River Forest
Public Schools

Community Listening Session Feedback

Board of Education Meeting
October 30, 2018

Members of the River Forest District 90 community shared the following discussion items with the Board of Education for their future consideration:

Topic - *District Equity Initiatives*

- A question was posed about what the District equity initiatives are about.
- A comment was shared about the need for specialists to receive better training in serving the needs of students with unique needs or disabilities.
- Comment: The District can afford to reflect on the way that we frame and consider issues of ability and disability. It is important that the District remain intentional about ensuring that inclusiveness is considered for all students, in all settings, at all times.
- A question was posed about whether equity initiatives may be informing instructional decision-making in District 90. Specifically, movement away from a Differentiated Learning approach and toward Universal Design for Learning (UDL).
- A comment was shared about the need to provide a challenging learning experience for all students.
- A comment was shared about how the more limited use of grouping has had beneficial impact on some learners, and the positive value of student-led conferences at the elementary level.

Topic – *School Facilities*

- River Forest Educational Association (RFEA) representatives expressed desire for the Board of Education to create and implement a plan to address the need to air condition all learning spaces throughout the District. Concerns include student health and well-being, staff health and well-being, and lost instructional time. Cooling stations do not provide a satisfactory solution to this problem on hot day.
- Comment: The number of days that are designated as excessively hot is significant and has seemed to be greater in number over the last two years.

- Comment: The timing of the hot days is particularly difficult at the start of school with student assessment.
- A question was raised about exploring potential partnerships with organizations such as the PTO's to help address the air conditioning problem.
- A question was raised about the possibility of using alternate mechanical approaches, such as window units.
- A suggestion was made that the District should consider the possibility of using "heat days" (similar to snow days) when weather is excessively hot.

Topic – *Rigor of Instruction*

- A concern was expressed about students who may be placed in the position of having to repeat content when moving to the District and not receiving accelerated/gifted level instruction; how can rigor be assured for all learners? How are teachers prepared to truly differentiate for student learning?
- A question was posed as to the relationship between equity initiatives and maintenance of instructional rigor.
- Comment: It is essential that all students' needs are met, not just students in the higher and lower performance bands.

Topic – *Appropriateness of Curriculum*

- Comment: Classroom differentiation is a challenging thing to do well. Some school districts use a differentiated approach utilizing leveled grouping for students throughout.
- Comment: District 90 can continue to improve in communicating with families about the manner in which classroom instruction occurs and the District philosophy guiding our instructional approach.
- Comment: The reading approach seems to be successful for many students, though the math approach would benefit from more refinement.

Topic – *School Safety*

- A comment was made about the need for the District to continue to take a stand for safety by not endorsing the Illinois Association for School Board (IASB) resolution to arm teachers in schools.

Topic – *Student Social and Emotional Well-Being*

- A comment was shared about the value of middle school LGBTQ and gender variant students having a place that it is intentionally designed for them to belong and feel included, with the suggestion that the middle school consider forming a club.

Topic – *District Financial Management*

(No comments were shared in this area)

Topic – *Other*

- A comment was made to encourage the Board to consider streaming meetings or videotaping them to improve access to Board deliberations and discussions.

Universal Design for Learning

Susan Barteaux

Abstract

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework for instruction that values the social, emotional, and academic diversity in the classroom while using this diversity to create a classroom environment of respect and appreciation for others. Through multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement, the UDL framework demands that curriculum is accessible to all learners, including gifted students, special needs learners, English language learners, and students with behavioural challenges.

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational model that creates access to the general classroom, curriculum, and learning experiences for all students, including those with special needs and behaviour challenges, average learners, and gifted students. The UDL framework assists educators in meeting those diverse needs while transforming instructional methods and the classroom environment. Inspired by architects' use of Universal Design for products and environments, UDL has been turned into an educational framework.

What Is UDL?

UDL is loosely based on the universal design for products and environments, whereby architects make physical environments accessible to everyone, regardless of potential barriers such as physical, cognitive or developmental barriers (Courey, Tappe, Siker, & LePage, 2013; Katz, 2012). To make physical environments accessible and beneficial to all, the principles for universal design were considered by architects while designing buildings ("What is Universal Design?" 2014). These principles require that physical products and environments are equitable, flexible, require minimal physical effort, and minimize hazards by effectively communicating information in a variety of forms, while leaving adequate size and space for diverse people to use them ("Everyone Can Learn," 2005-2014). By witnessing how architects planned physical environments to create accessibility, educators began to apply the principles of Universal Design to education, later forming the basis of the factors of accessibility in education within the UDL framework (Katz, 2012).

By using these factors of accessibility in education, teachers began to make the general classroom accessible to all learners (Courey et al., 2013), by means of instructional practices and curricula that consider students' needs and capitalize on their skills from the planning stages, creating more control and personalization of each student's education (Abbel, Jung, & Taylor, 2011). When implementing UDL, educators must consider the following factors: teaching practices that contribute to a positive class climate of diversity and inclusivity, delivery methods that are accessible to all learners, and encouragement of genuine interactions between students while providing ongoing, specific feedback from the teacher ("Everyone Can Learn," 2005-2012; Katz, 2012). Educators must instruct in a way that is educationally demanding for all students and can be achieved through varied and ongoing assessment, while using engaging resources and technology in spaces that are physically accommodating to everyone (Courey et al., 2013).

The factors of accessibility in UDL reduce barriers by creating flexibility of curricula through varied goals, methods, materials, and assessments, in order to create classrooms that are physically and academically accessible to all students (National Centre for Learning Disabilities, 2012). Through examining the four areas of existing curricula, and using various forms of goal setting, instructional methods, resources and materials, in addition to frequent formal and informal assessments of learners, teachers can identify existing barriers while optimizing the levels of challenges and supports in the classroom (Courey et al., 2013; "UDL Guidelines –

Version 2.0," 2013; Katz, 2012). That is not to say that UDL is diluting content, but rather it is the intentional planning of curricula to capitalize on, and appreciate diversity in the classroom by requiring a high-level of engagement, participation, and ultimately achievement by all students (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2013). When all learners are achieving academic and social goals within the general classroom's walls, then true inclusion has been achieved (Katz, 2012).

The UDL Framework

The UDL framework requires that educators, administrators, and learners begin to consider the complexity of learning in terms how small pieces, such as the factors of accessibility, the principles of UDL, and neuroscience come together to create a larger puzzle, rather than just understanding the smaller pieces themselves (Perkins, 2009). Brain networks and the following three core principles of UDL work together in planning learning experiences that address diversity among classroom groups:
1. multiple means of representation
2. multiple means of expression
3. multiple means of engagement

In understanding how multiples means of representation, expression, and engagement relate to brain networks – the "how," "what," and "why" of learning – the three core principles of UDL guide educators in creating meaningful learning experiences for all students.

UDL relies on 30 years' worth of brain research on how a child's brain gathers information, learning styles, and learning differences (Hall, Meyer, & Rose, 2012). Using information on brain networks – recognition networks, strategic networks, and affective networks – UDL creates a neuroscience-based approach to diverse learners with regards to all three networks (Courey et al., 2013; Katz, 2012; "What is UDL?" 2013). Recognition networks, or the "what" of learning, are essential to understanding how students gather and process data, because students primarily collect data through their five physical senses (Katz, 2012). While recognition networks are physically based brain networks, strategic networks tell learners "how" to do something, such as learning multiple ways to understand or represent a concept, and are a much more abstract brain process (Courey et al., 2013). Finally, affective networks are the most abstract of all brain networks. They determine the "why" of learning, regulating what is deemed most important and providing motivation for students' learning ("What is UDL?" 2013, "Universal Design for Learning" figure). UDL offers variety and choice to learners, based on each type of brain network, to form the three core principles of UDL.

The three core principles of UDL require teachers and curricula to offer multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement to form the second piece of UDL (Lapinski et al., 2012; Ralabate, 2011). UDL requires the use of different means of representation by giving learners a variety of opportunities to physically acquire information through the affective networks (Abbel et al., 2011). By providing multiple means of expression, teachers create multiple opportunities for students to showcase their understanding through the use of various tools, increased access to these tools, and strategies to overcome barriers to learning (Katz, 2012). When educators provide multiple means of engagement through flexible options for control and choice, they capitalize on the affective networks of students' brains (Samuels, 2007). In planning for multiple means of representation, expression and engagement, teachers create various means for students to access and showcase their knowledge of a topic. This flexibility in how knowledge is acquired and represented gives opportunity to create unique learning experiences for a diverse group of learners within one classroom.

UDL proactively combines the understanding of brain networks with the three core principles to enable teachers in creating an inclusive curriculum, which addresses the diversity of students by improving the learning goals, methods, and achievements for all learners (Ralabate, 2011). The framework for UDL requires that educators design learning that is intentional, and leads to a deep understanding of topics through genuine inquiry by students, in

order to build an authentic understanding of the content covered and to reach academic goals (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009). When designing UDL for the classroom, teachers must advocate for methods that create these authentic learning experiences for students with different abilities, disabilities, ethnicities, language skills ("Everyone Can Learn," 2005-2014), and learning styles (Samuels, 2007), by using materials and learning experiences based on skills needed, strengths possessed, and the multiple intelligences (Katz & Sugden, 2013). By doing so, educators create true experiences of inclusion for children whereby they can showcase their knowledge in a way that is as unique as they are, and to celebrate their achievements with classmates, because their learning is based on where they are developmentally regardless of age or grade level (Dalton & Brand, 2012).

When students can celebrate their learning with peers who respect where they are developmentally, celebrate the ways in which they learn, and help to build an authentic understanding of curricula, then the purpose of the UDL framework has come to fruition. This respect and celebration of diversity comes from thoughtful planning by educators, who have an understanding of the brain's networks, and who intentionally create various means of representation, expression, and engagement within the UDL framework. This respect for diversity in students, their learning, and how they connect to curriculum content is so integral to the framework of UDL that Dr. Jennifer Katz created the Respecting Diversity program to augment the experience for students and their teachers (Katz, 2012).

Who Benefits from UDL?

UDL benefits students and teachers alike by creating a community of learners who appreciate each other's similarities and differences. Students benefit from a learning approach that strays from a one-size-fits-all curriculum and offers equal access to all learners, increasing engagement and the flexibility of their learning (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2013). Similarly, teachers benefit professionally by using an improved teaching methodology that creates a truly inclusive classroom, while collaborating with students and teachers. The UDL framework benefits all stakeholders involved by giving opportunities to understand and best serve learners from the very beginning of their education ("UDL Guidelines – Version 2.0," 2013).

The purpose of the UDL is to benefit diverse learners, and while it was originally intended as a means to include special-needs learners in the classroom, it has become a generalized educational approach that provides flexibility for all students (Ralabate, 2011). UDL provides flexibility in product, process, demonstration of learning, and the means by which students engage with content (Katz, 2012). This means that if a student has strength in musical or kinesthetic learning styles, he/she has the opportunity to use that skillset to showcase his/her learning. Through this process alone, the final products of students become diverse, creating a variety of ways for students to reach learning goals. In this same process, and through connection with others, students are exposed to other ways in which students have demonstrated learning, opening them to possibilities in their own academic potential. UDL is applicable to all learners, as it can be applied to any subject and developmental age by making content available through a student's choice of learning process or product (Perkins, 2009).

When students are given choice, control, and flexibility, they perceive their learning environment to be enjoyable, challenging, and engaging (Abbel et al., 2011). For students who have unique learning needs, including those students who are English language learners, gifted students, and students who simply learn differently, traditional education has failed to engage them, and UDL offers the promise of an engaging learning experience (Samuels, 2007). Prior to UDL, gifted students were often given more of the same work, students with learning challenges were given remedial work, and students with behaviour challenges were put in specialized classrooms (Willms et al., 2009). Success and engagement for all of these learners, who were previously marginalized, is possible in UDL. The learning makes sense, and when their learning makes sense, students are increasingly engaged (Katz, 2012).

For teachers who use traditional instructional approaches to curriculum, the work planned often does not achieve the desired result: engagement and achievement within their classrooms (Willm et al., 2009). Nationally and locally, educational stakeholders are seeking instructional methods that are effective for learners with varied learning styles and needs, in order to educate them in the general classroom (Dalton & Brand, 2012). Teachers who are usually flexible in their instruction have developed many ways within traditional instructional models to create student engagement and meet the needs of learners, usually creating significantly more work for themselves because they have retrofitted their instruction to inflexible curriculum (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2012). The pressure to instruct a wide variety of learners, while using inflexible curriculum and traditional teaching methods, causes a great deal of stress for teachers (Katz, 2012). However, when educators approach curriculum through the lens of UDL, they can proactively address barriers while creating flexibility in order to serve all learners in a way that does not create extra work or stress (Ayala, Brace, & Stahl, 2012). The UDL framework builds upon a teacher's natural desire, skill set, and willingness to create appropriate learning experiences, by providing a framework to create flexible curriculum and use effective instructional methods (National Centre for Learning Disabilities, 2012).

A teacher at any level can use UDL to meet the demands of the classroom and manage the pressure of delivering an equitable education (Dalton & Brand, 2012), by creating flexible curricula and improved instructional methods, through collaboration with other educators. The framework for UDL encourages teachers to collaborate, relying on each other for constant professional discussions and co-planning of curricula (Lapinski et al., 2012). While there is a demand for collaboration between educators, UDL also requires that teachers have continued discussions with students about how they learn, their strengths, and what skills they need to acquire in order to experience further success. Through these discussions, students feel that their teacher understands how they learn, that their opinions have merit, and that they have a positive relationship with their teacher, therefore increasing their engagement and motivation for learning (Abbel et al., 2011). When teachers collaborate with students and other educators, they gain insight in instructional methods that will best meet the needs of their students.

Conclusion

At its core, UDL places value on the diversity of all learners by creating classroom environments that are academically, socially, and emotionally inclusive of all children. Educators create compassionate, safe learning environments for children when they create flexibility in how learners access curriculum through the use of UDL. Evolving from architectural accessibility designs and applying these concepts to knowledge of neuroscience, the UDL framework was created to benefit all educational stakeholders. Educators who use UDL can transform their classrooms, teaching practices, and the lives of their students.

References

Abbel, M., Jung, E., & Taylor, M. (2011). Students' perceptions of classroom instructional environments in the context of "Universal Design for Learning." *Learning Environments Research, 14,* 171-185. doi:10.1007/s10984-011-9090-2

Ayala, E., Brace, H., & Stahl, S. (2012). Preparing teachers to implement Universal Design for Learning. In T. E. Hall, A. Meyer, & D. H. Rose (Eds.), *Universal Design for Learning in the classroom* (pp. 135-152). New York, NY: Guilford

Courey, S., Tappe, P., Siker, J., & LePage, P. (2013). Improved lesson planning with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children, 36*(7), 7-27. doi:10.1177/0888406412446178

Dalton, E. M., & Brand, S. T. (2012). The assessment of young children through the lens of

Universal Design for Learning (UDL). *Forum on Public Policy Online, 2012*(1), 1-18.

Everyone can learn. (2005-2014). *Center for Excellence in Disabilites.* Retrieved July 15, 2014, from http://www.cedwvu.org/publications/everyonecanlearn/udl.php

Gargiulo, R. M., & Metcalf, D. (2013). *Teaching in today's inclusive classrooms: a Universal Design for Learning approach.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Hall, T., Meyer, A., & Rose, D. H. (2012). An introduction to Universal Design for Learning. In T. E. Hall, A. Meyer, & D. H. Rose (Eds.), *Universal Design for Learning in the classroom,* (pp. 1-8). New York, NY: Guilford.

Katz, J. (2012). *Teaching to diversity: The three-block model of Universal Design for Learning.* Winnipeg, MB: Portage and Main Press.

Katz, J., & Sugden, R. (2013). The three-block model of Universal Design for Learning implementation in a high school. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 141*(1), 1-28.

Lapinski, S., Gravel, J., & Rose, D. H. (2012). Tools for practice: The Universal Design for Learning guidelines. In T. E. Hall, A. Meyer, & D. H. Rose (Eds.) *Universal Design for Learning in the classroom,* (pp. 9-24). New York, NY: Guilford.

National Centre for Learning Disabilities. (2012). *What is Universal Design for Learning?* Retrieved July 16, 2014, from http://ncld.org/students-disabilities/ld-education-teachers/what-is-universal-design-learning

Perkins, D. (2009). *Making learning whole.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ralabate, P. (2011, August 30). *Universal Design for Learning: Meeting the needs of all students.* Retrieved July 16, 2014, from http://www.asha.org/publications/leader/2011/110830/Universal-Design-for-Learning--Meeting-the-Needs-of-All-Students/

Samuels, C. A. (2007). "Universal Design" concept pushed for education. *Education Week, 27*(10), 1-2. Retrieved July 16, 2014, from http://www.cflparents.org/information/resources/SystemicChange/Universal%20Design-Education-Week-07.pdf

UDL Guidelines – Version 2.0 (2013, July 15). *National Centre on Universal Design for Learning.* Retrieved July 16, 2014, from http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines

What is Universal Design? (2014). *Universaldesign.com.* Retrieved July 17, 2014, from http://www.universaldesign.com/about-universal-design.html

What is UDL? (2013, April 17). *National Centre on Universal Design for Learning.* Retrieved July 8, 2014, from http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl

Willms, J. D., Friesen, S., & Milton, P. (2009). *What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic, and intellectual engagement.* Toronto, ON: Canadian Education Association. Retrieved July 16, 2014, from http://www.cea-ace.ca/sites/cea-ace.ca/files/cea-2009-wdydist.pdf

About the Author

Susan M. Barteaux is a grade three teacher at R. J. Waugh Elementary School in Carberry, Manitoba. She graduated from Brandon University's Bachelor of Education program in 2009 and is now enrolled in the Master of Education program, focusing on curriculum and instruction.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING PUTS RIGOR AT THE CENTER

Q&A WITH ZARETTA HAMMOND

Zaretta Hammond is a teacher educator, researcher, and consultant committed to supporting leaders, coaches, and teachers in integrating neuroscience with instruction, equity, and literacy. Her work is informed by her classroom experience, her time in organizations such as the National Equity Project, and her own research about how neuroscience and culture impact learning.

In her ongoing work with teachers, she has successfully supported educators throughout the country and beyond to develop culturally responsive habits of mind and instructional practices that support underprepared diverse students to lead their own learning.

Zaretta Hammond

Q: Your book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (Corwin, 2015), introduces the "Ready for Rigor" approach to culturally responsive teaching. How is it unique?

A: For a long time, nationally we have been trying to address gaps in learning outcomes between diverse students — namely, between black, Latino, Southeast Asian, English language learner, and low-income students and their white and Asian counterparts.

When I began in education reform 20 years ago at the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, schools were just beginning to routinely disaggregate data across racial groups and socioeconomic

READY FOR RIGOR A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING
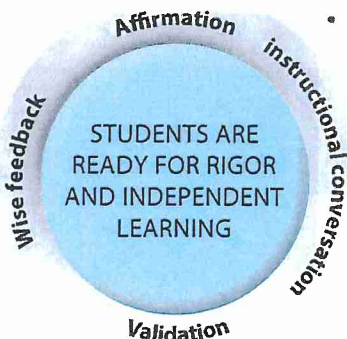
AWARENESS

- Know and own your cultural lens.
- Understand the three levels of culture.
- Recognize cultural archetypes of individualism and collectivism.
- Understand how the brain learns.
- Acknowledge the sociopolitical context around race and language.
- Recognize your brain's triggers around race and culture.
- Broaden your interpretation of culturally and linguistically diverse students' learning behaviors.

LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

- Reimagine the student and teacher relationship as a partnership.
- Take responsibility to reduce students' social-emotional stress from stereotype threat and microaggressions.
- Balance giving students both care and push.
- Help students cultivate a positive mindset and sense of self-efficacy.
- Support each student to take greater ownership for his learning.
  - Give students language to talk about their learning moves.

INFORMATION PROCESSING

- Provide appropriate challenge in order to stimulate brain growth to increase intellective capacity.
- Help students process new content using methods from oral traditions.
- Connect new content to culturally relevant examples and metaphors from students' community and everyday lives.
- Provide students authentic opportunities to process content.
- Teach students cognitive routines using the brain's natural learning systems.
- Use formative assessments and feedback to increase intellective capacity.

Affirmation
instructional conversation
Wise feedback
Validation

STUDENTS ARE READY FOR RIGOR AND INDEPENDENT LEARNING

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS & LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Create an environment that is intellectually and socially safe for learning.
  - Make space for student voice and agency.
- Build classroom culture and learning around communal (sociocultural) talk and task structures.
- Use classroom rituals and routines to support a culture of learning.
- Use principles of restorative justice to manage conflicts and redirect negative behavior.

---

status. A large part of that work was helping educators come to terms with the systems of oppression and bias that created chronic achievement and opportunity gaps.

Since then, educators have engaged regularly in courageous conversations to raise awareness of racial inequities in schools. More and more educators discuss implicit bias, white privilege,

and microaggressions at the school level. This is an important step.

Beyond this, though, it's essential to help teachers and leaders know what teaching and learning moves they should be making in schools to increase achievement and what acts of leadership facilitate and protect these efforts.

I see my work as helping schools that have done significant cultural

proficiency work go to the next phase of equity work: classroom and school implementation. The ultimate goal of culturally responsive teaching is to help students accelerate their learning by building cognitive learning muscles.

A growing body of research highlights this idea of "learnable intelligence." When we look at the causes of inequity related to instruction,

we see that diverse students aren't given the type of robust instruction early on that builds up their cognition. So they get to higher grades unable to carry the cognitive load.

We see a disproportionate number of struggling, underserved students of color and poor students who can't engage in higher-order thinking or read on grade level. That's not because they are not capable. It's the result of "inequity by design" — we aren't giving them the same learning opportunities as their peers.

To address that, it's not about remediation, but about bringing powerful teaching to underserved populations early on so they have the tools and opportunities to build their brainpower and learning muscles.

The Ready for Rigor framework codifies four core areas we have to synthesize and braid together to help students become leaders of their own learning. These areas are awareness, learning partnerships, information processing capacity, and learning communities and environments. (See p. 41.)

Integrating these pieces involves creating new routines, processes, and structures in classrooms around how we engage students in conversation, give feedback, and provide affirmation and validation.

Q: Schools and districts throughout the U.S. have used the book to inform their work on equity and supporting all students. What professional learning designs are educators employing?

A: I think the most powerful professional learning design (although not the only valuable one) for implementing culturally responsive teaching is a collaborative inquiry process. In collaborative inquiry, teachers work together to identify

> **When we improve the basic mental operations for processing information, we increase our capacity to take on more rigorous learning.**

common challenges related to the achievement gap, test instructional approaches that use cultural learning tools based on the framework, and analyze relevant data to determine if these practices are helping students.

When trying to help students improve their learning using culturally responsive practices, this approach offers a systematic, collective process so teachers build shared language and shared understanding of what works. In collaborative inquiry for culturally responsive teaching, the focus isn't on implementing strategies per se, but in mastering how to get a student to improve her "learning moves" leading to deeper learning.

Too often, teachers think the magic is in the strategy and don't focus on helping the student become a more confident, independent learner. When using collaborative inquiry for culturally responsive teaching, the focus is on the learner. Because only the learner learns.

Collaborative inquiry provides a space for teachers to come together to honestly examine how to help diverse, struggling students carry more of the cognitive load during instruction. "Cognitive load" relates to the amount of information that our working memory can hold at one time as it is solving a problem or working through a complex task.

When we improve the basic mental operations for processing information, we increase our capacity to take on more rigorous learning. For example, some teachers use Harvard's Project Zero's seven studio "habits," which are

really mental steps for analyzing a task. Some schools use "thinking routines" as a way to get students to process more effectively.

The more a student independently uses these routines, over time he can process more content with less effort. This results in him being able to engage in more academic conversations or depending less on the teacher for help with each step.

There are a variety of ways educators are integrating elements of the Ready for Rigor framework. For example, the work at Roots International Middle School in Oakland Unified School District in California is powerful. Roots International serves high-poverty communities in East Oakland, home to African-American, Latino, Cambodian, and Pacific Islander families.

Under the direction of principal Geoff Vu, the faculty have focused methodically on understanding how to help students carry more of the cognitive load by using the "ignite, chunk, chew, and review" process embedded in Ready for Rigor. As part of the "chunking" element to create more cognitive connections between students' everyday lives and the content, they've been innovative in combining elements of ethnic students, social justice education, and popular media.

For example, one history teacher used *Underground,* a popular TV show about the pre-Civil War period, to build several social studies units. Students then created historical fan fiction based on the units' lesson to teach writing skills and help students process their understanding of the concepts, motivations, facts, and events of the era.

Teachers in geography, science, and math are also finding ways to innovate. It's not perfect yet, but very promising.

I am also seeing promising efforts to integrate Ready for Rigor with existing frameworks and curricular approaches.

In the Boston Public Schools, leaders were able to integrate some of the core design principles from the Ready for Rigor frame into what they call their Essentials of Instructional Equity. They focused on creating shared language around core concepts and design principles that help students accelerate learning.

In California, Alameda County Office of Education is integrating Ready for Rigor into a course of study for educators that uses arts-integrated education methodologies from Harvard's Project Zero.

They have revolutionized the training of coaches who lead the courses for educators so that culturally responsive teaching is part of their larger work, not separated from it.

Q: This work is challenging. It requires educators to be ready and willing to rethink their beliefs, their actions, and the systems in which they work. What are some of the ways you recommend schools address the challenges to make culturally responsive teaching feasible?

A: This work is challenging for many schools because it requires that we coordinate several elements in four key areas of practice. The elements of the Ready for Rigor frame are most powerful when they act in unison. But too many schools are tempted to oversimplify culturally responsive teaching for an easy, quick rollout.

Schools fall into the trap of trying to find a few turnkey strategies that they label culturally responsive without ever engaging the student. If we don't give the student new language for talking about his learning and how he goes about improving it, then we won't see achievement scores improve.

Leaders too often promote culturally responsive teaching as a "thing" rather than as an approach

Unfortunately, there is a real danger of culturally responsive teaching going the way of growth mindset a few years ago.

that coordinates and integrates four macro-level areas outlined in the Ready for Rigor framework and a number of micro-level moves.

I see often where leaders make it a technical treatment for students of color rather than promote culturally responsive teaching as an adaptive challenge that requires change in how educators think about and do their work in partnership with students as learners.

The biggest trap is letting a sense of urgency lead to poor implementation. I see districts that are forming book study groups, asking teachers to pick a few actionable practices, and then expecting successful, widespread implementation when there's no capacity to support teachers and no quality control. There is a set of conditions that leaders need to put in place to execute equity by design.

Unfortunately, there is a real danger of culturally responsive teaching going the way of growth mindset a few years ago — people extract one element, oversimplify or misinterpret it, and then misapply it. Growth mindset's originator, Carol Dweck, had to come out and try to set the record straight.

I am hoping to encourage and support school districts to be more deliberate in building capacity thoroughly first — get small now to go big later, so you'll have real impact on student learning. Otherwise, schools can end up feeding achievement gaps, rather than closing them.

Q: Ideally, schools commit to this work in a systemic way. But getting everyone on board doesn't happen

easily. Where can individuals start at classroom, school, and district levels?

A: The beauty of culturally responsive teaching is that it doesn't require any special equipment. Any teacher who desires to improve the learning capacity of students can begin by assessing current practices in the four areas of the Ready for Rigor framework, determining what's missing, and using collaborative inquiry to make changes.

Helping underserved, struggling students develop the language and opportunity to talk about their process as learners can lead to students feeling more intellectually safe in the classroom and feeling that they have greater agency over their learning.

You have to begin small with your teacher leaders, building their skill and capacity by using their classrooms as lab classrooms, where they master their skills in moving struggling learners from dependent to independent learning over the course of a semester. You support those teacher leaders to become peer coaches to a new cohort of teachers within the school.

Coaching is beneficial so there is observation of new practices and educators can help one another overcome specific challenges. It is also essential to have a schedule that allows teachers to collaborate and make classroom time for a deeper engagement with students.

When you put all these pieces in place, over time you have shifted both the culture of the adult learning community and the instructional power of faculty. Unfortunately, you can't book study your way to being a culturally responsive school. But when done correctly, culturally responsive teaching can be a game changer for accelerating student learning. ■