SUPPORTING

STRUGGLING

LEARNERS

50 Instructional Moves for the Classroom Teacher

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This book is dedicated to Patricia Hoy—
my mother, my first teacher, my mentor, my friend.

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Introduction

As teachers, our days are filled with many things—everyday minutia, grand successes, endless mandates, and joyous small moments. And in those full days, we live alongside our students . . . ALL of them. Some students live in our minds easily. They are growing, they are happy, learning is going smoothly for them. Yet for other students, learning is not going so smoothly. They are not happy and not growing in the ways we want them to.

These students are always on our minds. We take them home with us and think about them at odd moments. I was young when I began teaching, barely a decade older than the students I taught, and that first year together was part trial by fire, part camp counselor, part experiment. During that year, it was Stephen who occupied my thoughts and plagued me with worry.

> *Is he learning?*
>
> *Is he happy?*
>
> *Is my classroom the right place for him?*
>
> *Am I doing what I need to be doing to help him achieve*
> *his goals as a learner?*
>
> *Is there something else I could be doing?*

Stephen was, on many fronts, a struggling learner. He had an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnosis, coupled with some mild processing and anxiety issues. He struggled to organize his thinking in writing, which affected not only reading and writing but social studies and science as well. He had trouble with handwriting, so he struggled to get his ideas down in legible ways. He had some social difficulties, too, and had trouble connecting with the other boys in the class. Many times at the beginning of the year, he came back from recess angry or upset. Once, he actually left the playground during recess and came up to my classroom to spend recess with me instead of playing with his classmates. He couldn't quite understand why the other students wouldn't play his version of dodge ball or why he should try to work out conflicts.

Stephen was also one of the most curious and creative learners I have ever met. His capacity for understanding texts and his interpretations of characters, events, and themes was unparalleled. When I realized that Stephen could not sit in our

meeting area for lessons and for read-aloud, I let him do laps in the back of the classroom. Yet the thinking he shared about either the lesson or the text was always right on and insightful, bringing our work to another level.

Stephen was just the first. There were Anna and Tomeo, Michael and Odin, Amy and Malachi, Stephanie and James and . . . you see what I mean. As you are reading this, your own list of names might be running through your head.

As Stephen's teacher, I was plagued with questions. And I knew that for him, and for myself, I needed to find answers. So I took this on, really on, as an inquiry into my personal professional development, and discovered things that have shaped my beliefs about how struggling learners learn best.

Many times, we think of struggling learners based on a deficit model. When I was teaching Stephen, I constantly worried about supporting him as a learner. Could I help him harness his thoughts in a coherent way? Would I be able to find a reading and writing partner with whom he could work? What about all of the materials I was introducing him to? Would he be able to use these? And what about when he got to the middle school—what would happen then?

I understand that we teachers are "fixers," and finding what is getting in a student's way will help us determine what he needs. However, let's not allow this idea to frame how we support struggling learners. Instead, let's use what positive psychology has taught us about student success: Every student has strengths—whether resources, talents, skills, or motivations—and those strengths should be the pillar on which we stand (Anderson 2005). We don't ignore the deficits but capitalize on the strengths (Clifton, Anderson, and Schreiner 2016) so we can design teaching moves, including specific interventions, that are grounded in what students can do well to propel them forward.

Tomlinson (2014) reminds us that learners are different. In turn, our classrooms must be laboratories where differentiated learning can exist.

> Thus, teachers in differentiated classrooms accept and act on the premise that they must be ready to engage students in instruction through different approaches to learning, by appealing to a range of interests, and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity and different support systems. In differentiated classrooms, teachers ensure that students compete against themselves as they grow and develop more than they compete against one another, always moving toward—and often beyond—designated content goals.
>
> In other words, teachers who differentiate provide specific alternatives for individuals to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly

> as possible, without assuming one student's road map for learning is
> identical to anyone else's. (3–4)

I started off big. I thought about different curricula, different placements for Stephen and others, and drastically different approaches. I had my heart in the right place, but those big changes weren't working. Stephen certainly was not going to learn to handle collaborations positively if he was isolated from his peers. As I got to know Stephen, I began to realize what a critical thinker he was. He did not need any modifications to the curriculum; he needed me to accommodate him and his learning to match his challenges. I realized that small changes—instructional moves geared to what the learner needs most in that moment—implemented inside my classroom, alongside our learning and learners, could make a big difference.

What You Will Find in This Book

The classroom environment can either support or impede learners, so in Chapter 1, I propose small instructional moves that you can make to enable learners to access ideas and learning.

I learned that peer support helps all learners, especially those who struggle. In Chapter 2 I tackle peer learning—learning centers and group projects—and suggest ways to use everyday structures to support our struggling learners.

Many students are visual learners, so in Chapter 3 I lay out simple ways to use visuals in instruction and practice for both teaching and learning.

One of the ways I supported Stephen and other struggling learners was with pre-teaching. Pre-teaching can feel hard to implement. We wonder: When will I have time to pre-teach? How will I pre-teach? Whom will I pre-teach and why? In Chapter 4, I offer easy yet powerful pre-teaching strategies.

One of the most profound ways I have been able to support struggling learners is through small-group instruction in reading, writing, math, and content areas. Chapter 5, which tackles small-group instruction, is chock full of samples of small-group instruction, classroom examples, and planners and other record-keeping tools.

Building certain academic and life skills can benefit students who struggle, so I devoted Chapters 6 and 7 to study skills and communication skills, respectively.

Another place where we can implement instructional moves that have huge benefits is to support all students as writers. Writing is a discipline that stands alone, yet it travels with us across the day and across other disciplines. Providing students with specific writing strategies—planning, brainstorming, and organization—can help them be successful learners. Chapter 8 tackles writing across the day and includes effective strategies for our struggling students.

Chapter 9 embraces the idea that strong home-school connections support every learner. In this chapter I share my thinking around collaboration and communication as a wrap-around approach to supporting students who struggle.

Chapter 10 offers my final thoughts and suggestions organized in an *If/Then* structure. If a student needs more support; if you need to progress-monitor a student; if you have a co-teacher, specialist, or an instructional aide in your room with you; if your teaching is not sticking, then take a look at my go-to list of tried and true solutions, which include instructional approaches, accommodations, tools, and protocols.

Why This Book for Classroom Teachers?

I have been thinking of writing a book about struggling learners for many years and for many reasons. I'm sure a tiny seed was planted even when I was a young child, and that seed began to grow as soon as I started working with children and young adults. We will (unfortunately) always have students in our classrooms who struggle. They struggle in many different ways—different in both the reasons why they struggle and the ways in which they struggle. Since each and every classroom will have struggling learners, it is helpful to define the kinds of struggling learners we might encounter in our classrooms and then plan moves to support them.

Who Are Struggling Learners?

The term "struggling learners" is a widely used and incredibly broad term. When teachers and schools use the term, they do so to describe special education students mandated to receive services, students identified as struggling learners who receive mandated or nonmandated supplemental academic intervention services, and other students who receive no additional support or services as well. Let's look carefully at what I see as the three cohorts of struggling learners.

SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

Students who qualify for special education services are struggling learners. These students have been classified as students who are to mandated to receive special education services, delivered by a certified special education teacher. The laws governing these mandates are most recently through IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. According to this legislation, special education is defined as "specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability."

To deliver specially designed instruction that will meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, it is important to determine not only the learner's disability but, more importantly, the learner's strengths and what the learner struggles with. For example, a student may have a classification of "Specific Learning Disability,"

which according to IDEA (1997) is defined as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, auditory processing disorders and developmental aphasia."

This broad statement, meant to describe the classification of "Specific Learning Disability," is helpful in determining what classification the student will receive and, in turn, can determine pertinent services. Yet to develop specific techniques and strategies that will most effectively teach this student, it is essential to determine *what* specifically the student struggles with. Does this learner struggle with reading? If so, with what aspects of reading—decoding? Inferring a main or central idea? Responding to reading? Does the learner struggle with math? If so, with what aspects of math—remembering math facts and equations? Applying the correct mathematical equation to solve the problem? Understanding multistep word problems? All of the above? Identifying the specific struggles of special education students is essential for creating the most effective instructional moves you will implement for this learner.

STUDENTS DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE MANDATED OR NONMANDATED SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION

Struggling learners are also those students who have been identified as needing additional support. These students are typically designated to receive support in a variety of subjects through programs titled "basic skills instruction" or "academic intervention services." These are the students in our classrooms who do not meet the requisite benchmarks we have put forth for our students, including yearly standardized tests, local diagnostic and formative assessments, and other school-based metrics. Students who receive supplemental instruction usually do not meet the above-mentioned metrics in reading and math and therefore are given additional support.

Marie Clay, innovative educator and founder of Reading Recovery has stated that, "70 percent of students will learn to read without struggle." Approximately 10 percent of our population is identified as learning disabled. This leaves somewhere around 20 percent of our students who are typically—and, more importantly, should be—identified in this cohort of struggling learners: learners who need supplemental instruction.

INTERMITTENT STRUGGLERS

This last category of struggling learner is not as easy to define. These students are not mandated for special education services and typically do not fall into the cohort of students who receive ongoing, systematic supplemental support. Yet they—and potentially any student—can struggle at any time in their school career.

These struggles may be related to an incident or event in a student's life, such as a home, personal, or social situation, that causes the learner to struggle and interferes with the typical progress he or she might make.

Other times, the struggle is contextual: There is a topic, course, or specific learning context that is challenging for the student. This is not to say the struggle is not real; it is just contextualized around a topic, moment of learning, or context that amplifies a weakness in the student's memory, organization, time management, or other skills.

Sometimes, students just occasionally struggle. We have all had them in our classrooms; you know who they are. They are always on our radar, our "watch list," but we know they will never qualify for services and do not need special education or supplemental services. They do, however, need instruction and support that intervenes in their learning and enables them to get past the struggle.

I have been thinking about struggling students for decades. You see, my journey didn't start with Stephen. It started with Tommy. In September 1968, two parents meet with the elementary school principal. Their son, Tommy, has a learning disability, yet no one is quite clear what it is. Although Tommy's parents are unclear of what he needs or what is getting in the way, Tommy is already struggling in school. During kindergarten, he has trouble following directions, and emergent literacy skills (such as learning letters, sounds, and how books work) are a challenge for him. Tommy's parents want to investigate the options for him. The principal leads them down a set of stairs to the basement. There, next to the boiler, is a room for children who are "different."

One child is in a wheelchair. He appears to be a capable student academically but is physically handicapped. Next to him are two students with Down syndrome. Across the room is a child who is there for behavioral concerns. He is identified by the teacher as a child who is a "lot of trouble" for his teachers.

Tommy's parents aren't sure why they are being shown this classroom. The learners are all quite different. In addition, Tommy, like all children, possesses many strengths. He is the fifth child in his family, and having lived with four older siblings, all close in age, and a large extended family, he is quite verbal. His expressive language skills are age appropriate, including his articulation and content, and he is able to hold interesting conversations with both peers and adults. He is also a curious learner with a great imagination. Tommy spends long afternoons in his backyard and in the accompanying woods playing many a game of make-believe and learning to play sportslike games such as Red Rover, kickball, and manhunt. He has age-appropriate gross and fine motor skills and enjoys group games and board games of all kinds. In addition, Tommy has an incredible memory. He can remember dates and experiences far beyond what a child of his age typically can.

His strengths are not a part of the conversation, or even part of the decision-making used to inform Tommy's placement or education. Tommy's parents ask the principal what Tommy's other options are. The principal looks at them, confused. He says, "There are no other options. It is here in this room, or in one of the first-grade classrooms."

Tommy went on to one of the first-grade classrooms and struggled for many years in school.

You see, Tommy is actually my brother. In the 1970s, I did a lot of learning alongside him. I learned what he was learning, and even though he is six years my senior, I took it upon myself to teach him what he needed to learn. This experience forever shaped me and led me to a career in education.

At the end of the day, they are *all* our students, and I think sometimes we forget that. We want so much for Tommy and Stephen to be successful that we think we can find a place, a program, or a person who can help them. And those things may indeed help our struggling students in some way, but as classroom teachers, we can implement moves and make a difference in our students' learning and in their lives. All we need to do is make some small changes.

CHAPTER ONE

Create an Inclusive Culture Through Structures and Environment

Last year I went to my son's middle school to meet with his English language arts (ELA) teacher. As I entered Susan Cooper's sixth-grade ELA room, I immediately felt that this was a room in which he could learn. There were many tangible elements I could point to: the seats were arranged in collaborative structures, technology was available and clearly a part of the fabric of the classroom, and evidence of teaching and learning existed in the environment through anchor charts and student work. However, many elements were much harder to identify. This room, which exuded the feeling of a place that welcomed and embraced all students, represented what I like to call an inclusive culture.

I define culture as the tone of the room—both the tangible and the intangible vibe, ethos, or spirit of a community of learners. Building an inclusive culture means that you create a space—both physical and social-emotional—that not only welcomes each student but also works for each student. The room fits them and their needs.

Research supports this. The universal design for learning (typically referred to as UDL) initiative was first defined by Harvard educator David H. Rose (1998) but was originally an architectural design framework called universal design. It informed and influenced the way architects designed buildings to be inclusive of all individuals (Story, Mace, and Mueller 1998). This included building ramps at the entrance of buildings, incorporating automatic doors, and using voice technology in elevators. What they discovered was that many people benefitted from this inclusive design. As Conn-Powers, Cross, Traub, and Hutter-Pishgahi (2006) explain in "The Universal Design of Early Education: Moving Forward for All Children,"

> At first these design applications may seem solely intended for people with disabilities. But developers of the universal design framework

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recognized that usability would increase as special needs features began to serve all. People who use wheelchairs benefit from curb cuts and ramps, but so do bicycle riders, parents pushing strollers, and travelers pulling wheeled luggage. Elevators that announce floor numbers assist individuals with impaired sight along with shorter people who may not be able to see the light indicators when the elevator is crowded with riders. Doors that open automatically aid those not strong enough to open them as well as individuals whose arms hold packages or young children.

After becoming aware of universal design, the field of education took on the idea of incorporating its seven principles into the fabric of our classrooms. In particular, the principle of "size and space for appropriate use" translated into the idea of recreating spaces to be inclusive of all students.

Considering how to create the most appropriate and useful environment for learning is essential. In "Instructional Theories Supporting Universal Design for Learning—Teaching to Individual Learners," Mason, Orkwis, and Scott claim "Classroom environment and the organization of curricular materials allow for variations in physical and cognitive access by students as well as for variations in instructional methods; classroom environment allows for varied student groupings; classroom space encourages learning" (2005).

The first moves you can make to support struggling learners will enable you to create a learning environment that is conducive for all students. And although tone and culture can sometimes seem intangible, we can make tangible moves to create an inclusive culture that will enable our struggling students to thrive.

#1 *Make Your Room and Walls Clutter Free (K–8)*

This concept is simple yet profound. My belief in creating an uncluttered, visually supportive environment that would not overstimulate students started many years ago when I first began teaching. I taught in a Waldorf school, an the Waldorf pedagogy closely matches the UDL principle that design should be "simple and intuitive." This means that we do not overcomplicate our environment and fill it with every imaginable tool, thought, material, and decoration. We carefully curate our materials and have students interact with them in simple and intuitive ways.

I believe the classroom environment can be considered an additional teacher, so begin with the materials. Students do need a variety of materials for learning, but we do not need to present all the materials to our students, all of the

time. Figure 1.1a shows how classroom materials can be organized and clutter-free. Rotate materials as they are needed throughout the year. This can include materials for labs and science experiments, manipulatives for math, and even books for our classroom libraries. I am a book junkie and this one took me a long time to em-

Figure 1.1a: Lisa Horst's Grade 3 Writing Center

brace, but having such a busy library can challenge many of our students. Add and subtract books as the year goes on, perhaps adding books of increasing complexity for primary or middle elementary students, or adding genres, subjects, and themes as they become pertinent across the year for upper-elementary and middle school students. You might even consider splitting up the library. For example, keep multiple sets of books (text pairs, certain genres or themes, or book club selections) in another section of the room. This will allow students to access different types of materials in different spaces—a much easier task to manage. Figures 1.1b, 1.1c, and 1.1d show how second–grade teacher Anthony DiNoto has multiple sections to his classroom library. Classrooms are crowded, and removing materials from the room creates a better flow and an increased chance for access and independent use of materials.

This principle applies to our walls as well. I often encourage teachers to think about how the wall space is used up. Consider removing any store-bought or premade visuals—they may not feel relevant to our students and frequently distract them. Do not hang every anchor chart from every discipline on your

Figure 1.1b–1.1d: Anthony DiNoto's Grade 2 Library Center

walls at all times. For struggling students, visual stimulation actually impedes learning. If possible, consider the color choice of walls and materials, and use warm, soft, and/or muted hues instead of bright, loud colors. Chapter 3 provides more moves that address the use of visuals in the environment, especially the use of anchor charts.

#2 *Offer Multiple, Flexible Seating Arrangements (K–5)*

Students spend many hours in school, sometimes more than they spend awake at home, so it is important to keep the environment in which they learn functional and comfortable. Unfortunately, many of our schools still have traditional environments that do not work for many of our students. Although altering the architecture and layout of our classrooms might be difficult, changing seating options is one move that we can make to support all of our learners.

During the course of a day, students should be allowed to sit on chairs of different sizes, styles, and heights, on the floor, leaning on a secure surface (such as the wall), or on special seats (such as balls or seats designed to support posture and focus). Where a student sits should be his choice and should be part of the early discussions that you have with students regarding where and how they will work in your classroom. Once these conversations occur, students can sit in that "seat" for a predetermined amount of time until seating options can be changed—for the day, for the week, or even for the unit of study if that makes the most sense.

Where students sit can impact how they learn, so it is important to recognize that this seemingly innocuous element can affect student success. For some students, sitting in a typical school chair for an entire day can actually be torturous. So too can sitting on the floor unsupported. Young learners who have postural weaknesses (in simple terms, weak core muscles and control), sitting on the floor unsupported actually taxes their body, and attention, focus, and understanding are compromised. Therefore, it is important to provide multiple seating options for various times of the day. For example, when I gathered my students in a central

Figure 1.2: Standing Desk

area for a minilesson or class meeting, they could sit on the carpet unsupported or leaning on the wall, on a chair (that they brought to the meeting area), or on the floor on a supportive seat (sometimes called a wiggle cushion). They even had the option to stand. My fourth-grade student Stephen would stand for the entire read-aloud, sometimes in one place, but frequently lapping the back of the classroom. Now there are standing desks, some with a movable bar below that students can pedal while working, that work very well for struggling learners. Figure 1.2 shows an example of a standing desk with a pedal. In fact, you can now purchase an inexpensive, stretchable band, called Bouncy Bands (www.bouncy bands.com), that can be attached to any chair or desk to allow students to bounce and stretch their legs.

Having varied workspace options is also important. Teachers frequently ask my thoughts regarding desks and tables and where students should sit during independent practice. My answer is: anywhere and everywhere. Regardless of the discipline, my students could be found in every available space in the classroom. This includes on the floor (on their bottom, a seat, or even on their

Figures 1.3a–1.3c: Flexible Seating

stomachs, leaning on a clipboard), on one of the comfortable nontraditional seating options (large pillows, rocking chairs, and so on), at a desk (I always had a few of those in my room), or at a table (I had a few, in various places, of different heights, sizes and shapes). I called where they chose to work their "smart spot," and I put a lot of stock into thinking carefully about seating arrangements and how I could support my struggling students by providing them comfortable options. I even offered my desk as an option. As the years went by, I realized that I did not want a traditional teacher's desk placed front and center in my classroom. I gradually reduced the size of the desk until it was the smallest desk we had in our building (slightly larger than a typical student desk, but wooden, with drawers), and I put my desk in a corner

facing a board or wall. This actually became a great option for students who needed a little help "tuning out" the working hum and visual stimulation of the room, and I shared this seating with many a struggling student over the years. Figures 1.3a, 1.3b, and 1.3c show a classroom with multiple, flexible seating arrangements.

#3   *Present Information in Multiple Media (K–8)*

Learners are different, and as such, they will process information differently. Although we want our classrooms to be active, student-centered environments, sometimes we will need to present information to our students. Therefore, when we are in minilesson mode, we want to make sure that we have multiple media for teaching and learning, not just presenting information orally. This move to presenting learning in multiple media stands on the shoulders of one of the three UDL principles defined by the Center for Applied Special Technology—incorporating multiple means of representation (Mason, Orkwis, and Scott 2005). When we impart knowledge to our students by demonstrating, using a model, or instructing, we provide an additional medium through which students receive and process the information.

This is about more than providing visuals, although that is always a great start. In Chapter 3 I unpack the moves around using visuals in teaching. Here, I am also talking about providing students with physical, tactile, and kinesthetic materials and opportunities to learn.

For minilessons that involve texts, have extra copies of these texts available for student use. Sometimes, all students might have a text, or the text is visually displayed during reading, as in the case of a shared or close read. However, during read-aloud, the teacher is typically the only reader with a copy of the text. Be sure to have extra copies of read-aloud texts (especially chapter books for middle- and upper-grade students) so students can follow along. For certain struggling learners, this move provides the visual support they need to engage with and understand the text.

We understand the impact of success criteria on student achievement (Hattie 2009), so we want to incorporate rubrics and checklists as often and as clearly as possible. Therefore, when contemplating multiple means of representation, consider incorporating a visual rubric in your writing center (or area of the classroom designated to writing). A visual rubric demonstrates the differences between a 1, 2, 3, and 4 in writing, using a teacher-created example. Figure 1.4 shows an example of a visual rubric.

When teaching math, keep manipulatives within students' reach. I had a variety of math materials in small caddies on tables and surfaces during the minilesson. Sometimes, all students used the materials, but other times, they were available for individual use. For example, Tammy could be using the base-ten blocks on a mat during our place-value lesson, while Phillip could be using the fraction circle during a lesson on fractions and decimals. And the same was true of science materials during science lessons. I gave students time at the beginning of the year to get to know the manipulatives/tools and to "play" with the materials. After that they were able to use them well, at appropriate times, and with intention.

I am a firm believer in the power of kinesthetic movement for learning, especially for struggling learners. Why? For them, understanding multiple parts to a story, multiple steps to a process, and remembering the multiple steps necessary to complete a task (whether in a text to be read or written, a historical event, a math problem, or a series of directions) can be challenging because of weak working memory. What is working memory? It is a part of the short-term memory system that takes in visual and auditory input and processes and stores the input in the short term. Information does not go into long-term memory until it is processed in our working memory.

Research on ways to support students with weak working memory supports the notion that it is best to use strategies that decrease working memory stress and overload, rather than try to improve working memory. How can we decrease working memory overload without decreasing the expectations we have for students? We can chunk information and provide students with tangible ways to process this information in the short term. One way I do that is to add kinesthetic movement to the processing procedure. For example, I allow students to add physical movement to reading and writing when they are interacting
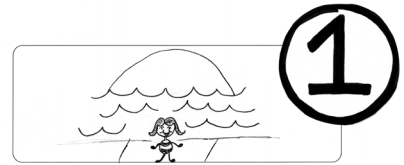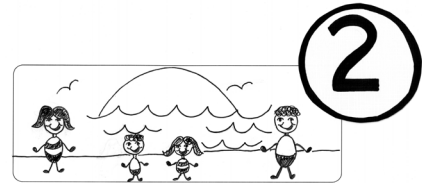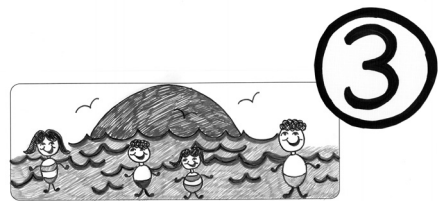
Figure 1.4: Visual Writing Rubric

with texts. In reading, you might add movement to retellings, or even allow them to act out a sequence of events, a problem or solution a character had, or even a reaction or motivation to the problem. In writing, you might allow students to touch the page while planning their writing, literally adding the tapping movement whil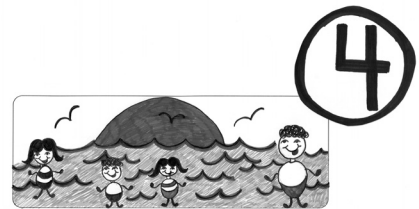e stating the parts to the text. In math, I incorporate kinesthetic movement while teaching division. Although I have a variety of algorithms and "tricks" for both completing equations and understanding the concept, I find that the movement around the basic steps really supports learners who are struggling with the concept. For those of you who know the jazz "step ball change" move, it is a variation of that to the words: "divide, multiply, subtract, get the remainder." Chunking the steps of division—divide, multiply, subtract, get the remainder—and putting those steps to song and dance decreases working memory demands and enables learners to process and use the steps necessary for solving the equation. In *Math on the Move*, Malke Rosenfeld writes, "when children harness their innate body knowledge for mathematical sense making, they also harness their whole selves in the pursuit of new ideas and understanding" (2017). Adding kinesthetic movement is quite effective (and fun)!

#4 Allow Students to Show Understanding in Multiple Forms (K–8)

Allowing students to show understanding in multiple forms also plays off of one of the three UDL principles—incorporating multiple means of expression. For a variety of reasons, expressing understanding is hard for many struggling learners. Sometimes, a learner has trouble putting thoughts to words and is unclear of what he or she wants to say. Other times, the learner knows what he or she wants to say but has trouble expressing it clearly and succinctly. And in other cases, a learner is taking time to process input and just needs time to express understanding. Regardless, we serve all our learners well when we provide students with multiple ways to demonstrate understanding. Examples are shown below in Figure 1.5.

ROLE PLAY	Demonstrate scientific conclusions (such as the movement of molecules or the change in rock formations), plot elements or character change in a text, or depict an event of historical significance through a short skit or even pantomime. Role playing can happen individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

Figure 1.5: Multiple Means of Expressing Understanding   *(continues)*

Figure 1.5   *(continued)*

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VERBAL EXPRESSION WITH CONFIRMATION	When a student expresses thinking, an opinion, or understanding, offer verbal confirmation. One way to offer verbal confirmation is to state back to students what you heard: "So what I believe I hear you saying is . . ." This helps acknowledge students' thinking (I never stray far from their original thoughts), model expression, and confirm their thoughts as valid and important.
NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION	Using nonverbal communication is efficient, represents a different medium, and creates an inclusive tone in your classroom. At the beginning of the year, your students can come up with three to five nonverbal signals to represent their thinking. Signals might represent: I agree, I have a question, I am thinking, I need a break, I am confused, or I need help. Students use these signals in unobtrusive ways and are able to communicate thinking, needs, and requests to you and to their peers. Varying the form of expression through signals allows all learners to express their thinking in tangible, accessible, and powerful ways. See Figure 1.6 as an example of a nonverbal chart to represent thinking.
VISUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH SKETCHING	Include art and visual representation as a medium for learning and expression. During instructional read-aloud, allow students to "sketch to stretch" to represent their thinking about the text through pictures. Or, demonstrate math solutions or process, scientific conclusions, and their understanding of a historical event through sketching or pictures. You might create historical murals so students can demonstrate their understanding of the nuances of a historical event (the causes of an event, and the effects shown through actions and the expressions on the faces of the patriots during the Boston Tea Party as an example). See Figures 1.7a and 1.7b as examples.
VISUAL UNDERSTANDING SCAFFOLDED THROUGH ORGANIZERS	Use visual organizers to express ideas and understanding. Quick and simple organizers provide all students, especially struggling students, with an accessible option for expressing ideas and understandings. Organizers can be premade or quickly made by students. One example is the "3-2-1"—three big ideas (from the book, experiment, lesson, concept), two questions, and one element or place where you need help. Another is a basic box with a line and bullets. On the line students jot the big idea (or conclusion or solution), and next to each bullet, they share details. See Figures 1.8 and 1.9 as examples of visual organizers.
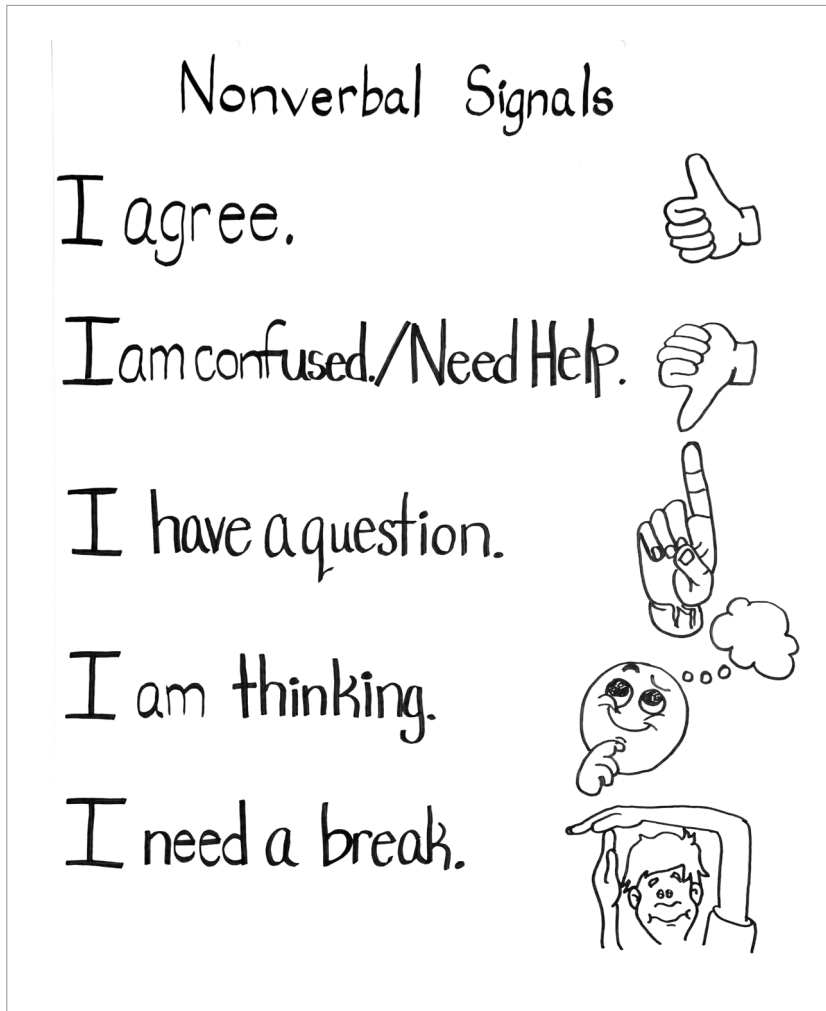
Figure 1.6: Sample Classroom Chart of Nonverbal Signals

Figure 1.7a–1.7b: Historical Mural of the Reasons Behind the Boston Tea Party

3-2-1 Thinking

3 Big Ideas

_____

_____

_____

_____

2 Questions

Q1 _____

_____

_____

Q2 _____

_____

_____

1 Way You Need Support

_____

_____

_____

_____

Figure 1.8: Visual Organizers That Can Demonstrate Understanding

BIG IDEA AND DETAILS ORGANIZER

Big Idea
Details:

  •

  •

  •
  |

Figure 1.9: Visual Organizers That Can Demonstrate Understanding

#5   *Embrace the Power of* Yet *(K–8)*

Believing in and teaching the transformative power of *yet* is perhaps my favorite of all moves. Life, learning, progress, and success is always about *yet*. What you can't do now is not what you can't do, but what you can't do *yet*.

Wrapping your mind around *yet* is not always easy. This summer, I got back into my yoga practice. Since I tend to go in and out of the practice, when I start back up, I am usually out of shape, and the yoga poses are hard for me. It doesn't help when I am sitting in child's pose (completely bent over, head and body on mat, lying there) and the guy next to me is in a one-handed plank (envision a one-handed push-up). I am unable to move, and the person next to me is basically supporting his body weight with one arm. But in yoga, the teacher says, "Yoga is about learning to fly. If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl. Wherever you are is where you are. You will get there. Embrace where you are and believe that you will learn to fly." These words are exactly the kinds of words we need to say to our students.

Begin by acknowledging that students are where they are. Embrace that, and believe that they will learn how to fly. Truly. Believing in the power of *yet* is not some touchy-feely ideology but is grounded in the belief that when we have a mindset that trusts that all students can grow, we can move our students to a place of great joy and success.

For me, embracing *yet* is a four-part process:

1. **Acknowledge struggles.** Don't shy away from them; don't try to smooth them over or pretend they don't exist. Have honest and authentic conversations with students (developmentally appropriate to the age and maturity of the student), and let students know that it is absolutely okay that something is hard for them. Something is hard for everyone. Use yourself or other people students may know as an example or model. You could say: *I know that _____ doesn't come easily to you right now. That's okay. We all have something that doesn't come as naturally to us the first time we learn it. The trick is to keep at it, and use our community to support you. Remember how we were talking about how we all have strengths and struggles? And about how even famous people have struggles? Well, I want you to be thinking about that now. I think that _____ is feeling hard for you. Let's talk about that.*

2. **Rephrase their challenge as something that they cannot do yet.** Put language around the struggle, as a *yet* phrase, and discuss this with them. Perhaps even posit this as a goal or in connection with a positive. For example, *You cannot yet read that text you want to read independently, but you are able to identify the genre and text elements that you like, and so here are three texts that are just like that one you want to read. They will move you toward being able to read that text independently.*

3. **Set goals.** Setting goals is about moving students from *not yet* to *yes*. This can include really breaking down steps or providing them with a process that will enable them to reach their desired results. For example, if a student wants to read a text that is too complex for him to both understand and enjoy, then perhaps set a goal to eventually read that book and lay out books that will lead him to success. Lay out a trajectory of reading that gets him from the reader he is today to the reader he wants to be. Literally, set the goal to read the more complex text (*Harry Potter*, for example), and lay out the reading that will move him there (reading *Sea of Monsters,* then reading *The Forgotten Door,* and then moving to read *The Secret Garden*).

4. **Celebrate.** We have far too few celebrations in our classrooms, and celebration is key to moving struggling learners. Celebrate milestones, celebrate successes, and definitely celebrate hard work. We don't necessarily have to achieve something to celebrate. I am not talking about "carrots and sticks" or any type of external reward, but a celebration of their work. Hard work is just that—hard to accomplish, but it will lead to success. At the end of yoga class, there is *shavasana*. It is a few quiet moments at the end of class where you sit on your mat in quiet meditation and acknowledge all your hard work. You will

pull your knees to your chest in a hug, bow to yourself, and acknowledge your work on the mat for that day. Remember to create moments of *shavasana* in your classrooms to acknowledge and celebrate the hard work of our students to move them from where they are and what they can't do yet to where they want to be.

KEEP IN MIND

Considering the environment is the first set of moves that will support struggling learners. To ensure the environment supports our students in the most positive way, keep in mind a few key ideas across grade levels and across disciplines:

- Represent ideas in simple ways. This would include using images for directions and anchor charts, and color-coding areas of the room.
- Organize materials so that they are accessible and can be found independently.
- Set and post goals daily. Be sure students are always clear about what is expected and what they are going to do.