

# Preface



In our work in inclusive schools, we often talk to teachers about a variety of ways they can develop curriculum and instruction to be more responsive to the diverse learners in their classrooms. For many reasons, one of the practices we feel is the most “tried and true” for achieving this goal is the use of active and collaborative learning.

One reason we promote this type of instruction is related to student response. We find that students (including those in our own university classrooms) react very positively to active and collaborative learning techniques and that this type of teaching lends itself well to universal lesson design, differentiation, and individualization of instruction. Furthermore, in our observation, students are more engaged and seemingly comprehend more when they have agency in the learning process.

We are also drawn to instruction that is interactive and multilevel because research indicates that all students, including those with disabilities, learn better when they are able to make meaning and demonstrate what they know in authentic ways. In fact, a multiyear study that Alice (the first author of this text) conducted about educators’ responses to diverse learners indicated that when teachers created more responsive classrooms by changing lesson formats, teaching strategies, and instructional arrangements, the engagement, participation, and interactions of students with significant disabilities increased significantly (Udvari-Solner, 1995).

Research and related literature indicate that other populations such as students with identified gifts and talents, those from diverse cultural backgrounds, and learners at the college level also benefit from active and responsive classrooms, showing increased interest, retention of material, and levels of participation (Beichner, 2014; Bonwell & Eisen, 1991; Cole, 2001; Freeman et al., 2014; Harry & Klingner, 2005; Hohmann, Epstein, & Wiekart, 2008; Johnson, D. W., Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Marzano, 2003; Prince, 2004; Tomlinson, 2003).

We are also interested in this work because of the students sitting in classrooms today; we are now teaching the millennial and postmillennial generations (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). These students who have been born into the digital age of information, technology, and social networking pose new learning preferences and needs (Prensky, 2001). Notably, the teaching approaches that are preferred by and recommended for millennials are group oriented, highly active, variety-filled, and attend to the social aspects of learning—exactly the strategies we advocate in this book (Prensky, 2010; Roehl, Linga Reddy, & Shannon, 2013).

Finally, we feel that these strategies are helpful in supporting one more group: professionals. These structures make our work more interesting and more enjoyable. They inspire laughter. They make the classroom more fun. They help us meet the needs of a wider range of students. They also inspire us to team with our colleagues in a range

of ways. When we use active and collaborative learning structures in elementary and secondary classrooms, it is easy to plan ways for related service providers (e.g., speech therapists, occupational therapists), fellow classroom teachers (e.g., English language [EL] professionals, general and special educators), and paraprofessionals to coteach and support all students. When students engage in a very busy and social structure such as *Dinner Party* (p. 80), for instance, we often ask speech therapists to work with small groups on pragmatics and vocabulary development. When we use text-based techniques such as *Say Something* (p. 122), we often collaborate with reading specialists, asking them to work with different groups of students throughout the lesson so that all learners can gain more powerful comprehension strategies.

For all of these reasons, we began collecting active and collaborative learning structures and working with practicing educators and preservice teachers to adapt these different structures to meet the needs of a wider variety of students. As we shared these techniques in our classes and inservice presentations, teachers and university students alike asked us where they could find more information on using the structures in their inclusive classes. For instance, they wanted to use *Dinner Party*, but they were curious about how to use it in a classroom where one or two students used augmentative communication systems. They were interested in *Say Something*, but were unsure how to use it with a student who was an emerging reader. These requests led us to develop this resource, which includes active learning techniques appropriate for use in K–12 classrooms and beyond. We explicitly designed structures that allow a wide range of students to participate, contribute, learn, collaborate with peers, and succeed.

Although some of the structures featured are not new in the sense that we created or named them (in fact, a number are purposely included because they are already popular with teachers and used widely in elementary and secondary classrooms), we feel this book is unique in that many texts related to active learning, differentiated instruction, or universal design do not include information or ideas appropriate for some inclusive classrooms; contain few examples related to learners with disabilities—especially those with significant disabilities; and lack specific suggestions for designing activities for the range of learners in a typical class. Alternatively, *Joyful Learning* focuses explicitly on inclusive classrooms; provides unique suggestions for meeting the needs of students with disabilities, including those with learning, intellectual, physical, and sensory differences; contains dozens of familiar and novel activities that all students can access; and illustrates ways all students can participate in them.

## Using This Book

The activities in this book are clearly intended for or are at least well suited for use in classrooms in which students may have marked differences in ability, need, language, culture, or learning profile. We are hoping that by creating this resource, we are also promoting the idea that students with such differences can and should learn side by side.

## How the Text Is Organized

The introduction to the book explores how inclusive schooling, differentiated instruction, and active learning are (or should be) linked and related. The five chapters that

follow describe 60 structures that can be used with students in both elementary and secondary schools, and in a final note at the very end of the book, we reflect on the nature of joyful learning with recommendations for its cultivation in the classroom.

Please note that we have attempted to organize the structures into logical categories to help the reader locate techniques that match an instructional purpose. However, we don't believe the categories are mutually exclusive, and many structures can be employed for multiple instructional uses. Therefore, consider the chapter headings simply as a guide. The five chapters are as follows:

1. **“Building Teams and Classroom Communities.”** This initial chapter includes techniques that help teachers build community and teaming. These structures promote relationship building, listening, sharing, and interdependence.
2. **“Teaching and Learning.”** This chapter contains structures that help students of all ages learn standards-based content in meaningful, interesting, and compelling ways. This collection of ideas will help learners remember information, teach content to one another, and make discoveries about course content.
3. **“Studying and Reviewing.”** The study and review structures give teachers ideas for supporting students as they work independently or with small groups to prepare for assessments or learn familiar content in a deeper way.
4. **“Creating Active Lectures.”** Every teacher needs to engage in whole-class instruction and lecture-based instruction at some point during the school day. This instruction does not need to be formal and dry, however. By using the structures outlined in this chapter, teachers can involve their students in whole-class learning without losing those who need a more dynamic or personalized approach.
5. **“Assessing and Celebrating.”** Structures offered in this chapter will give educators active-learning options for assessing student understanding, encouraging learners to teach and share, and celebrating growth.

Each one of these chapters features 12 activities. Each structure is outlined in detail with directions, reproducible handouts (when applicable), classroom-tested examples, and guidelines for maximizing the participation of students. Some structures also feature tips for implementation and ideas for extending or varying the structure. Each description is followed by space to record notes and ideas for using the structure in your classroom. We encourage you to log how you used the structure and then reflect on any of the following elements:

- Did the students learn what I had intended?
- Were the students able to carry out the structure, or are changes needed in the way I organized it or provided directions?
- Were all students engaged?
- What additional changes might be needed to maximize engagement and participation for particular students?

- If coteaching with another adult, how can we facilitate or guide our students more effectively as a team?
- Where else in my teaching can I use this strategy?

## Using the Structures

This book is best used as a coplanning tool between general educators and specialists (e.g., special educators, EL educators, occupational therapists, speech therapists, physical therapists). We recommend that all team members who share responsibility for the same students become familiar with the structures and the associated procedures. In our research, we found that when members of educational teams used the same language and understood the same techniques, joint planning for differentiation was expedited (Udvari-Solner, 1996a). Effective supports for students with learning differences occur when instructional teams meet on a consistent basis (i.e., weekly or biweekly) and determine what is important for students to learn and how best to organize that learning. Familiarity with the structures in this book by all team members will provide an abundance of options for reaching those students who challenge us the most as educators.

If you don't currently have strong collaborative partnerships, using these structures can be an effective way to begin such a relationship. In our preservice courses, we often suggest that special educators or therapists seeking to coteach or to further develop their inclusive education model should offer to demonstrate active and collaborative structures as a way into the general education classroom. A general education classroom teacher who seems less than enthusiastic about making changes in curriculum or instruction can often be inspired to do so when alternatives to traditional teaching are not only suggested but also modeled. Such an offer illustrates that all adults in the building can and should teach and design instruction and that it is not just the job of the general educator to take on new roles.

Having shared how important it is for teaching teams to use these structures, we can now turn to another important group of instructors: students. We feel strongly that as educators we are modeling techniques that we want students to use and incorporate into their own instructional repertoire. There may be times when it is appropriate for a student or group of students to lead a class discussion or present reports or individual research. These techniques can be used to enliven this process and give students yet another arena for building skills and developing competencies.

Administrators are yet another audience for this material. If you are a principal, department chairperson, or even superintendent, consider using these structures in your meetings and staff development activities. Because teachers are learners too, you are likely to get a higher quality of participation in meetings when you are using techniques that will reach and interest larger numbers of "students." Further, there is no better way to emphasize a commitment to and enthusiasm for active and collaborative learning than to model it in your own work. For instance, a middle school principal had his staff try out the *Group Résumé* activity (p. 22) during a summer staff development institute. Teachers were mixed into groups with those from different grade levels and specialty areas and asked to construct the résumé on large pieces of chart paper. This activity gave the teachers the opportunity to learn about the skills and competencies of one another and, ultimately, helped them get

and give support to one another on topics ranging from cooperative learning to flipping classrooms to conducting classroom meetings to developing a schoolwide service learning program. The résumés were then posted around the room and used as springboards for the next activity, which was to develop an action plan for learning from colleagues.

Finally, consider this book as a vehicle for professional development. As authors, we have been asked by innumerable school districts and organizations to work with specific teaching teams or entire buildings or districts to learn and integrate these strategies into daily practice. Teaching has been called one of the loneliest professions, and unfortunately—in some schools—trying something new in the classroom can feel risky. We believe there is strength in numbers and that being creative in the classroom should be supported and celebrated in the school community. In healthy organizations, new information and innovative practices are shared in collaborative ways. One way to facilitate this shift in school culture is to initiate professional development that focuses on the use of active and collaborative structures to differentiate instruction or inspire the universal design of lessons.

This type of staff development can be as simple as a book study group or as organized as a formal action research project. Some schools with which we have worked arranged for a group of interested faculty to meet weekly or biweekly to read and discuss the ideas in this book. In these groups, teachers select structures of interest and agree to implement one or two within the week. In each subsequent meeting, teachers share their successes and challenges. This informal arrangement also provides a time for educators to discuss student progress and concerns and to collectively generate ways to teach, support, and challenge all learners through the use of the structures.

### Getting Started: Tips for Implementing the Structures

Begin using these structures in your unit or lesson planning with particular students in mind. Effective differentiation occurs when we consider our learners and find out about their abilities, preferences, and areas of intelligence as a starting point in instructional design. Then, look for structures that will allow you to teach the content you have identified while you address student needs, teach skills you want to foster, and potentially provide opportunities to address social and academic goals that are a part of a learner's individualized education plan (IEP). For example, if a student with learning disabilities needs multiple trials to retain information and also has an IEP goal to paraphrase key concepts from texts, *Popcorn* (p. 107) might be chosen as a review strategy for the entire class. This structure allows students to summarize learning in their own words and then teach or share the same content several times to various partners. By using this structure, the teaching team can provide avenues for the student with learning disabilities to work on critical goals identified by his or her educational team.

Keep in mind that all of the structures can be used individually, or they can be “stacked” to create new and different classroom experiences. For instance, a teacher might use *Popcorn* to get students talking about content and follow that activity with *The Whip* (p. 162) to find out one thing that each student learned from his or her classmates during the interview process. Or *Take My Perspective, Please!* (p. 168) could be used

to elicit opinions or impressions about a topic, and it could be followed with *Stand & Deliver* (p. 154) to allow students to share one thing they learned from their interactions.

### Making Them Work for All: Tips for Adapting and Teaching the Structures

These structures are not subject or grade-level specific. We offer examples with each structure; however, if the example does not mirror your exact teaching experience, we encourage you to be inventive. The structures can be used in different ways across subject areas and with students of different ages, so they should definitely be edited, changed, and modified to fit not only your grade level but also your unique group of students.

Our suggestions throughout this book for adapting and otherwise altering the activities are not comprehensive; we intend these ideas simply to serve as examples of how certain activities might be changed for various types of learners and, perhaps more important, to suggest that they should be changed! In other words, we hope to communicate that adaptation, differentiation, and personalization of lessons for all students is what good teachers do. Furthermore, we are striving to demonstrate that when we expand or alter an activity to meet the needs of a single learner or a small group of learners, the result is almost always a lesson that is more comprehensive, responsive, and appropriate—for all. In Table 0.1, we have provided a short list of simple and quick ways to differentiate or design more universal learning experiences when using active and collaborative learning structures. More extensive ideas are offered in the section of each structure titled “Methods to Maximize Engagement and Participation.”

To further increase your chances of meeting the needs of all learners, we recommend that you practice, practice, and practice. Avoid the common error of using these structures as beginning-of-the-year icebreakers—and only as beginning-of-the-year icebreakers. These structures, in most cases, are designed to be used as tools for delivering daily instruction, and with regular use, students will become more proficient and self-directed in their participation. So try a structure once, revise your plan, and try it again.

Keep in mind that during this process you may need to break down the structures into steps and spend some time teaching students *how* to participate in them. This may be particularly important for students with learning difficulties or those who struggle with change or novelty. Be explicit with directions, and be sure to teach both the rules and the social and communication requirements for working well in groups (e.g., sharing materials, paraphrasing a classmate’s statement, expressing an opinion).

Further, you will want to explain to students why you are doing what you are doing and how it is relevant to the content. And always leave time at the end of an activity to debrief about what worked well or what might need to be changed to be more responsive to students’ learning needs. You may even want students to reflect on the strategy so you can gather written feedback. Figure 0.1 is a student reflection form that can be used with learners in intermediate elementary grades to secondary settings. This same feedback can be solicited in a large-group feedback session or individual conferencing with younger children.

**Figure 0.1 Student Reflection**

**Active and Collaborative Learning Structures**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What structure did your teacher use?

\_\_\_\_\_

What content did he or she teach or review using the structure (e.g., fractions, Spanish vocabulary)?

\_\_\_\_\_

What did you like about using the structure? For example, was it fun, did you learn something new, or did it make learning easier?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What was difficult or challenging about using the structure?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What did you learn from participating in the structure? Be as specific as you can.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Would you want your teacher to use this structure again? Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Students may—at first—resist participating in active and collaborative structures, particularly if they have not had opportunities to do so in the past; this is a natural part of the learning process. Once they are familiar with several strategies we encourage you, whenever possible, to enlist their input in selecting methods to incorporate into upcoming lessons. Doing so will likely increase your students' sense of agency in their own learning and willingness to engage in the structures.

Finally, be sure to enjoy the process of this new and more joyful way of doing business in the classroom.

**Table 0.1 Using Active and Collaborative Learning: Quick and Easy Ways to Differentiate and Design Lessons for All**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students work in pairs or in small groups.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring therapists, paraprofessionals, other teachers, or volunteers into the classroom to help facilitate the activities and to give all students more adult support.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give directions or review the content in advance (preteach).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach the structure to students first with less complex, familiar, or low-stakes content so that they can focus on <i>how</i> to engage in the process before applying it with higher-stakes material.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow all or some students to practice the activity in advance, or video record the structure so the learner can see and hear what is expected.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow students to have cue cards and preview materials during activities. Or let them use their phones or tablets to access the material, visuals, or supports they need.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow students to have different roles in the activities; if most students are talking in small groups, one or two students might document responses they hear or serve as facilitators of groups.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask or allow all students to use alternative or augmentative communication (AAC); you might, for instance, give all students the option to either speak or write a response during a group-sharing activity.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give choices in the activity (e.g., let students switch partners or stay with the same partner).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide “wait time” or “think time” to one or all students before expecting a response.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use more than one output strategy (e.g., use pictures as well as words) when giving directions or providing instruction.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask students to help in preparing the lessons so they can take active roles in leading activities, generating questions or content, and even creating supports for one another.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a range of tools for writing and expression, including paper and pencil, laptops, and tablets.</li> </ul>