homework because I was like, 'What's the point?'*
> Brent: What do you mean?
> A: *I really didn't know what they were talking about and never paid attention in second grade.*
> B: So you didn't do homework, didn't pay attention. And did that help you or hurt you in school?
> A: *It was like nothing because the teachers they thought I didn't speak English at all so they excused me from everything*.

Amara's recollection of not participating in her second grade class is illustrative: she tells us she did not pay attention and did not do her homework, but, as she understands it, suffered no consequences. Though her last comment was delivered with a bit of bravado, Amara's experience is representative of many other students with whom we spoke who were also non-native English speakers: teachers harbored persistently low expectations of students marked as somehow deficient, particularly because of perceived language ability: *"they thought I didn't speak English at all so they excused me from everything."*

In keeping with the Disability Studies tenet that necessitates a "values-based" philosophy, our first recommendation is: presume and construct competence when teaching all students regardless of labels they carry**.** This concept, originating in the work of Biklen (1990), presumes that people with disability labels are intelligent and competent individuals who have the same aspirations and goals of people without disabilities. Within an educational context, "the presumption of competence does not require the teacher's ability to prove its existence or validity in advance; rather it is a

[2] The authors wish to note that although all of our participants arrived in the U.S. with what would be considered "limited English proficiency," and thus were placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, they were all fluent in their native language and sometimes a second or even third language.

stance, an outlook, a framework for educational engagement" (Biklen & Burke, 2007, p. 168). Students do not have to prove their worth to be a part of any inclusive classroom community. Presuming competence is a long-held, core belief within Disability Studies, admonishing educators that, "if you are interested in seeing another's competence, it helps to look for it" (Biklen & Kliewer, 2006, p. 184). Ashby (2012) extends this concept beyond simply a mindset that educators must intrinsically possess and proposes that *constructing* competence is the implementable action via which educators can intentionally create an environment in which all students can showcase their intelligence. Finally, we propose that presuming and constructing student competence, no matter the labels, identities or histories with which they enter your classroom, is the best way to always maintain the "least dangerous assumption" about a student's educational future. Building on Donnellan (1994) and Jorgensen (2005), the most responsible way to ensure that educators deliver the highest quality material to any student is, in absence of any other reliable information, assume that every student can learn the general education material. Many refugee youth that enter American public schools arrive with a host of challenges (both visible and invisible) (Bradley & Tawfiq, 2006; Loutan et al, 1999) and it is the responsibility of teachers, administrators and supplemental service providers to decide what their least dangerous assumption will be and what potential consequences could befall students if they are underestimated.

Table 13.1 details strategies to help educators presume and construct student competence and descriptions of what that might look like in a classroom.

Table 13.1: Presuming Competence in the Classroom

Presuming and Constructing Competence	Description

Strategy	
Examine attitudes	Practice saying, "How can this work?" "How can this child be successful?"
Question Stereotypes	Be honest and self-reflexive about the beliefs you may harbor about children with specific disability labels, from certain regions of the world, or wearing traditional garb: try to view each student as an individual, with his or her own unique history that may or may not confirm your own previously-held beliefs.
Establish Strengths-Based Goals	Instead of focusing on what students can't do, create individualized student profiles that detail a student's strengths, gifts, interests and talents with corresponding strategies to realize that student's best self
Maintain the "Least Dangerous Assumption"	When presented with a student with unknown skills, competencies and perhaps with an unknown history, ask yourself: "how would I like to be treated someday if I was unable to communicate or demonstrate my competence?" Or, "How would I want others to treat my child, if he or she were in the same situation?"
Create Opportunities for Success	Institute varied means of response for class participation such as: turn and talks, response cards, drawings, stand and deliver, or guided notes
Adapted from: Ashby, 2012; Jorgensen 2005; Kasa-Hendrickson & Buswell, 2007; Kluth & Dimon-Borowski, 2003.)	

"Learn from each other": Building Classroom Communities

Yasir is a shy 17-year old high school student who lives for soccer and has been in the United States since 2008. Yasir's family moved to the United States from Somalia, relocating to a city in the northeast after two and a half years to be closer to their friends in a Somali refugee community. When he began school in the United States he received ESL services and would frequently ask teachers to help him improve his English after school. Yasir loves math because he sees a lot of "real life" in it. Outside of school, you can find Yasir running track, playing baseball and refining his soccer skills. He dreams of becoming a math teacher…that is, if he does not become a professional soccer player first. Yasir opened up to us about his experiences being bullied (e.g., students threatening

physical violence, physically pushing and swearing) and provided suggestions on how to get students to connect in more positive ways in school:

> Brent: What about with the bullying? Is there anything the teachers can do to help kids understand each other better so they're not fighting so much?
> *Yasir: Yeah just being like talking to each other, putting them in groups.*
> B: Putting kids in groups.
> *Y: Yeah, learn [from] each other.*
> B: So you're saying teachers need to make sure that kids are working in groups. And what would that do for students if they're in groups together?
> *Y: Yeah, if they don't like each other they can ask the teacher can you change this, can I go to a different group?*

What Yasir alludes to in this vignette is that working in small, diverse groups in schools provided him opportunities to get to know and work with a variety of students in his classes. This increased and varied contact with his peers gives Yasir the opportunity to learn alongside them, to get to know about their interests, to learn what they have in common, to learn what their strengths are and to co-construct a sense of community. When community is created and fostered in inclusive classrooms, students can learn to act as natural supports for one another. When students mentor one another, teachers are then able to reach other students who may require extra support in any given lesson.

A prerequisite for developing a classroom ecology that encourages natural, peer supports and promotes community is one that is first and foremost, inclusive **(**Janney & Snell, 2006**).** For general education classrooms to be welcoming and safe for *all* students, regardless of the labels they carry, teachers need to construct learning environments that value diversity and acknowledge many ways of knowing. In this context, "welcoming and safe" means students learn in classrooms that encourage academic and personal risk taking. Within these spaces, teachers and students encourage diversity and difference without fearing marginalization or violence. Inclusive classrooms are not spaces where

students have to earn their membership. Sapon-Shevin (2007) calls this "unconditional acceptance" (p. 148). With this perspective, students are welcomed (and anticipated) as they are, with differences and similarities openly discussed and celebrated. Norm Kunc (1992), defines inclusive education as:

> …the valuing of diversity within the human community. When inclusive education is fully embraced, we abandon the idea that children have to become "normal" in order to contribute to the world…We begin to look beyond typical ways of becoming valued members of the community, and in doing so, begin to realize the achievable goal of providing all children with an authentic sense of belonging. (pp. 38-39)

When diversity and equity are foundational in classrooms, students can focus on learning and developing individualized academic and personal skills. In such classrooms, students use person-first (or identity-first language) when referring to peers (Sinclair, 2013) and feel safe participating actively in all aspects of the classroom. All students, regardless of labels, decide the norms of inclusion (Kriete, 2003). They also have ample opportunities to collaborate on mutual, non-competitive goals. Inclusive class activities are focused on flexible cooperative learning activities where peer-to-peer teaching and interaction is encouraged (Browder, Wakeman, Flowers, Rickelman, Pugalee & Karvonen, 2007; Hunt, Staub, Alwell, & Goetz, 1994).

Authentic relationships develop when peers interact with each other often. Natural supports develop, which can also lead to better academic outcomes for all students including: higher grades, class participation and assignment completion (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Janney & Snell, 2006). Natural supports are reflexive and all students receive and provide them at various times throughout the school year (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Such supports can be embedded throughout the day in a variety of groupings and across content areas. For natural supports to be successful, explicit social skills must be

taught (e.g., turn taking, sharing, listening, appropriate touch and being considerate). Such social skills have the potential to teach inclusive social behavior and disrupt existing social hierarchies of power (Copeland & Cosbey, 2009; Schwartz, Staub, Peck, & Gallucci, 2006; Quirk, 2009). When a Disability Studies philosophy that is characterized by acceptance of diversity is applied to classrooms, spaces are created where students have frequent opportunities to learn about each other as well as content. Thus, *all* students in that co-constructed space benefit, not just students who carry multiple labels. Table 13.2 provides community-building strategies that can be implemented to help promote peer-to-peer interaction, as well as strategies consistent with culturally responsive pedagogy.

Table 13.2: Strategies that Promote Peer Interaction

Community Building Strategy	Description
Home Groups	Place students in groups of 3-5 that reflect classroom diversity. Students come up with a creative name/chant/handshake for their home group. These groups can be used for academic and/or social activities in class. To make this more culturally relevant, teachers can ask students to come up with native language names when forming home groups.
Morning/Daily Meeting	Create a 5-10 minute time where students have a chance to share or contribute to the class. This can be something personal or academic. The main idea is that everyone has a chance to learn from each other and have equal chances to contribute to class discussions. Student prompts can be focused on sharing personal details about home and cultural life and native language to make meetings more culturally relevant.
Inner-Outer Circle	Students are placed either in an inner circle (facing out) or an outer circle (facing in). Students line up so that everyone has a partner. Students share a fact/greeting/etc. related to the teacher's lesson. Students can practice phrases in different languages to tap into the cultural diversity of the class. Once the interaction is done, the outer circle of students rotates according to the teacher's directions.
Class Rules	Create class dialogue about class rules and expectations. Every student has a chance to contribute to the formation of the rules. Rules should inform students what to do, be stated in the

	positive and be non-competitive. Students can also work in collaborative small groups to translate the rules into the different languages represented in their class or align with different cultural norms.
New and Good	Place students in a circle so everyone can see each other. Every student has a chance to share something that is either "new" or "good" in their lives. Class rules should be referenced prior to the start of this activity so students feel safe sharing personal details with their peers. Topics and prompts can vary to represent the various diversities represented in the class.
Lifelines	Each student receives a piece of paper with a line on it. On that line, students place a series of dots that represent significant life events. Students have a chance to share their lifelines with the class as the teacher sees fit. Lifelines are placed on the wall. Students can do a gallery walk of the lifelines and ask each other questions related to peer diversity.
Cultural Artifact Share	Each student has a chance to bring in a "cultural artifact" to share with the class. The artifact is not something the students have to go out and buy. It should be an object, word, song, etc. that represents their life in some way. Students can share in a variety of ways (e.g., Inner-Outer Circle, Home Groups, Daily Meeting, etc.).
Numbered Heads Together	Students are placed in groups. Each student is given a number. The teacher poses a question and the group collaboratively comes up with the answer. The teacher calls out a number and the student with that number is responsible for sharing the answer. Every student has to know the answer and be prepared to share since they do not know what number the teacher will call. Topics can be tied to injustice, prejudice and various forms of discrimination.
Jigsaw	A large amount of class content is broken into chunks. Groups of students are responsible for becoming "experts" on certain chunks of content. These experts work together in groups to research the content. These groups share out to the whole class. The process repeats until everyone is exposed to content from every group. Content can be built on students' diverse strengths and experiences and directly address power relations and how they shape the world.

Adapted from:

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 47*, 465-491.

Nieto, S. (2013). *Finding joy in teaching students of diverse backgrounds: Culturally responsive and socially just practices in U.S. classrooms.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Sapon-Shevin, M. (2007). *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Silberman, M. (1996). *Active learning: 101 strategies to teach any subject*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Thousand, J. Villa, R. & Nevin, A. (2007). *Differentiating instruction: Collaborative planning and teaching for universally designed learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

"An Extra Teacher": Co-Teaching Models to Support Diverse Classrooms

Ashkir is a precocious and playful fourth grader who has no problem telling it like it is. He was born into a large Somali family in Kenya. When asked about his first memory of school, he immediately blurted out, *"REESES!"* He is open about his love affair with candy. He speaks Somali and English fluently and understands bits of Swahili and Arabic. He admittedly gets into some trouble at school, but doesn't mind because it is usually because he is trying to get a laugh out of someone. During the interview, Ashkir was asked if he had any advice for teachers. He adamantly stated, "Give us more free time!"

One of the themes that emerged in our interview data was the value of co-teaching. Across our participants, students identified multiple adults in the classroom as indicative of things that "worked" for them. Specifically for refugee youth, students with disabilities, or students who carry multiple labels, individual time with a teacher or paraeducator becomes highly valuable. Here, Ashkir articulates this recommendation:

> *Ashkir: If you have two teachers or [an] extra teacher, you should take one teacher [when] another teacher is teaching [and] they should like, whoever she sees reading books or not focusing, tell them to put it away or put the books down.*
> Brent: So, if you have two teachers then both of them should be helping kids?
> *A: One teacher should teach for one lesson and the other teacher should look out for the people who are not listening.*

In this quote, Ashkir unknowingly touches on the interdisciplinary aspect of Disability Studies when he describes his wish to see his teachers co-teach (Goodley & Davis, 2011). He acknowledges that if there are two teachers in a classroom, one can

teach, while the other supports the class in other ways. He is indirectly referencing the "one-teach, one-drift" approach to co-teaching (Friend & Cook, 2003). Though Ashkir describes one teacher managing "off-task" student behavior, he acknowledges the value in having more than one teacher in the classroom at a time and how that can support students in variety of ways.

As Ashkir alluded to above, a classroom that implements Disability Studies values must be interdisciplinary (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012). This approach to understanding and supporting disability has clear implication for the classroom. Inclusive learning communities begin when teachers value collaboration with many people in their community of practice (e.g., administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, students, parents, community members) (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003). Co-teaching is one way of bringing these communities of practice into the classroom. Co-teaching is defined as "a delivery approach when a classroom teacher and a special education teacher share responsibility for planning, delivering and evaluating instruction for a group of learners" (Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993, p. 8). Effective co-teaching requires teachers to think beyond traditional teaching roles. For example, co-teaching requires general education and special education teachers to be responsible for *all* students. In this model, *all* students are educated in general education classrooms, with a special education and general education teacher co-planning everything from lessons, to instruction, classroom management and grading (Murawski & Deiker, 2004).

When discussing the advantages of co-teaching, Murawski and Deiker (2004) state:

> One of the major benefits of co-teaching is that teachers bring different areas of expertise. These diverse skills are helpful during the planning stage, as both

> educators can find ways to use their strengths to ensure that the lesson is appropriately differentiated for a heterogeneous class. (p. 55)

Aside from students receiving instruction from teachers with different expertise and perspectives, co-teaching also reduces stigma for learners with multiple labels and leads to the creation of more understanding and respectful learning environments for all students (DeLuca, Borman, Jump, Ratzlaff & Nystrom, 2010; Henderson & Ferreria, 2014). Similar to Yasir's example above, when students interact with one another in various mixed groupings they have increased opportunity to interact with and connect with one another. These groupings include: one-teach-one support, one-teach-one drift, alternative teaching, parallel teaching, station teaching and team teaching (Friend & Cook, 2003). Co-teaching similarly increases student-to-teacher interactions.

Though teachers often cite lack of planning time and discomfort when starting co-teaching relationships, with adequate administrative support and on-going experience with the approach, teachers have reported students benefiting from this model (Henderson & Ferreria, 2014; Magiera & Zigmond 2005; Murawski & Dieker, 2004; York-Barr, Bacharach, Salk, Frank & Benick, 2004). Co-teaching is one interdisciplinary approach that supports *all* students in inclusive classrooms, not just students who carry labels. However, teacher training programs have historically separated strategies for "special education" populations versus strategies for culturally and linguistically diverse students, when in fact they can inform and buttress each other (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2013; Santamaria, 2009). The table below outlines a variety of co-teaching models teachers can implement as they move toward a more inclusive, culturally responsive model in their schools. Specifically, Table 13.3 provides examples of how co-

teaching can be used to in ways to reach students with disabilities, while also accounting for language and culture.

Table 13.3: Co-Teaching Possibilities

Co-Teaching Model	Description
One Teach, One Drift	In this model, one teacher is responsible for delivering substantive academic content while the other teacher drifts around the class and supports students as needed. This partnership may be comprised of one general education teacher and one ESL teacher or one special education teacher.
Team Teaching	With a team teaching approach, both teachers share responsibility for planning and delivering instruction. This approach typically takes time to master and requires a lot of trust, planning time and in depth of each teacher's teaching philosophy. When planning, teachers should specifically tap into student backgrounds in order to make content more meaningful and relevant to class discussions and assignments.
Parallel Teaching	With a parallel teaching approach, each teacher takes half the class and teaches the same content simultaneously. Both teachers must plan instruction together to ensure they are presenting the same material in the same way. This approach allows more meaningful teacher-student interactions and the integration of cooperative learning opportunities.
Alternative Teaching	Alternative teaching involves one group of students receiving more individualized instruction (e.g., re-teaching) out of the room. This allows for each group of students to receive instruction at a pace that meets their academic needs for that particular lesson. To address cultural and linguistic diversity, individualized instruction can focus on creating focused cooperative learning activities that use multicultural literature and increased student-teacher interactions to practice reading, writing and expression.
One Teach, One Observe	This model is used when observable data needs to be taken by one teacher in the classroom. In this model, one teacher delivers the instruction while the other teacher records data. The teacher who is observing can be specifically looking at ways to make content more accessible (e.g., technology, current events, realia, simplified text) for the diversity represented in the classroom.
Station Teaching	In station teaching, teachers take turns introducing their station to the whole class. Lessons can be planned together or separately depending on student needs. Students are broken up into groups and rotate through each station. In these

	stations, teachers can use cultural artifacts to initiate conversations about home life and relevant cultural topics.

Adapted from:

Friend, M., Cook, L., Hurley-Chamberlain, D., & Shamberger, C. (2010). Co-teaching: An illustration of the complexity of collaboration in special education. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *20*(1), 9-27.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.

Nieto, S. (2013). *Finding joy in teaching students of diverse backgrounds: Culturally responsive and socially just practices in U.S. classrooms.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Ramirez, P. C., & Jimenez-Silva, M. (2014). Secondary English Learners: Strengthening Their Literacy Skills Through Culturally Responsive Teaching. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 50*(2), 65-69.

"When I say the word, then he could say it after me": Implementing Universal Design for Learning Principles

Ianna and Zeinab are classmates who attend an urban middle school in the northeastern United States, having been resettled from Somalia and Kenya, respectively, about five years ago. Though both young ladies independently identified each other as friends (they were interviewed separately), we could easily envision Zeinab as the proverbial leader, the "alpha" friend if you will. Effervescent in her delivery, Zeinab's responses to our questions were detailed and pointed. She was keen to share with us what makes a great teacher or a helpful learning environment, as well as amusing snapshots of life in her shoes.

> Katherine: Did you ever see snow before you came here?
> Zeinab: *We only had every day all summer years.*
> K: Oh really? What did you think the first time you saw snow?
> S: *I thought it was salt! Everyone thought it was salt. We were like, 'Why is salt coming from the sky?' Then we touched it and it was freezing, and then we went back inside* (All laugh.)

Contrastingly, Ianna didn't begin to meet the interviewer's eye until later in the session and responded with brevity as she intently studied the recording device in the

center of the table. However both girls were extremely thoughtful, excited by schooling and provided invaluable input to this chapter.

As noted earlier, much of our questioning centered around garnering input from our participants about what "works" for them in school from course content to support resources to teacher qualities, etc. Zeinab and Ianna both had a lot to say about how they each learn best—and what's best for Zeinab is not best for Ianna. These two friends and classmates, with similar histories and family constellations could not be more different in terms of their educational needs. Thus a third theme that emerged in our data was Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**.** Granted, none of our participants explicitly used this term, but again and again, students identified competencies and strategies consistent with UDL principles as illustrative of what "works" for them as refugee youth.

Curb cuts, wide entryways, ramps or automatic door-opening buttons are features of a universally designed building. In addition to providing access for wheelchair users, persons with service animals or individuals with other disabilities, these features enhance the building's usability for persons without identified disabilities, but who benefit from this "universal design" such as: parents or caretakers with strollers, delivery persons with dollies or office furniture, or to facilitate ease of snow removal. The aims of universal design are to "…eliminat[e] barriers through initial designs that consider the needs of diverse people, rather than overcoming barriers later through individual adaptation" (Rose, Harbour, Johnston, Daley, & Abarbanell, 2006, p. 136). Likewise, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) applies the abovementioned concepts to education, constructing learning environments with not only accessible information but also accessible pedagogy (Rose, Harbour, Johnston, Daley, & Abarbanell, 2006). The three

principles of UDL state that in order for classroom curriculum to be accessed by the widest variety of students, it must be developed with flexibility and adaptability in mind, as accomplished by: 1) multiple means of representation, 2) multiple means of expression and 3) multiple means of engagement (Rose & Meyer 2002; Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), 2011). Knowing students well and anticipating as well as planning for diversity from the onset is critical to establishing universally designed, inclusive classrooms (Rose & Meyer, 2002; CAST, 2009). Planning UDL lessons means asking: What materials and methods will be used to teach? What are multiple ways students can demonstrate their knowledge? Why is learning important? Furthermore, Jorgensen, McSheehan, Schuh and Sonnenmeier (2012) propose that in inclusive classrooms,

> Curriculum and instruction are designed to accommodate the full range of student diversity based on universal design principles. Individualized supports are provided to students with significant disabilities to enable them to fully participate and make progress within the general education curriculum. Students learn functional or life skills within typical routines in the general education classroom or other inclusive activities and environments. (p. 6)

As exhibited from the data excerpts below and consistent throughout our interviews with refugee youth, we discovered themes characteristic with UDL philosophy and principles.

For example, Ianna explains how multiple means of representation were integral in supporting her English language acquisition.

> Ianna: *I want help with writing*.
> Brent: How would you need help with writing? What could the teacher do to help you with writing?
> I: *She writes it on the board.*
> B: Okay, so write on the board. What else? What else would you need help with in writing?
> I: *Reading.*
> B: Oh, so you said the new kid that's coming from Somalia should also get help with reading. How would you get help with reading?

I: *When I say the word then he could say it after me.*

Here Ianna notes that both visual and auditory supports were necessary in her English language development, exemplifying the first UDL principle of "multiple means of representation"—delivering content that touches on different modalities such as seeing, hearing or touch (CAST, 2011).

We asked Zeinab about her preferred subjects in school and though she confessed that she liked all of them, Science emerged as a favorite:

> Zeinab: *I pick Science.*
> Katherine: You would? You're the fourth or fifth person that we've talked to whose favorite subject is Science. Why is it your favorite?
> Z: *Sometime like we make our own juices, [we learn] how to make it so later we can make our own. And how like…sometimes… you know like a thing, I don't know what it's called, but it looks like snow but it's not. We made that in class and stuff.*

Though Zeinab did not always possess the words to name classroom activities, her facility in describing content that's hands-on, participatory, varied and active, demonstrates that she benefits from a universally designed curriculum that is flexible in how it allows her to engage with it and demonstrate her learning (See chart below re: principles 2 and 3 of UDL.) Additionally, while Ianna describes structured support as the means by which she prefers to engage with new content (e.g. writing vocabulary words on the board and saying them out loud), Zeinab is clearly an active learner and is motivated by activities where she can exert some autonomy and is motivated by discovery:

> Katherine: Do you ever do projects in Science class?
> Zeinab: *Yes like at the end of the year we're going to make rockets and then throw them in the air. We're going to shoot up in the air to see which one did better and who goes higher and stuff. And then when it comes down you grab it and then go back at the end of the line*.

K: Oh wow, that sounds cool. And is that a project you do by yourself or with other people?
Z: *You can do it with a partner. I don't know yet, but you can do it with a partner or you can do it by yourself I think.*

Though the principles of UDL are inherently adaptable to any cultural group (it's flexible in its very design), it warrants mentioning that creating a universally designed classroom that is responsive to diverse learners with diverse languages, histories and cultures must be more intentional (Santamaria, 2009). Table 13.4 below details the three tenets of UDL that are also culturally responsive, with a corresponding description of what that might look like in the classroom.

Table 13.4: Universal Design Ideas for the Classroom

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Strategy	Description
Multiple Means of Representation	Develop content delivery that utilizes different means of delivery. For example, in a middle school Civics lesson about "How a Bill becomes a Law," varying presentation format from traditional stand and deliver/lecture with a PowerPoint or Prezi, to video presentation of content (a film or web-based video); audio (an NPR clip or podcast); or a more creative format, sharing a comic strip version of the process. Develop a parallel lesson in a non-U.S. cultural context to allow for comparison.
Multiple Means of Action and Expression	Allow students to "show what they know" in differentiated ways such as: raising hands and contributing individual responses; doing a five minute "free write" where the class reflects on recently delivered content; small group work with assigned duties and one "reporter" to share with the entire class; a participatory "Tweeting" session where students have to develop questions, comments and share "main ideas" in less than 140 characters. Build in opportunities for students to participate in their native language; placing a culturally diverse student in the role of "expert," and highlighting points of congruence or divergence between various languages.
Multiple Means of Engagement	As students are all motivated to engage with learning by different factors, necessitating a pedagogy that

	challenges and excites learners, or elicits student interest via a variety of means. Teachers can achieve this by: varying classroom decision-making and goal-setting (sometimes set by the teacher, sometimes arrived at collaboratively by the entire class), engaging the students in culturally-relevant material or age-appropriate incentives and actively teaching self-regulation skills and corresponding self-assessment/monitoring tools.
Adapted from: CAST (2011). *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.0.* Wakefield, MA: Author.	

What does this mean for my classroom?

The current educational experiences of refugee youth with disabilities are unique, diverse and nuanced. The sheer number of "labels" potentially placed on individuals within this population (e.g., refugee, ELL, LEP, CLD, disabled, racial minority, religious minority, low SES, victims of bullying, etc.) and the interaction between them (LEP + disability + refugee) serves to position these students at a precarious and relatively unknown intersection. Perhaps more than any other factor, the language ability (and opportunity to demonstrate said ability) with which students arrive to U.S. public schools, significantly affects initial educational placement, corresponding teacher expectations and determines the kind of experiences a student will have for the foreseeable future. Students who do not speak English well or who exhibit divergent, culturally-informed communication norms are immediately placed into segregated settings which, in addition to marking them as deficient from the outset, may actually subsume all other decisions for their educational program. Because intelligence or assumptions about intelligence are so inextricably tied to language—being "well-spoken," "speaking in class," "speaking your mind," and generally showing what you know via speech—many refugee youth

with and without disabilities show up in our classrooms with two strikes against them. Additionally, segregated ELL/LEP settings, understood to be doing the job of providing supplemental support for an area that's currently lacking, may in fact eclipse a diagnosis of an actual disability, leaving many refugee youth with disabilities unidentified and unsupported.

So, what do these implications have to do with *your* classroom? Plenty. Focusing this research and recommendations on refugee youth who carry multiple labels is to demonstrate that you never really know what each student brings to the classroom everyday, regardless of country of birth, immigration status, disability label or identity. Even the most well intentioned teachers, administrators or supplementary service providers cannot change students' pasts, nor should you want to, but you can work to establish a secure future with equitable access to opportunity. Knowing that teachers cannot peek into the brain of each student to see what they are learning, we've offered the preceding recommendations as tools and strategies to hopefully make your jobs a bit easier.

Presuming that every student in your class is competent and can learn something from each lesson has strong implications for many aspects of our school structure. Take the IEP process for example. If the general education classroom was assumed to be the least restrictive environment from the onset, then the conversation begins with, "What can we do for this student that will not only benefit him/her, but other students in the class as well?" and, "How can we be creative with our supports so that they are provided in the general education setting and help other students at the same time?" What if we shifted our language in the IEP process from, "George can't do 'x' and can't do 'y'." To,

"George may not be able to do 'x' yet, but he can certainly do this part of 'y' with appropriate supports." What if not all students had to read at the same reading level at the same time and that was OK? What if we evaluated IEP goal progress mainly on modified general education curriculum? What if we devalued the labels that many kids come with and started designing our classrooms in ways where our only assumption is that if lessons are designed with everyone in mind, then no one has to leave the class to get something "special"? If we stop spending so much time and money making things so "special," then maybe we could spend more of our resources making schools more universally accessible.

To make schools more universally accessible, we have to think beyond just student supports. With an influx of students from around the globe, schools need to be more responsive to access needs that relate to parents of refugees, diverse minority languages spoken at after school events (e.g., parent conferences, Back to School Night, parent teacher meetings), the literacy levels of parents of refugee youth and diverse cultural norms. Issues related to parent access to reliable and affordable transportation and structural barriers to participation must also be considered (e.g., reliable interpretation and translation services). Especially with parents of refugee youth, special attention must be paid to perceived power differentials as many refugees fled their countries of origin due to significant threats from governmental powers.

All of these considerations and many more, call for a more critical examination of not only classroom-level interventions, but also policies and practices for school-wide reform. If we shift our thinking to see diversity as an asset rather than a drain on resources, then more students collectively benefit. Many schools have "special programs"

that pull students from the general education setting. These programs can be numerous and include, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE), Resource, Special Day Classrooms, ELD, occupational therapy (OT), adapted physical education (APE), etc. What if we took the "special" components of all these programs and gave everyone access to them? General education teachers could learn from "special" teachers, supports could be replicated and money could be saved. Administrators could then allocate those extra funds to other necessary services like hiring ELL teachers who actually speak languages like Somali, Arabic and Swahili to support language development in general education classrooms. Resources could be allocated to the promotion of student-identified diversity programs (e.g., Disability Studies programs, anti-bullying programs, anti-racism programs, social justice programs) and interpreting and translation services for families who speak different languages.

Conclusion

As the editors of this volume note, the values and principles of Disability Studies can seem impractical and overly optimistic when applied to the often-sobering realities of daily life in a public school classroom—particularly when many classrooms are in a permanent state of flux: welcoming increasingly diverse students with increasingly diverse histories and needs, such as refugee youth with disabilities. But as we have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter, these values and corresponding practices are not at odds with what the youth interviewed for this chapter have identified as best practice. Nor are these best practices wholly different from what many educators are already doing. Our hope is that by privileging the lived experiences of refugee youth with a host of identities, labels and experiences we've enacted a foundational tenet of Disability

Studies: “Nothing about us without us” (Charlton, 1998, p. 162). While the students that participated in our interviews are not solely or completely representative of the full spectrum of refugee youth with disabilities, they do represent the diversity of histories, experiences and perspectives that populates public school classrooms throughout the United States. It also gives educators a place to begin.

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