Collaboration for Multilingual Learners With Exceptionalities

I dedicate this book to my coauthor, Dr. Audrey Cohan, with whom I have been collaborating for close to two and a half decades, combining our expertise, challenging and affirming each other's thinking, and never stopping learning.

—Andrea

This book is dedicated to the next "chapter" in my life, my first grandson Jaewoo Norman Ha.

—Audrey

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We Share the Students

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and Colleen Wilcox

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The subtitle of the book, *We Share the Students,* is the foundation of our belief that through collaboration we can reach *all* students and create educational institutions in which *all* students benefit from high-quality and thoughtful instructional practices. The educators' vignettes and materials integrated in this book share our vision. A huge thank-you to all the teachers and administrators whose contributions are included as authentic examples: Jill Ayabei, Monica (McGuire) Barc, Paula Barnick, Dr. Courtney Berry, Andrea Bitner, SheMeika Charles, Dr. Laurene Christensen, Kelly Cooney, Kelly Cray, Danielle Dodge, Amanda Haleiko, Erika Hall, Laura A. Hastings, Madison Leech, Jennifer Mårtensson, Dr. Nicole Montellese, Julie Ochoa, Leah Palmer, Crystal Reid, Dr. Claudia Rinaldi, Jamie Scripps, Katie Stenz, Svetlana Stowell, Karen Muñante Trzaska, and Cassie Varela.

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About the Authors

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(2014), *Collaboration and Co-Teaching: A Leader's Guide* (2015), *Coteaching for English Learners: A Guide to Collaborative Planning, Instruction, Assessment, and Reflection* (2018), *Collaborating for English Learners: A Foundational Guide to Integrated Practices* (2019), and *Co-Planning: 5 Essential Practices to Integrate Curriculum and Instruction for English Learners* (2022). She is a contributing author of *Breaking Down the Wall: Essential Shifts for English Learner Success* (2020), *From Equity Insights to Action* (2022), *Digital-Age Teaching for English Learners* (2022), *Collaboration and Co-Teaching for Dual Language Learners: Transforming Programs for Multilingualism and Equity* (2023), and *Breaking Down the Monolingual Wall: Essential Shifts for Multilingual Learners' Success* (2024). Ten of her Corwin books are bestsellers.

Audrey Cohan, EdD, is the senior dean for Research, Scholarship, and Graduate Studies at Molloy University, Rockville Centre, New York. She has been at Molloy University for twenty-nine years during which time she served as professor, chairperson of the Education Department, and interim dean for the Division of Natural Sciences. Dr. Cohan has taught in the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs. She began her career as a special education teacher in New York City working with students with special needs in both self-contained and resource room settings. Her first book, published in 1995, was titled *Sexual Harassment and Sexual Abuse: A Handbook for Teachers and Administrators*. This coauthored book was an outgrowth of her dissertation work, which focused on child sexual abuse within schools. Dr. Cohan coedited a five-volume Breaking the Mold series about educational innovation with Dr. Andrea Honigsfeld and has published numerous peer-reviewed articles about English language learners. The textbook published in 2016, *Serving English Language Learners,* earned the Textbook & Academic Authors Association (TAA) Most Promising New Textbook Award. Her other coauthored book publications include *Beyond Core Expectations: A Schoolwide Framework for Serving the Not-So-Common Learner* (2014), *America's Peace-minded Educator: John Dewey* (2016), *Team Up, Speak Up, Fire Up! Educators, Students, and the Community Working Together to Support English Learners* (2020), and *From Equity Insights to Action* (2022). While at Molloy University, Dr. Cohan has been the recipient of the Faculty Leadership Award, the Faculty Recognition Award, the Molloy University Research Award, and the Distinguished Service Award.

A TIMELY COLLABORATION

Fluid

Complex

Co-generative

Yield impactful academic results for **Multilingual LEARNERS** with **EXCEPTIONALITIES**

Multilingualism as an asset & powerful lens

multilingual Consciousness

Embrace Collaboration

Educators

Use shared **voices** to advocate

Work Together

Districts

Communities

Rely on each other

Combine expertise

Capitalize on each other's **Strengths**
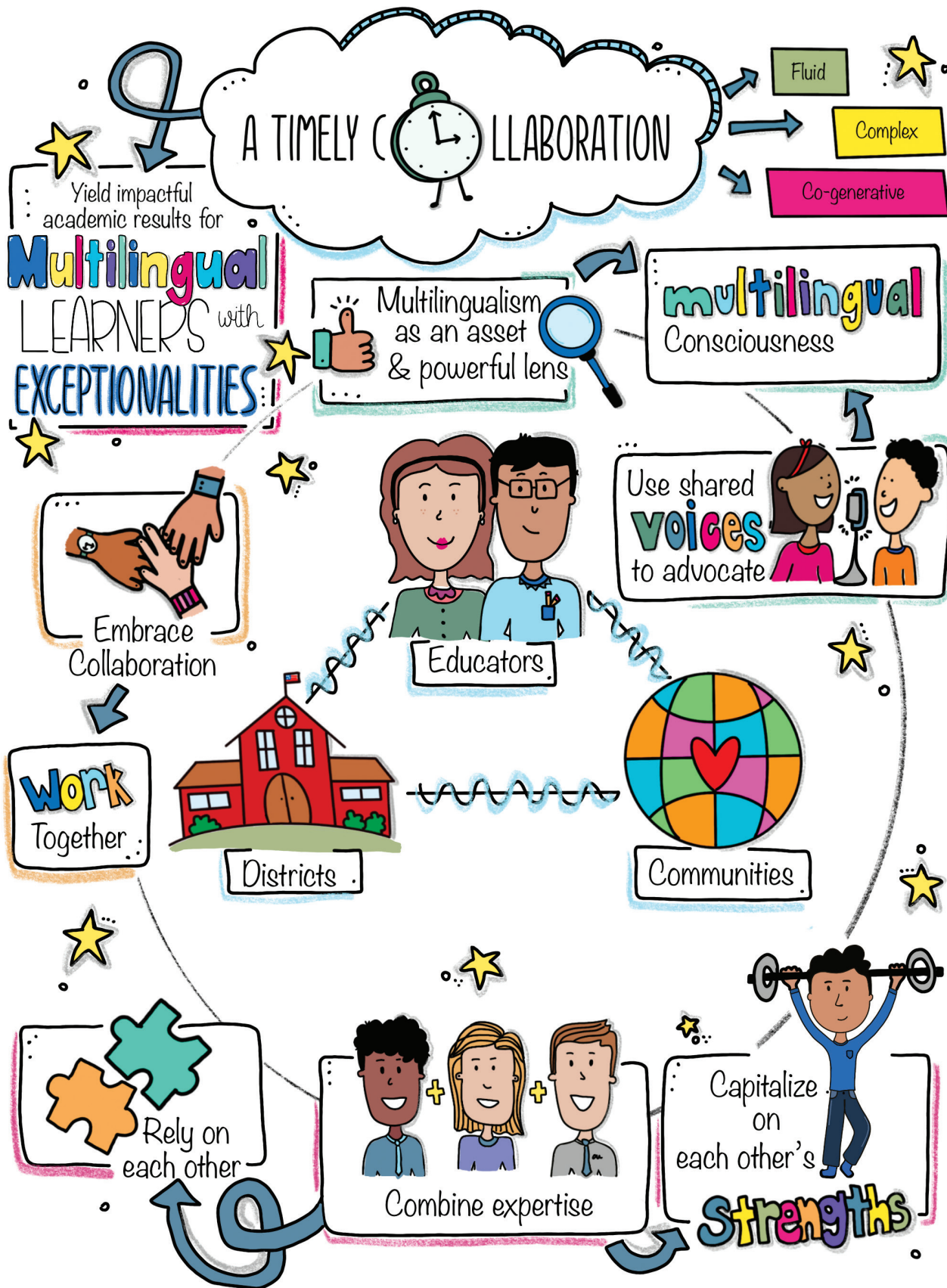
Introduction

"In a daring leadership role, it's time to lift up our teams and help them shine."

—Brené Brown (2018, p. 132)

Welcome to Chapter 1! This book has long been in the making and we are excited—very excited—to share our thinking around collaborative practices on behalf of *multilingual learners with exceptionalities*. Right away, we are ready to introduce, reintroduce, or affirm a new term you will find throughout this book. We have worn many hats prior and during this manuscript development. Our combined experience and expertise in English language development (ELD) and special education have led to firsthand opportunities to work with students who previously were referred to as dually identified learners as well as their teachers, coaches, and administrators. As professors of preservice and inservice teacher education and coaches, we have helped many schools and districts recognize the talent and expertise of their educators in designing successful academic experiences for this unique student population. We wrote this book to champion asset-based perceptions of multilingual learners with exceptionalities and to cultivate an understanding of how a well-developed, collaboratively designed instructional focus—integrated with language and literacy development—can yield impactful academic, linguistic, and social-emotional outcomes. Our rationale for writing this book is rooted in our commitment and passion for helping educators fully embrace collaborative practices to bring an innovative focus to multilingual learners with exceptionalities. Let's recognize that districts must not identify or designate students with disabilities merely because of their emerging language development. First and foremost, all students are general education students! Let's get to work and break down silos!

START HERE

The theme of this book, *We Share the Students*, has been at the heart of much of our work, including teaching, research, coaching support, and advocacy, for the past twenty years. We have considered what strategies work best for multilingual learners as well as the most effective practices for both language and

literacy development. We have published resources on learning disabilities and considered the question of how to differentiate between typical language acquisition, language difficulties, and learning disabilities. Additionally, we have explored the most valuable ways to design instruction to meet the needs of multilingual learners with exceptionalities. This six-chapter book is an outgrowth of much of our field-based research and collective processing related to teacher collaboration. As authors and unapologetic advocates for this often-marginalized population, we embrace teacher collaboration as a powerful process and tool. Therefore, we invite you to use your own lens of collaborative experiences and possibilities to create a cohesive approach to program design, planning, instruction, and assessment in support of multilingual learners with exceptionalities as you read further. We believe that you will find the models, strategies, and real-life stories as guides to establish, affirm, or strengthen collaborative practices in your own context.

WHY IS THIS BOOK NEEDED?

While we intend for this book to offer practical ideas and instructional cycles for collaboration, we also feel strongly that teachers and administrators need to know the history of why cooperation, coordination of services, and impactful, intentional collaboration on behalf of multilingual learners with exceptionalities are so critical. We are inspired by Amanda Kibler (2023), who reminds us that our students deserve *rightful presence* (not merely inclusion) and *educational dignity* (not merely supports). We fully agree with her notion of creating the *most expansive learning environment* (not merely the least restrictive environment).

We believe the time has come for educators, districts, and communities to embrace collaboration, combine their professional expertise, and use shared voices to advocate for multilingual learners with exceptionalities. We further contend that this is a must-read guide for educators to support their collaborative efforts.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

In this book, we invite you to think about your students' learning opportunities and consider which of your students are exceptional learners who may require special education programming or related services or who need to be challenged. Keep in mind that multilingual learners with exceptionalities who require interventions or differentiation as learning supports may also benefit from gifted and talented curriculums as they may be considered twice exceptional. For teaching teams, this means working together to provide the best education possible without falling for what Kangas (2018b) refers to as the *specialization trap*. When working with students, consider this: Does one set of services take precedence over another set of services? If so, why? How can we collectively create a balanced, equitable approach to serve all students?

OVERALL CHALLENGES

María Cioè-Peña (2017) calls attention to a troubling phenomenon she refers to as the *intersectional gap*. She challenges inclusion programs since they are often unable to

> adequately provide truly inclusive spaces for children who have more than one factor affecting their academic development [. . .] these inclusive spaces can often place bilingual students with disabilities alongside 'peers' who are typically developing, speak the same languages or receive special education services but never all three. (p. 913)

Similarly, Patricia Martínez-Álvarez (2022) raises a concern that "schools have failed to understand the complexities of children with multiple potential learning identities or the forms of oppression they experience" (pp. 3–4), which may lead to a disproportionate number of students becoming marginalized, misunderstood, and underserved.

What we have observed is that many of our multilingual students are at the intersection of diversity and exceptionalities, while the program models have not caught up with this intersectionality. Our education field continues to be siloed because of the challenges of meaningfully weaving all the dimensions of our students' identities together and creating what Lee Ann Jung (2023) and earlier, Jung et al. (2019) refer to as *a universally welcoming environment*.

Educators who teach in inclusive settings (or shall we agree to start referring to such settings by the name they deserve: universally welcoming environments?) report that there are several additional phenomena that may need consideration when working with multilingual learners. These include

- Understanding of the stages of language acquisition and the processes by which children comprehend, process, and produce language

- Knowing the home and English language proficiency levels of each child and how long they have been educated in English

- Evaluating students' prior schooling experiences, including limited or interrupted formal education

- Recognizing students' multidimensional identities, including the multiple languages and dialogues their families share and the complex cultural traditions and experiences they bring from their homes and communities

- Evaluating child developmental and academic milestones and trajectories

- Understanding family backgrounds and the presence of adults

- Traumatic situations and living conditions (refugees, immigration policies, poverty, family separations, homelessness)

A common source of frustration among educators may be a lack of resources, lack of systemic support, or perhaps the lack of knowledge and experience with how to provide effective instruction for multilingual learners who are also exceptional. Many of the teachers we have worked with report that at times they felt underprepared to support learners with exceptionalities in their classrooms and that the path to achievement was clouded by systemic inequities as well as their limited tools to address the multitude of students' needs, be it academic, cultural, linguistic, or social.

When asked about the teacher collaborations that might support working with multilingual students, the answer was common: Teachers trained with a special education background might not be knowledgeable about language proficiency levels, typical stages of language acquisition, or best strategies for students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFEs). The inverse seems true as well. Teachers prepared for working with student populations learning English as a second language—or even a third or fourth language—may not have been introduced to strategies to be used with the broad spectrum of diverse learners, many who are classified within the special education continuums (See Chapter 2 for more on this).

FIRST THINGS FIRST

We recommend that you start with a conversation: You can begin your collaboration about language acquisition, diversity, intersectionality, and program choices by engaging in student-centered collaborative discussions that allow each educator to better understand the unique perspectives and expertise colleagues bring to the table as well as to better understand the intersections of student experiences. For example, it is important to know that language acquisition is typically described as a natural development across several predictable stages. Depending on the state you live in and the ELD standards that are used, there might be some variations on how these stages are described or even how many of them there are (four, five, or six). For our purposes, we are going to briefly review the five levels of language proficiency presented by TESOL, an international advocacy organization, as follows (See www.tesol.org for more):

1. *Starting:* being exposed to English while language production is just beginning to appear

2. *Emerging:* demonstrating receptive and emerging productive language skills

3. *Developing:* employing basic oral and written language skills with predictable patterns

4. *Expanding:* employing more advanced oral and written language skills with fewer errors

5. *Bridging:* having a comprehensive command of English

There are shared characteristics of learners at each level, while there are also unique variations among students. Inspired by Sara Kangas's work (2018a, 2018b), we also suggest starting an open dialogue, asking lots of questions, learning from each other, and reflecting on your own practice. The conversation is even more relevant when you focus on a single student as in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1 ● Questions to Ask About Students

WHAT TO ASK ELD/BILINGUAL TEACHERS	WHAT TO ASK SPECIAL EDUCATORS
What is the English proficiency level of my student? What was it last year? How much growth has been noted? How much growth is expected to happen in a year across the languages and the language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing? Which language domain is a strength for the student? Which needs more enrichment and support? What are the most impactful strategies that support language and literacy development? What can this student do academically during their stage of language development?	Are there any specific aspects of the student's development to be aware of? (This may include health, hearing, vision, fine and gross motor skills, social-emotional behaviors.) How is the student able to best communicate with teachers and peers? How does the student's disability or disabilities impact learning? What are some strategies to support this student across content areas? Are there any specific instructional routines that you recommend? What does the IEP include? What are the student's strengths? What are some unique ways the student is successful in your classroom?
WHAT TO ASK CLASSROOM TEACHERS	**WHAT TO CONSIDER TO OPTIMIZE INSTRUCTIONAL SUCCESS**
What aspects of the content lesson may be difficult for this student? Is there any background knowledge that is needed for the student to understand the lesson(s)? Does the student have any prior knowledge that would support the current lesson? Is there any vocabulary that needs to be pre-taught? How can the lesson(s) be more accessible and meaningful for student success? What opportunities does this student have to truly shine in the classroom?	How can I continue to learn about this student? How can I adjust or modify my instruction to meet the needs of this student? What areas of academic performance may need modified instruction? Does the size of the learning group impact success? Are there areas of academic performance that seem to resist typical instructional practices and need extra review? Might assessments need to be modified, and if so, how to allow for learning targets to be met? What modifications or adaptations will make the lessons accessible? Does the student benefit from modifications other than those stated on the IEP? Are there times during instruction that the student seems over-stimulated or under-stimulated, and how might the learning environment be adapted?

How will the student benefit from collaborative planning?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYSTEMIC SUPPORT

Many of us in the field of education have been thinking about this question for many years: *How do we best support our multilingual students who are also under the umbrella of special education services?* To answer this question, schools need to take a systemic approach, such as the structured, consistent frameworks RTI (Response to Intervention) or MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) offer. Both of these approaches aim to accomplish something similar: They are designed to provide a consistent, systemic alignment of a vision for equity with ongoing assessments and differentiated instructional practices to advance all students' growth and development. Historically, RTI has focused on academic interventions, whereas MTSS is designed to take students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs into consideration. McCart and Miller (2020) present four components that are considered essential for the MTSS system to be successful. These include "teaming structures; data for decision-making; evidence-based curriculum, instruction, and support materials; as well as continuous improvement practices" (p. 10)—also highlighting the need for collaboration!

It is beyond the scope of this book to fully unpack RTI or MTSS (see for example, Haas & Brown, 2019). Instead, our goal is to show the common thread across both approaches as well as other possible practices—such as PLCs (Professional Learning Communities): Their successful implementation is contingent upon sustained teacher collaboration! So we are here to help you create a sustainable school environment that embraces cultural acceptance, offers meaningful choices in assessments, and acknowledges contributions from students with diverse backgrounds. Rachel Mun et al. (2020) remind us to focus on building systemic capacity, which refers to the shared ability of all parts of an organization to work together in unison toward a common goal.

Both RTI and MTSS are heavily dependent on collaborative practices. As educators, we, too, advocate for achieving success with multilingual learners with exceptionalities through teacher collaboration. Therefore, if you can use your lens of teacher collaboration as you read further, we believe that you will find the models, strategies, and real-life stories can be a guide for your own best practices.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHER COLLABORATION

The idea of teacher collaboration may not be new; however, our invitation to all teachers (PreK–12 classroom teachers, special educators, ELD teachers, bilingual educators, and special service providers) to embrace opportunities for and make a commitment to sustained collaboration *for the sake of multilingual learners with exceptionalities* may be new in many contexts. Inclusive pedagogy is based on the premise that educators recognize and respond to all students' needs and extend what is available to some students and make it accessible to all:

Inclusive education is not merely about inclusion of students with disabilities. Inclusive education is a means to enable all students to create meaning and develop passions for lifelong learning and creativity. It acknowledges human diversity and seeks to understand and appreciate differences between individuals to maximize each individual's talent potential. (Dawson, 2022, p. 217)

While the notion of inclusive pedagogy is closely tied to instructional practices in the PreK–12 special education context, it provides a helpful framework for working with multilingual learners with or without exceptionalities in a collaborative, integrated program as well. At the core of successful inclusive pedagogy is systemic collaboration between and among educators, administrators, and family members. When instruction is designed, delivered, and assessed collaboratively while being centered on multilingual learners with exceptionalities, all students benefit.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR JOINT REFLECTION AND SHARED PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

When we look holistically at students, we are acknowledging those who are neurodiverse; who represent different linguistic groups; who identify with different racial, ethnic, or cultural groups; or who represent varied talents and academic readiness levels. When we closely examine students' complex cultural, linguistic, and academic identities and their related academic achievement, we often notice glaring inequities. The achievement disparities for multilingual learners and students with disabilities signal that in the past, students might have experienced lower expectations, different levels of support, and limited access to challenging educational opportunities.

As a starting point, think about the diversity that exists in your classroom or a classroom that you recently visited. Did you recognize the wide range of academic abilities and interests of the students? Were you aware of the many cultural and linguistic backgrounds represented in the class? If so, you are noticing the complex cultural, linguistic, and academic identities represented within that group of students (Honigsfeld et al., 2022). This is your asset-based lens. Now go one step further:

- Are you intentionally using an asset-based lens?

- What are some critical understandings around typical language acquisition and appropriate placements for multilingual learners with exceptional needs?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION WITH FAMILIES

To provide exceptional multilingual learners with the appropriate educational placements and services, we must think of families as part of the team as well (Cohan et al., 2020a, 2020b). When we include them and give respect to parents and caregivers, we choose to recognize the whole child

and the value of a family unit. This is imperative because parents have the insider view of their child to share, especially in the pre-referral phase. They know about their children's access to language beyond school; likes and dislikes; patterns of social, academic, and linguistic behaviors; talents and creativity; and individual needs. Parents are bridges to school-based education and must be invited to advocate for their child (Oregon Department of Education, 2021). Having parents or guardians as partners contributes to asset-based thinking and cultivates communication between the home and school. Urtubey (2020) states it clearly, "Most school systems aren't fully equipped to gauge the complexities of multilayered identities, such as first- or second-generation English language learners who may also have learning disabilities" (p. 40). Including families and caregivers in all levels of educational decision-making not only builds a school community but ensures active engagement in the special education processes. Some parents might have exhibited mistrust of special education placements; others might deeply worry about the stigma of various classes. But beyond the legal requirements of parental participation are the positive dynamics of collaborative interaction and shared decision-making in the best interest of the child.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THIS BOOK?

In this publication, we intend to address multiple themes of exceptionality with a distinct focus on the multilingual learner. As a backdrop, we have the continuums of special education services that have been embedded in schools, and we will consider the variations in placements most often available to students. This volume is not a handbook, and we do not review clinical differences—as in the DSM, which classifies students as special learners. There are numerous excellent publications accomplishing a detailed look at neurodiversity, and those publications may complement this book. In addition, we recognize twice-exceptional learners, as well as gifted and talented students, who are also developing competence across multiple languages and literacies. Rather, we take a broad-brush approach with the goal of making the book accessible for all educators. Our goal is to ensure that our readers embrace teacher collaboration in support of multilingual learners with exceptionalities, work as teams to combine their expertise, and to best service students together.

HOW IS THIS BOOK ORGANIZED?

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter sets the tone for the entire book. It articulates the context and defines the goal for writing this book: We identify the purpose and the rationale for this work and establish its unique focus on exceptional multilingual learners. We clearly articulate what is in this book and how it will be a must-read guide for educators to support their collaborative efforts for multilingual learners with exceptionalities.

CHAPTER 2: MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES AND PROGRAM MODELS TO SERVE THEM

Through multiple asset-based lenses—for example, intersectionality, equity, culturally and linguistically responsive instructional and assessment practices—we paint a comprehensive picture of multilingual learners with exceptionalities and showcase several stories and portraits of neurodiversity. We consider commonly used frameworks and take them one step further by systematically and intentionally infusing tools and strategies for sustained collaboration. Furthermore, we engage in a critical exploration of various instructional and program models and make a strong case for collaborative approaches to serving these students.

CHAPTER 3: COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO IDENTIFICATION AND ON-GOING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

In this chapter, we begin to take a comprehensive look at the expertise teachers, ELD specialists, bilingual educators, special educators, and support personnel offer. We highlight the knowledge and experience each group of professionals contribute to the collaborative efforts of identification and placement of multilingual learners with exceptional needs. We will discuss how taking multiple perspectives into consideration will help avoid under- and over-representation as well as misidentification. When many educators "share the students" and work together with clear goals and purpose, their students benefit from not only the creative synergy and collective efficacy that emerges in those partnerships but from the sustained efforts to monitor students' academic, linguistic, literacy, and social progress.

CHAPTER 4: ENGAGING IN COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

In this chapter, we present multiple approaches that educators can take to combine their expertise and successfully co-plan. Taking actionable steps to co-plan by using the strategies and routines in this chapter, readers will be prepared to create effective differentiated and appropriately scaffolded units and lessons that carefully consider the complex needs of multilingual learners with exceptionalities. We present field-tested collaborative tools and protocols that support the intentional and meaningful integration of content, language, literacy, and IEPs.

CHAPTER 5: CO-DELIVERING INSTRUCTION FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES

This chapter builds upon the collaborative planning and assessment practices that are presented in Chapters 3 and 4. It is geared toward instructional contexts where two or more educators collaboratively deliver the

curriculum and support student learning within a shared classroom space or in an alternative learning environment. Co-teaching and coordinated teaching configurations will be explored and richly illustrated.

CHAPTER 6: CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SUSTAINED COLLABORATION

In this final chapter, we will address the importance of sustained collaboration and the complex ways to build capacity. We adapt the professional capital framework consisting of human capital, social capital, and decision-making capital and apply it to the types of collaborative practices that lead to enduring results for multilingual learners with exceptionalities.

RECURRING CHAPTER FEATURES

There are several major sections as well as recurring features in each chapter to provide continuity and a consistent learning experience for our readers. Keep in mind that this book is written with both the experienced educator as well as the novice teacher or teacher candidate in mind so we anticipate that you will find both affirmations and challenges presented on the pages of this book. Each chapter will follow a predictable format to help you navigate the content. To achieve that, you can count on the following sections to appear in every chapter in this order:

CHAPTER OPENING SKETCH NOTE

Each chapter begins with a sketch note masterfully developed by Carmen Nguyen offering a visual representation of the key ideas of the chapter. Carmen is the Officer of Professional Development for Multilingual Learners in the Office of Other Languages, Katy Independent School District, Texas, and a prolific sketch note artist, who works digitally and freehand to capture key ideas and to portray her inner positivity when working with multilingual learners.

QUOTE OR PROVERB

Following Carmen's splendid visual overview of the chapter, we offer a compelling quote that reflects the chapter's message as well as the experiences of many of our multilingual learners with exceptionalities.

ANCHOR QUESTIONS

Our goal with the anchor questions is to set the stage for the rest of the chapter. These carefully crafted questions also double as an invitation to collaborate with your teams. Perhaps you pause and set some goals for yourself based on these questions. Or perhaps you plan a meeting or initiate a shared document with your colleagues to record your responses before you read each chapter. While these questions are purposefully designed

to engage collaborative teams as they define the focus of the chapter content, you can try them out individually as a preassessment and reflection tool. Whether the questions serve as springboards to your dynamic and free-flowing discussions or help settle you for reading on your own, let's agree to stay focused on recognizing and affirming the assets and strengths of learners and their educators!

START HERE

As the *Start Here* heading suggests, these introductory sections in each chapter invite you to launch your exploration of the topic with some key information. We want you to center your thinking around some essential concepts and shared practices before going deeper into the topic. Some of you may have already "been there and done that," and if so, these sections will reaffirm and validate your current practices as well as offer you talking points to bring to your colleagues.

COLLABORATIVE TEAM PORTRAIT

We introduce you to a three-way collaborative partnership and weave their story across all the chapters. These composite vignettes depict realistic scenarios with fictitious names and locations. The inspirations for the story have come from our own experiences as teachers, researchers, coaches, and advocates. We believe that this type of portraiture will contain student and teacher experiences as well as elements of collaborative teaching and learning that many of you recognize and easily relate to. In fact, we are going to introduce the team later in this chapter.

DIG DEEPER

The next key feature in each chapter helps you deepen your thinking around multilingual learners with exceptionalities. The ideas presented here have been field-tested in many schools and districts as well as backed by research. The *Dig Deeper* sections are designed to critically engage you with the material as we challenge you to consider differences of opinions or perspectives about collaborative practices.

ESSENTIAL TOOLS AND PROTOCOLS

In the *Essential Tools and Protocols* section, we present equitable classroom-based approaches and powerful multimodal resources related to the topic of the chapter. Throughout the book, we highlight Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Jung, 2023; Novak, 2016; Stein, 2023) as a framework for creating inclusive, collaborative learning environments and developing consistent instructional practices for multilingual learners with exceptionalities and their peers in collaborative, integrated classes. A word of caution is in order: Protocols and tools are not set in stone—they are intended to be refined and adapted to your local context so consider them as further opportunities and invitations for collaboration.

CELEBRATIONS

While we showcase many examples of collaborations and acknowledge educators throughout the chapters, we include more detailed stories called *Celebrations,* which are first-person accounts written by the contributing educators. You may want to try some of the initiatives, or you may simply appreciate the innovations and inspirations that teachers of multilingual learners with exceptionalities have developed over time. These authentic stories from around the country portray collaborative practices with successful outcomes. The names of the students have been changed, but the educators themselves are excited to share their best collaborative strategies and so their professional names, schools, and districts are identified. Some of the featured educators are well-established teachers or administrators, and some are novice teachers who are ready to make an impact on the students that they are privileged to teach.

SCHOOL AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS' CORNER

As we wrap up each chapter, we make some leadership-specific recommendations to school or district administrative team members. Instructional leadership as well as strong commitment and vision for collaboration are essential to the success of the type of initiative we are advocating for multilingual learners with exceptionalities—or for all students in your care!

END-OF-CHAPTER REFLECTION QUESTIONS

We incorporated reflection questions at the end of each chapter to invite you to stop and process all that was presented before moving on to the next chapter. Although we decided against a designated chapter on collaborative reflection, we recognize the importance of engaging in reflective practices as part of the collaborative instructional cycle and have woven reflections throughout the book in multiple ways. These questions may be shared with your team members, co-teachers, or instructional leaders to further your collaboration and to continue to build your collective efficacy (Hattie, 2018). We have found that by using reflection questions and discussion prompts, we can validate existing practices, share successes and unpack challenges, elicit new ideas and solutions as well as enhance overall team communication. These questions are designed to both keep you in the chapter a little longer as well as to stretch your thinking and imagination beyond the content of the chapter.

GO BEYOND THE CHAPTER

The *Go Beyond the Chapter* section includes additional resources to best meet the needs of your students. Think of these resources as professional learning opportunities to extend and elaborate on your collaborative practices.

BUT WAIT, THERE IS MORE . . .

In addition to this consistent chapter organization, wherever deemed necessary, we have inserted some additional features throughout each chapter to further illustrate a key point we are making or to invite you to engage with the content in unique ways.

MINDFUL MOMENTS

As their names suggest, *Mindful Moments* are highlights you will find throughout the book. These features offer opportunities to slow down a bit and to pause and think about how to create rich collaborative opportunities in your context as well as how to bring linguistic, academic, social, and cultural experiences to the classroom or the team meetings. The Mindful Moments feature also serves the purpose of on-going reflection and provides the possibility for extended discourse with your colleagues.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Each chapter will include two pieces of artwork by Vermont-based painter–illustrator Colleen Wilcox to visually represent a key idea, sentence, or a quote. Other types of illustrations will include images that showcase examples of authentic teacher work samples from different contexts across varied grade levels, content areas, and instructional delivery models.

SUMMARY CHARTS AND FIGURES

Periodically we will synthesize key information or recommendations in some graphic format for easier access. We love one-pagers that succinctly organize and present essential material; we hope you do too!

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Under the heading *Voices from the Field,* you will find brief examples that may focus on a single strategy, a compelling personal story, or a shared professional experience. We wish to showcase authentic practices from PreK–12 classrooms and schools with you. One of our own takeaways from writing this book is that the desire to collaborate and build relationships with colleagues always yields powerful results. Here is our first example of this feature:

> Kelly Cray, cultural and language support specialist at Burr and Burton Academy, Manchester, Vermont, shared her thoughts with us on every chapter during the manuscript development, so it is most fitting to showcase her persuasive message:
>
> *If we truly want to foster collaboration and promote inclusion, we need to speak as if the individuals or groups we discuss are present with us. This approach not only respects people with disabilities and neurodivergences, but it also helps prevent the reinforcement of implicit biases.*

When advocates emphasize the use of neuroinclusive language and the importance of avoiding deficit-based language, they do so not only for the benefit of neurodivergent individuals but also for the betterment of society. Language holds immense significance because it shapes our perception of the world. Biases and prejudices will flourish if a particular group of people is consistently discussed regarding their limitations or what they cannot contribute to society. Similarly, when we talk about marginalized groups as if they are separate from us, we create a mental divide that hinders inclusion.

One phrase that resonates with me is "belonging is a type of access." This concept applies to our classrooms and our professional communities. It becomes apparent that many people genuinely believe that disabilities and divergences are inherent disadvantages. If we view our students in this light, they will never experience a sense of belonging. If we view our colleagues in this light, genuine collaboration becomes unattainable.

Reflect on this brief quote: Do you agree with what Kelly says about the importance of language? How does what Kelly describes manifest itself in your context?

WHO COLLABORATES WITH WHOM?

Collaboration is a fluid, complex, co-generative process. It generally includes several educators and, simply put, it means working together, relying on each other, and capitalizing on each other's strengths. Some collaborations may be regularly scheduled and sustained, while others may only occur occasionally or on an as-needed basis. Consider the following list and reflect on what collaboration may look like in each of the scenarios when teachers work in partnership with colleagues:

- Grade-level teachers (on the elementary level)

- Content-area teachers (on the secondary level)

- ELD teachers and special educators

- Bilingual and dual-language educators

- Educators specializing in speech-language pathology, behavior, occupational and physical therapy, mental health, and so forth

- Librarians and special area teachers (music, art, physical education, health science, and so forth)

- Teaching assistants or paraprofessionals

- Instructional coaches

- Instructional leaders and administrators

- Parents, guardians, or caretakers

- Community liaisons or other members of the larger linguistic community

Collaboration may greatly vary in each case: Collaborating with teaching assistants may focus on the effective and efficient day-to-day management of resources. Connecting with parents invites a two-way dialogue about their children's progress; whereas collaborating with instructional coaches allows for self-assessment, goal setting, and on-going, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for the team.

COLLABORATION IS A *fluid*, COMPLEX CO-GENERATIVE PROCESS: EDUCATORS WORKING *together*, RELYING on EACH OTHER, & BUILDING on each OTHER'S STRENGTHS.

Source: Created by Colleen Wilcox

Collaborative practices, most recently, have been stretched to include new models—such as synchronous and asynchronous arrangements, traditional face-to-face work, and virtual meetings. We have all been involved in trying new technologies and programs as well as been active participants in the technology shifts that have impacted both teachers and students.

A Mindful Moment

Research shows that teachers find innovative ways to collaborate on behalf of their students. We invite you to consider this term: multilingual consciousness. What might this mean to you in your professional context? Jot it down here before you read further.

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Multilingual consciousness means that on a daily basis you are using your students' multilingualism as an asset and a powerful lens to design your units and lessons or unpack ideas in support of your students with your colleagues. Can you identify informal and formal interactions and spaces that allow for the lens of multilingual consciousness to come into focus?

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What spaces were on your list? Did you think faculty meetings, grade-level planning sessions, community outreach programs, data meetings, and assessment sessions are all spaces for educators to embrace and share their multilingual consciousness?

BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE WITH COLLEAGUES AND STUDENTS

Among many others, we have also found that one way to incorporate all the languages spoken by classroom community members and deeply value multilingualism in our classrooms is to share "one's personal history and identity as a multilingual" (Wagner, 2021, p. 7). When teachers describe the "meaningfulness of multilingualism in their own lives" (p. 7) and share experiences with their students to promote language learning, they build community. Do you share your personal and professional experiences with languages to engage them? How do you incorporate opportunities for students to share their background knowledge or interests with their peers?

We are going to urge you to learn as much as possible about your students' in-school and out-of-school identities and consider some of the opportunities and challenges of forming a multilingual community in your classroom. To get started, work with your collaborative team to learn about your students:

- Do we know the language proficiency levels of all students in our class? (Hint: Depending on the state you live in, the levels and the labels used to describe them will vary slightly.)

- Are we thoroughly familiar with the dimensions of the students' IEPs and 504 plans?

- Are our lessons addressing both short- and long-term goals consistently?

- Are we incorporating high-quality research-based instructional strategies to provide access to the core content curricula to meet the diverse linguistic and academic needs of our class?

- Do we implement varied and ongoing student assessments that recognize the linguistic and academic strengths of the students?

- Are we mindful of each individual student's strengths and challenges, especially in group work and assignments?

- Do we invite the students to reflect and offer feedback on their level of understanding after a lesson?

Getting to know your students and deeply understanding their sociocultural, academic, and linguistic experiences helps develop a more asset-based, culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining approach to serving them. We celebrate and build on what Socorro Herrera et al. (2023) suggest when taking a biography-driven instructional approach: "The shift toward discovering and utilizing students' words, knowledge systems, literacies, skills, and experiences has the power to illuminate new possibilities for actualizing the potential of each learner" (p. 11). We also recommend engaging in all asset-oriented practices collaboratively to maximize the impact on students' education.

We are going to feature a collaborative team portrait in each chapter focusing on a fifth-grade team consisting of Ms. Xi (classroom teacher), Mr. Young (special education teacher), and Mrs. Santos (ELD specialist). Before you learn more about their collaborative practices, meet one of their students, Julia.

MEET JULIA

Julia is an 11-year-old multilingual learner who has recently arrived in the United States after living with her extended family for five years. Her mother had placed Julia under the care of her maternal grandmother while she sought employment and learned English. Julia was born in Guatemala

and had encountered personal trauma, so she had to leave her immediate family. She has now settled with her mother (whom she hasn't seen in five years and who tends to speak English at home). She has been enrolled in three elementary schools thus far and seems unclear about why she is in this new school, what the structure of her classroom is, and why she has to complete the work mostly in English. In her previous school, a bilingual assessment and a special education evaluation process had been started, which her mom agreed to when she saw that Julia could not complete her assignments. After the evaluation, Julia was given an IEP (Individualized Education Program) that includes extra time to complete work, preferential seating near the teacher, and support from an adult when she transitions from one classroom to another. Additionally, the four language domains will be Julia's focus: For example, Julia will use context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words in a grade-level text with 75% accuracy, and Julia will actively listen and follow multi-step directions with 90% accuracy. The teaching team we have just introduced—Ms. Xi (classroom teacher), Mr. Young (special education teacher), and Mrs. Santos (ELD specialist)—frequently discuss what makes Julia an exceptional learner and how to help her settle into the routines of school. They all agree that she is capable of age-appropriate assignments, but Ms. Xi believes that the many uncertainties in her life may be the reason why she needs support while transitioning between learning activities and moving from classroom to classroom. A recent team discussion focused on connecting with Julia and building trust as well as implementing some innovative ideas to help Julia adjust to her current educational and home environment. Mrs. Santos suggested adopting a journal that each of Julia's teachers would write in daily, responding to each other, making notes, and even adding some quick sketches for Julia. As this shared document fast became a routine, Julia proudly brought the journal back daily for each teacher to contribute. It was through this dialogue journal that the teachers modeled how to express their feelings and Julia said she felt "a window into their hearts."

Dear Julia,

As we walked into the gym today, I noticed that you had a great big smile and the ball went right into the net. Great work!

Ms. Xi

Dear Julia,

Thank you for moving your seat next to Charlie today and pointing to the pictures while we read our tall tale. You are a good friend.

Ms. B (librarian)

Dear Julia,

Be sure to have a fun weekend and share your journal entry of your favorite activity on Monday! You can draw a picture of it, too!

Mrs. Santos

Dear Julia,

What did you like about our science activity today? My favorite part was drawing the molecules of a gas, liquid and solid. I can't wait to learn more about states of matter with our class.

Mr. Young

A Mindful Moment

Students come from a myriad of backgrounds, experiences, and family structures. Consider how powerful journaling is both for students and teachers to communicate uplifting messages. What other strategies have you used or can you use to get to know your students, connect with families, and initiate daily collaborative practices with your colleagues?

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HOW DOES UDL FIT INTO THIS BOOK?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL, Novak, 2022) is based on the notions that learner *variability* (not ability, dis/ability) exists in all classrooms and designing lessons must take place with all students in mind rather than siloing some or differentiating instruction just for some others. UDL principles—when implemented with fidelity—result in multiple means of

1. **Engagement**—students are motivated and engaged in the lesson in multiple ways:

   a. Authentic and relevant learning experiences

   b. Fostering collaboration and communication

   c. Encouraging goal setting, self-assessment, and reflection about the learning process

2. **Representation**—the content of the lesson is presented in multiple formats, thus ensuring that all students can access it and transfer it to new knowledge:

   a. Multiple perceptual modalities (auditory, visual, tactile, kinesthetic) infused in the lesson

   b. Language-based, visual, or symbolic presentation of content

   c. Variety of opportunities for comprehension

3. **Action and Expression**—during the lesson, students have options for expressing and demonstrating what they have learned and can do:

   a. Physical involvement and movement during the lesson

   b. Choice opportunities for responding to the content of the lesson (including use of tools and multimedia)

   c. Purposeful use of strategies and resources

While UDL has been widely used in some general education classrooms and has received considerable attention from special educators, multilingual learners might not have benefitted from this framework as fully as they possibly could have.

> Because language is pervasive and inseparable from learning information in all content areas, planning for English learners impacts the overall design of all lesson planning, and depending on the language acquisition program, builds literacy in two or more languages. *This implies that the instruction for all in UDL has embedded English learner accessibility features of which all students may take advantage.* (California Department of Education, 2019, p. 66)

Based on this notion, we are following in some others' footsteps (see for example, Eichhorn et al., 2019; Ralabate & Nelson, 2017; Torres & Rao, 2019) offering a fresh perspective on UDL by aligning design principles and learning guidelines to focusing on identity-affirming pedagogy and identity-safe places as well as language and literacy development for multilingual learners with exceptionalities. (See Figure 1.2.)

FIGURE 1.2 ● UDL Design Principles Aligned With Culture, Language, and Literacy Learning

UDL DESIGN PRINCIPLES	ENHANCED FOCUS ON IDENTITY-AFFIRMING PEDAGOGY AND IDENTITY-SAFE PLACES FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES	ENHANCED FOCUS ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES
Engagement (The Why of Learning)	Select materials and learning tools that ensure students see their lives and cultures reflected in the curriculum.	Fully understand your students' level of communicative competence, literacy, and interest in maintaining their home languages.
	Provide choices in topic, resources, and learning experiences.	Honor your students' linguistic choices, resources, and multilingual assets to access complex learning.
	Nurture autonomy while also recognizing the importance of collaboration for students coming from collectivistic cultures.	Encourage students and families to use their full linguistic repertoires at school and at home.
	Invite students to reflect on their own learning processes, strengths, and needs.	Offer "time out" from English if the students get overwhelmed by language or the busyness/distraction of the classroom.
	If your students are born and educated in countries outside of the U.S., discuss the differences and similarities and guide students to maximize their potential based on what positive experiences they have had.	Invite students to engage in self-assessment and reflection about their language and literacy development.
	Collaboratively explore what the school and classroom expectations and common learning experiences are in the U.S. vs. in their countries of origin.	Balance creating a place for members of the same language community to work together with multilingual learning spaces and focused, targeted English language development opportunities.
	Have students set goals and monitor their own progress using tools that they can use meaningfully.	
Representation (The What of Learning)	Make meaningful connections between new learning and students' prior lived experiences and academic learning both in the U.S. and before their arrival (if relevant).	Provide options for students to access new learning through auditory and visual modalities (hear and see).
	Think of the 4 Rs here: Activate and/or build background knowledge that multilingual learners with exceptionalities may find ***relevant, real, representative*** in relation to their cultural and cognitive understandings and what you find ***rigorous*** to excellent learning.	Provide options for students to access new learning through their home language and English.
	Present information in multiple, culturally congruent formats.	Focus on linguistic representations through the lens of language transfer (what linguistic understandings can the students demonstrate).
	Invite students to share their personal or family stories and journeys of migration/immigration though multiple modes of expressions (including artistic or non-language-based communicative approaches) while respecting students' needs for privacy and confidentiality.	Strategically teach academic language at the word, sentence. and discourse levels.
	Honor students' cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic heritages in order for them to develop a positive self-concept and identity.	Plan for message abundancy through relevant and accessible curricular and instructional materials.

(Continued)

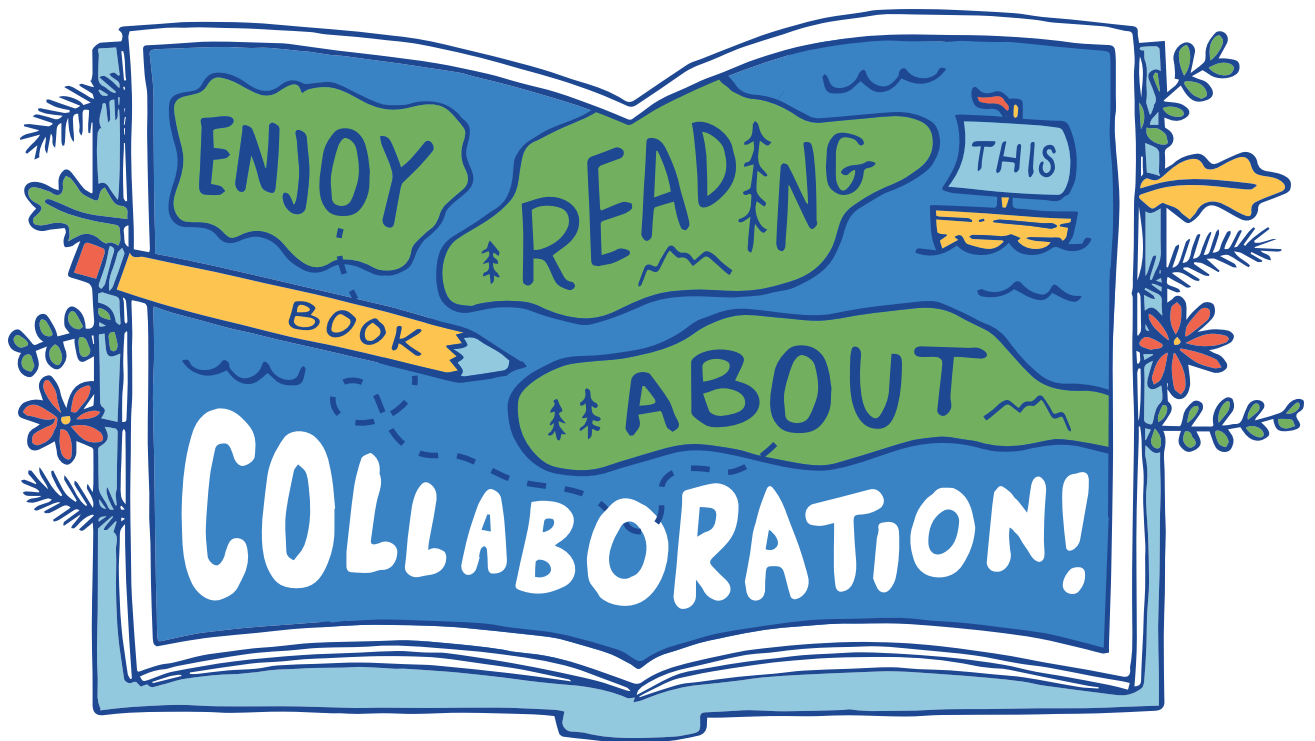| UDL DESIGN PRINCIPLES	ENHANCED FOCUS ON IDENTITY-AFFIRMING PEDAGOGY AND IDENTITY-SAFE PLACES FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES	ENHANCED FOCUS ON LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES
Action and Expression (The How of Learning)	Explicitly teach and practice the use of assistive technology and a range of technology tools and multi-media that provide appropriate scaffolds and support for student participation and expression. Have students express what they know and understand while recognizing that knowledge is not absolute and there may be multiple ways of doing (for example, long division is taught differently across the world). Recognize the difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultures and employ strategies that support collaboration, collaborative learning, and joint meaning-making.	Have students set goals for themselves based on their self-assessment and reflection about their language and literacy development. Create multiple meaningful opportunities for shared or guided practice leading to more independent language use. Empower students as readers, writers, and thinkers by encouraging self-expressions across multiple modalities and languages. Incorporate multisensory content, language, and literacy learning opportunities to enhance short- and long-term memory.

Margo Gottlieb (2021) sums it up best: "UDL principles coupled with multilingual resources increase opportunities for multilingual learners and multilingual learners with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to access and achieve grade-level content" (p. 89). We further believe that our multilingual learners with exceptionalities can achieve or exceed age- and grade-level goals through collaborative approaches suggested in this book.

GUIDEPOSTS FOR EXPLORING THIS BOOK

As you begin to read this book, here are four of our favorite reminders for you to consider:

1. Using feed-forward strategies will help as much as feedback strategies. Think about working with your grade-level or content-area teams at the beginning of the year and set up a schedule for long-term planning. (Feedback focuses on the team's current performance but feed-forward tactics look ahead.) This approach will get you started early as a feed-forward strategy.

2. Have all the paperwork and reports ready. This includes language proficiency levels, IEP goals, 504 records, and assessments, which will help cultivate efficient and productive collaborations. Be mindful of the fact that you may want to benchmark students' levels of language acquisition, but you also do not want to label them with a specific phase of development. Using the levels of language acquisition as a guide will serve the student best.

3. Jot down some of your collaborative conversations that include new ideas, possible good ideas, or even "wait till next year" ideas. Brainstorming proves to be an effective way to generate solutions related to student learning.

4. Embrace your role of advocacy. For collaborative approaches to work in support of multilingual learners, you must fearlessly and consistently advocate for making collaboration the norm in your school, securing and maximizing protected collaboration time, and celebrating successes along the way!

Source: Created by Colleen Wilcox