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Mental Health & Well-Being

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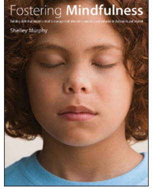
We are pleased to offer sample chapters from five of our newest and bestselling titles on mental health and well-being—a peek inside five key resources. This sampler is provided as a PDF, which can be easily read on PC or Apple computers, as well as any number of commercially available e-readers and mobile devices. You can also copy the file to multiple devices, or print the reproducible pages for classroom use.

As a PDF, this sampler is also easily searchable—if you are looking for information on a particular topic, just enter a word or phrase into the Adobe Reader search box, and you'll find every place that word or phrase appears in the document. If any (or all!) of these chapters intrigue you enough to want to read further, simply click on the cover page within the sampler to be taken to the appropriate "buy" page at **www.pembrokepublishers.com**. We offer each title in print and eBook versions—or package the two versions for only $10 more than the print price. And don't forget, any purchase made from Pembroke is eligible for our **10% education discount**!

We hope that you enjoy this special look into Pembroke's practical books for teaching and learning.

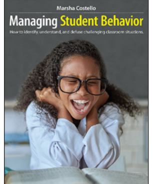


Fostering Mindfulness 3

An essential guide to bringing mindfulness practices into the classroom with simple, creative, ready-to-use lessons, activities, templates, and much more. Students will cultivate the skills they need for self-regulation, stress management, and learning.

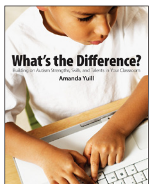
The Autism Lens 13

The Autism Lens helps teachers connect to students with autism and support them along their own unique trajectory. It offers the information and classroom strategies teachers need to build relationships, support learning, and understand the perspectives of students with autism.



Managing Student Behavior 28

This practical resource provides an in-depth understanding of student behavior, along with many effective, evidence-based strategies that support positive change. Although there is no one-size-fits-all answer, when these strategies are applied consistently they will have a profound effect on classroom behavior that will last.



What's the Difference? 37

What's the Difference? focuses on integrating teaching autistic students into the teaching practice of the whole class. Based on classroom experience, it provides teachers with informed background and classroom strategies to meet the unique needs of all students.

Mentoring Each Other 56

This hands-on book illustrates how a mentor can support and guide preservice, new, and experienced colleagues in a way that is meaningful, open, engaging, and values-driven. It describes how a mentoring program benefits all those involved and helps create a successful learning community.

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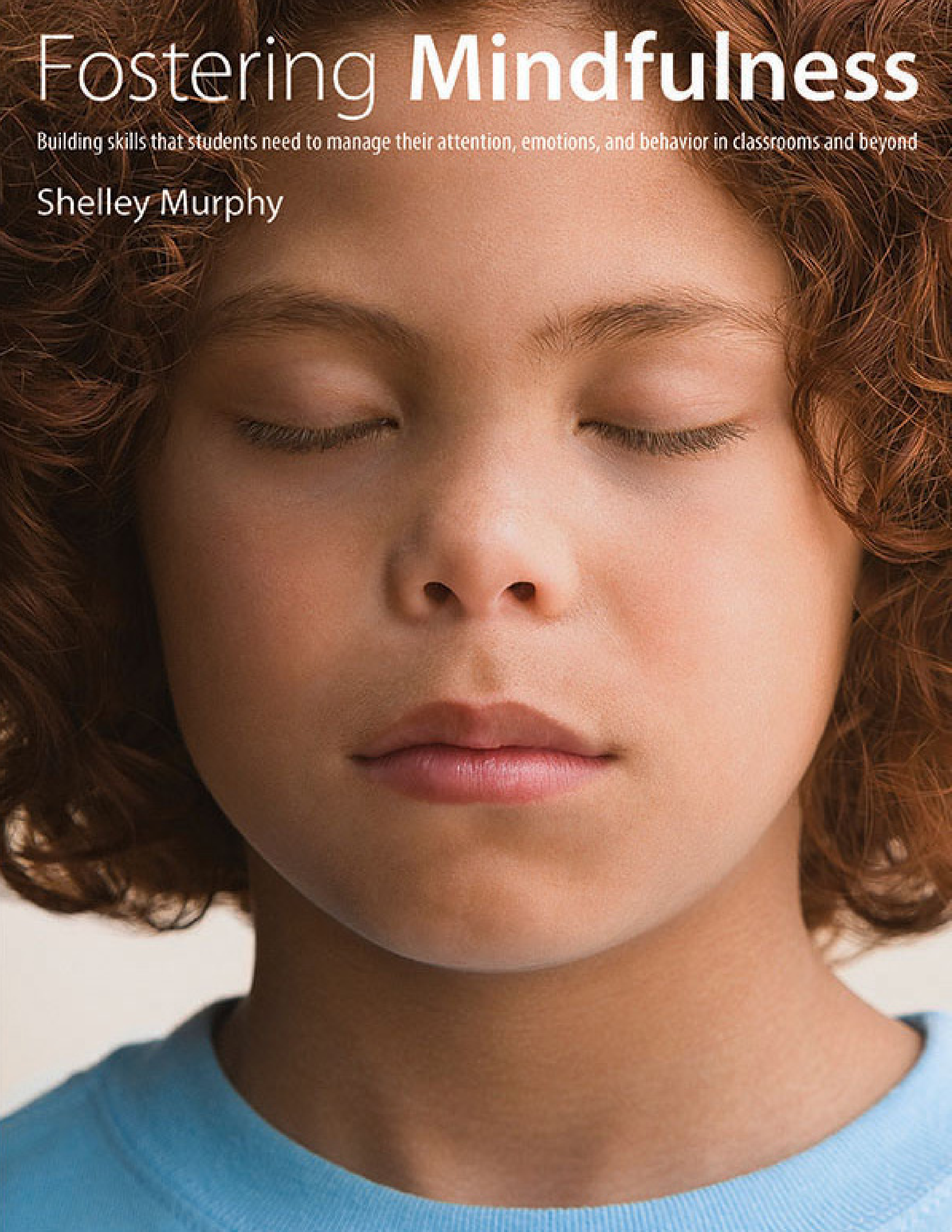

Fostering Mindfulness
Building skills that students need to manage their attention, emotions, and behavior in classrooms and beyond
Shelley Murphy

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1

Why Mindfulness Matters in the Classroom

What Is Mindfulness?

"We are what we repeatedly do."
— Aristotle

Mindfulness is both a way of being in the world and a practice. As a way of being, mindfulness is the quality of presence we bring to everything we do. It describes our innate capacity to pay full and conscious attention to something in the moment. It is the awareness that emerges from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of our experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Each of us naturally experiences states of mindfulness. Think of being in nature and hiking to the peak of a beautiful mountain. When you are completely attentive to where you are and what you are experiencing as you make your way to the summit, you are in a state of mindfulness. You may feel the rise and fall of the path beneath your feet or notice the majesty of the trees, the curve of a stream, or the calls of wildlife as you climb. This present awareness is an experience of mindfulness. You are not experiencing mindfulness if you are in the midst of hiking and your mind is elsewhere. The *elsewhere* is often described as "mindlessness" or "being on autopilot." This is when our bodies are in one place but our thoughts are somewhere else. Many of us have had the experience of driving in a car to get from one place to another and having had very little or no awareness or recollection of what we passed along the way. Our bodies were in the car getting us from point A to point B, but our minds, for the most part, were elsewhere. While we were focused enough on our driving and the environment around us to get to our destinations safely, our attention was being distracted by the endless stream of thoughts in our head.

Our brains are fantastic time-travel machines. We spend a lot of time thinking about the past and plenty of time thinking and worrying about the future. In other words, we spend a lot of time thinking about what is not happening in the moment.

A recent Harvard study showed that our minds wander 47% of the time (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). This means we are spending almost half of our waking hours thinking and worrying about something other than what we are actually doing. Our brains are in a default mode of mind wandering and are, in essence, being perpetually hijacked.

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"I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."
— attributed to Mark Twain

While mindfulness is an innate capacity we all naturally possess, it is also more readily available to us when we practice on a daily basis. In this sense, it is helpful to think of mindfulness as a skill that can be cultivated and strengthened over time through various formal and informal exercises. We recognize the importance of exercising our bodies to help keep them healthy, resilient, and strong. In the same way, our minds require attention and exercise to keep them healthy, resilient, and strong. Think of mindfulness as mental strength training for your students' brains. Like a workout for their bodies, it takes regular practice and some discipline.

Here is how the practice of mindfulness works. Mindfulness practice is often defined as the intentional focusing of our awareness on our thoughts, our feelings, our body sensations, and the surrounding environment without judging them. It typically involves directing attention to a specific focus, often called an *anchor*, such as the breath. I invite you to experiment with this for a moment. Shift your attention away from reading this book to focus solely on your breathing. Close your eyes and just notice your in-breath and your out-breath for one minute. Then come back to reading where you left off.

It is important to be gentle and kind to a wandering mind during mindfulness practice.

Chances are, within a very short period of time, your mind was drawn away to thoughts, sounds, or physical sensations. Actually, this is the nature of our minds; it is typical and expected. Despite this, people most often give up on mindfulness practice because they think they are doing it wrong when their minds wander repeatedly. In fact, it is when you realize your mind has wandered and you bring your attention back to your breath that you are experiencing, practicing, and strengthening mindfulness. It is the repeated redirection of the mind back to focusing on the anchor that breaks the conditioned response of distraction. It also strengthens the part of the brain that controls self-regulation and promotes greater resilience and a variety of positive mental and physical outcomes.

Common Myths about Mindfulness

As mindfulness increases in popularity, misconceptions, myths, and confusions abound. Here are a few things to consider:

- Myth: *Mindfulness practice is a religion*. While mindfulness has its roots in many cultures, philosophies, religions, and psychologies, it is a universal practice that is now most widely considered secular or mainstream. Secular mindfulness exercises were brought to the mainstream, in part, through the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn. The mindfulness exercises, lessons, and practices introduced in this book are not connected, in any way, to religious or spiritual practice. They are life-skill practices designed to help students develop habits of mind central to learning, resilience, and well-being.
- Myth: *Mindfulness is about clearing the mind*. In fact, it is quite the opposite. In mindfulness practices, we give our students' minds something to focus on. Thoughts will actually come and go, and this is part of the practice. Mindfulness is about becoming a witness to those thoughts without being drawn into them. It is not about making thoughts stop. It is about simply noticing them.
- Myth: *Mindfulness requires a lot of time*. Daily practice is important, but it does not take a lot of time from the school day. When you engage your students in as little as 10 minutes a day of regular practice, you are giving

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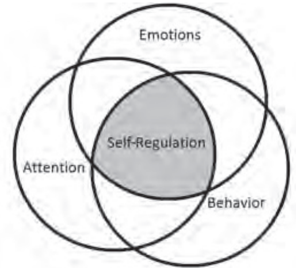
them the opportunity to become more skilled in how they regulate their emotions, attention, impulses, and responses.
- Myth: *Mindfulness requires a quiet space to practice*. While it is ideal to have as quiet an environment as possible during mindfulness practice, it is not entirely necessary. Schools and classrooms are full of expected and unexpected movement, noise, and interruption. Mindfulness activities can be practiced in the midst of all of this. There is no need to wait for a "right" moment.
- Myth: *Mindfulness is not backed by scientific research*. There is a depth and breadth of research showing the ways in which mindfulness practices support attention, focus, and executive functioning (Leyland, Rowse, & Emerson. 2018); regulation of emotions and behavior (Black & Fernando, 2014; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Semple et al., 2010); empathy and perspective-taking (MacDonald & Price, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015); stress management (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Sibinga et al., 2016); and overall academic performance and well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Self-Regulation and Emotions, Attention, and Behavior

For children to be successful in school and in life, they need to be able to manage their thoughts, emotions, attention, and behaviors during the rigors of the school day and beyond. This ability to self-manage is often called *self-regulation*. According to Stuart Shanker, a leading authority on self-regulation and child development, "we are in the midst of a revolution in educational thinking and practice. Scientific advances in a number of fields point to a similar argument—how well students do in school can be determined by how well they are able to self-regulate" (2013, p. IX). In fact, many studies have shown that self-regulation is more important than IQ when it comes to predicting a child's ability to do well in school.

So, what is self-regulation? Self-regulation, as a capacity of well-being, has been defined in a number of ways. It often gets confused with the idea of self-control or compliance; it is neither. In its most basic sense, it is a student's ability to effectively manage their attention, behaviors, and emotions in different situations. It is a skill set that allows them to develop strategies and habits of mind to help them achieve personal goals and respond mindfully to their everyday experiences:



- Emotion self-regulation is a student's ability to recognize and name what they are feeling at any given moment and the ability to calm themselves in the face of challenging emotions and stress.
- Attention self-regulation is a student's ability to focus and keep their attention where they want and need it to be, despite distraction.
- Behavior self-regulation is a student's ability to act in socially appropriate ways, to adapt to new situations, and to respond thoughtfully to impulses.

Mindfulness and Emotions

Emotional well-being is crucial to learning and life success. Research shows that children who are able to regulate their emotions are better at recognizing and

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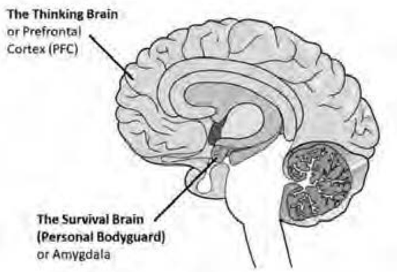
managing their feelings and behaviors, making informed decisions, empathizing with and being kind to others, and coping with challenges. Not surprisingly, they also do better in school (Goldman, 1995).

Students who have high levels of stress have a much more difficult time managing their emotions. If you ask most teachers, they will tell you they see an alarming increase in the number of students experiencing stress and anxiety in the classroom. This stress makes it hard for students to manage difficult feelings like anger, fear, or sadness, and it makes it difficult for them to learn. When our students are in a negative emotional state and are experiencing stress, there is a cascade of reactions that happens in their brains and bodies. Their thinking brains (prefrontal cortex) go temporarily offline in service of their survival brain (amygdala) (see image below).



The amygdala is often called the *reptilian brain* or our *fight-flight-or-freeze* response.

The amygdala is one of the oldest parts of the brain and is consumed with survival. It is constantly scanning for threats or danger to avoid to help keep us safe. To help us flee or fight, our heart rate and blood pressure increase, our breath becomes quick and shallow, our pupils dilate, blood flow is sent to our arm and leg muscles and away from our internal organs, digestion shuts down because it is not immediately necessary for survival, and stress hormones course through our bloodstream. These responses are unconscious and automatic. All of this is in service of survival. The problem is that the amygdala cannot tell the difference between a true emergency and an imagined one. It can be triggered by a thought, a memory, or a worry about the future. These are not physical threats to us, but our brains experience them as though they are. So, in response, our bodies go into alert mode and our thinking brain (prefrontal cortex) temporarily shuts down. This stops us from thinking clearly. Over time, the amygdala grows and the brain gets used to responding to everyday life as though it is a threat. Executive functions, which are important for planning, problem-solving, and reasoning, are negatively affected. So it is very important for children to learn how to manage their stress response when it is not needed.

The good news is that mindfulness practice helps students do just that. Research shows regular mindfulness practice shrinks the amygdala, while the prefrontal cortex becomes stronger (Taren, Creswell, Gianaros, 2013). Teaching mindfulness to children helps them better identify, understand, and manage their emotions. This leads to improved learning and overall well-being.

Mindfulness and Attention

Attention is a first starting point of learning. The impact of our teaching is dependent on our students' ability to focus their minds at any given moment and to maintain that focus in the face of distraction. A student's ability to focus

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their attention is a predictor of school success. Of course, we know this is easier for some students and more challenging for others. The reality is that teachers are in competition for their students' attention. We are in an era of multitasking and distractibility in a new frontier of interactive technologies and digital media. Research shows that 8- to 12-year-olds spend, on average, anywhere from 4½ to 6 hours each day on forms of screen media. Many of us have wondered how this affects our students' developing brains. A recent longitudinal study appeared in Journal of the American Medical Association on the connection between children's media use and their ability to focus their attention. Researchers (Ra, et al., 2018) tracked 2500 teens over two years, monitoring how much they used digital media and what their symptoms were. They found the more adolescents use digital media, such as social media, texting, browsing, streaming, etc., the more they are at risk for developing the characteristics of ADHD; i.e., inattention and hyperactivity.

The fact that many major tech companies have developed special technology to help combat the addictive qualities of screen media is indicative of the level of concern about the connection between screen media and lack of attention.

So what does all this research tell us? It tells us we need to pay attention to students' attention and give them opportunities to strengthen it. They are expected to focus as we try to engage them in learning, but we rarely teach them how to do this more effectively. Mindfulness is one way to train their brains to focus their attention where they want it to be and to keep it there. Research shows that regular mindfulness practice helps sharpen and strengthen attention and concentration skills to keep students focused on their learning (Black & Fernando, 2013; Costello, 2014). The more they practice, the more they will benefit.

Mindfulness and Behavior

When students struggle in their learning, we respond by gathering as much information as we can to better understand what the barrier to learning might be; we shift our approach in response; and we work to strengthen their confidence, motivation, and skills. When students struggle with behavior challenges, the response tends to be quite different. As Ross Greene, who has written widely on supporting children with behavior challenges, has said, "Kids do well if they can." He suggests, "Behind every challenging behavior is an unsolved problem or a lagging skill (or both)" (Greene, 2008). It makes sense for us to ask ourselves what a particular student's challenging behaviors might be telling us about what they need. Of course, for every child the answer will be somewhat different.

Self-regulation expert Stuart Shanker believes that many of our students are showing what he calls stress behaviors in the classroom (Shanker, 2012). These students are not fully aware of what they are doing or why, and might be limited in their ability to act differently. If children have been repeatedly exposed to highly stressful situations or trauma they tend to be hypervigilant, because their brains are wired to be on high alert for a perceived threat or danger. Feelings like fear and anger can be perceived by students' brains as threats and can trigger impulsive behaviors. These behaviors act almost like a defence to the stressful situation. All of this means that while students' brains are consumed with scanning and responding to perceived threats, there is little room for learning. So what are teachers to do? Shanker (2012) argues we need to help students develop the strategies they need to calm their nervous systems down when they are feeling afraid, angry, stressed, or agitated.

As you have read, mindfulness is a way to help students calm their nervous systems. Over time, this helps them come out of a default mode of stress. When difficult emotions, such as anger and fear, rise up, mindfulness practice helps

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students respond more thoughtfully and with more awareness. Mindfulness helps create some thoughtful space between an impulse and an action. This can mean the difference between a poor behavior response and a good one. Over time, this leads to positive behavior change.

Mindfulness is not a behavior-management technique; however, a likely byproduct of regular mindfulness practice is that students will be less reactive and in more control of their impulses. This will certainly contribute to a classroom environment that is more conducive to learning and overall well-being.

Mindfulness and a More Compassionate World

Mindfulness is, first and foremost, a way to foster the development of the whole person. By giving students the opportunity to engage in daily mindfulness practices, we help them to be more present and aware. We strengthen their self-regulation skills; i.e., their ability to manage their own emotions, attention, and behavior. Mindfulness practice helps them become aware of their internal and external experiences, to notice when they are distracted, and to focus their attention where they want it to be and stay. It helps them respond wisely, rather than impulsively, and to be more compassionate and kind toward themselves and others. In many ways, this important work also helps to cultivate a more compassionate world.

I recently had the opportunity to hear Dr. Oliver Hill, Professor of Psychology at Virginia State University, speak about the impact and benefits of mindfulness. I was struck by his compelling argument that mindfulness can be seen as action toward social justice. When we have an underlying understanding and experience of mindfulness, it is expressed in how we live our lives. Mindfulness helps us be more aware of our interconnectedness and our judgments, biases, behaviors, and responses. With this awareness, we are more likely to transform how we interact with each other. It helps to change our perspectives and understanding so we can more mindfully and thoughtfully "serve the world." Dr. Hill suggests this positive and responsive way of operating in the world can contribute to an understanding of our interconnectedness and to positive social change. This idea resonates with me, as I think about our role as teachers in preparing children both for the world and to be good citizens in the world. It is daily practice worth investing in.

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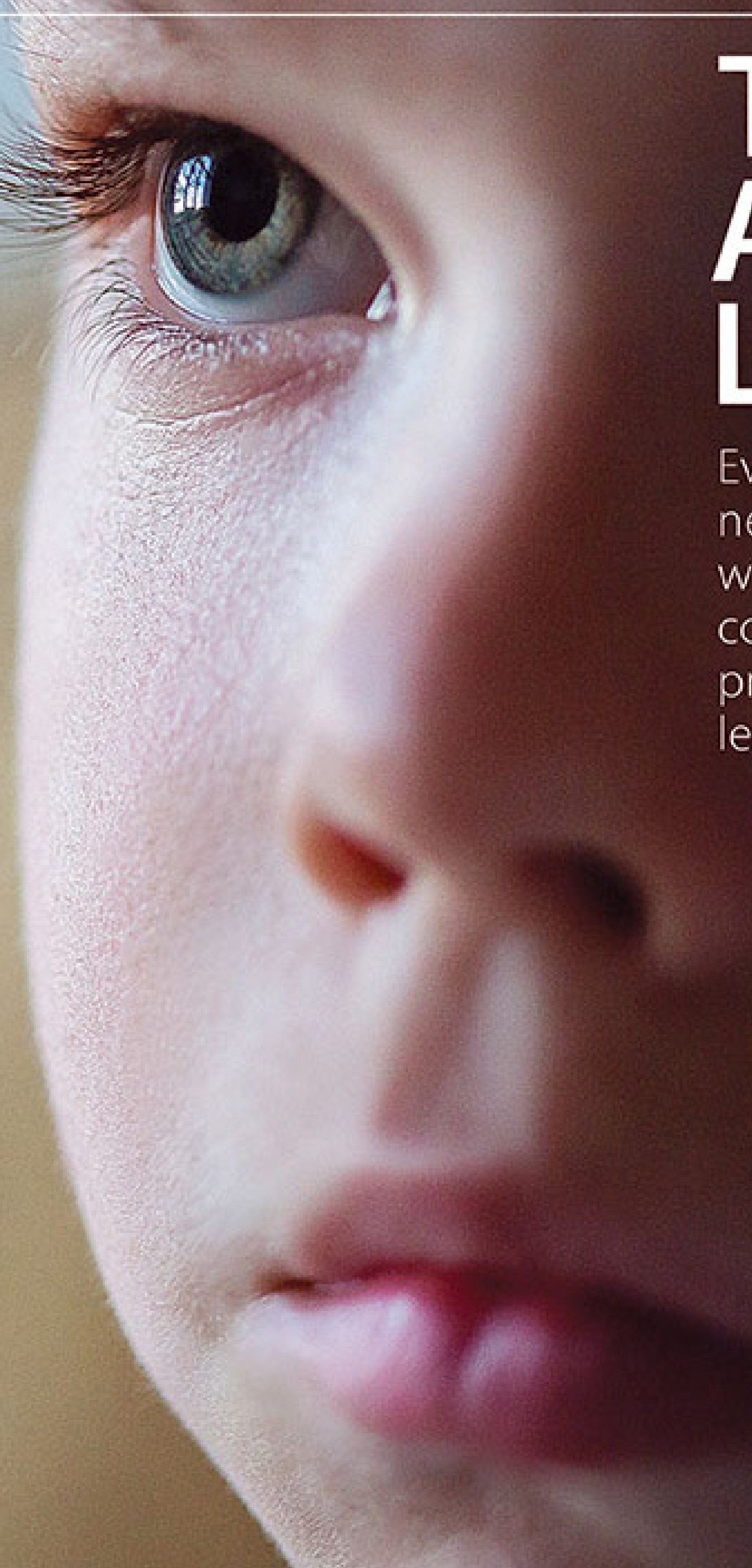
KARA DYMOND

The Autism Lens

Everything teachers need to connect with students, build confidence, and promote classroom learning



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1

The Teacher/Student Disconnect

Works fundamental to my practice and my philosophy include the books and the Collaborative and Proactive Solutions approach to behavior developed by Dr. Ross Greene (livesinthebalance.org); *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome* by Dr. Tony Attwood (2007); the notion of the "hidden curriculum" as described by Dr. Brenda Smith Myles and colleagues (2004); and the Social Thinking® Methodology created by Michelle Garcia Winner (www.socialthinking.com). Starting on page 123 you will find recommended resources for exploring related topics, and suggestions for classroom read-alouds to reinforce perspective-taking, inclusion, social-emotional awareness, and autism understanding with students.

Teaching is tough. I'm sure if you work in a school, you'll agree: until I became a teacher, I had no idea how much educators invest in our classrooms and students. Growing up, it didn't register how hard it must be to teach a diverse group of learners and to help each student along their own pathway to success. My autistic brother Danny switched to an independent school by Grade 3 and no one else in my school appeared to have any disabilities or learning differences. I didn't see them, but that doesn't mean they weren't there.

The landscape of schools has changed in the years since then. There are so many more needs in our classrooms to understand, accommodate, and support that it can be overwhelming. It's not just supporting students with identified exceptionalities that concerns teachers. The invisible load many students carry into the classroom has a very tangible impact on their mental health, well-being, and ability to learn. I work with colleagues whose hearts are bigger than their wallets, who stock their classrooms with snacks for the students going without, and who pitch in to buy a new snowsuit and winter boots for the kid who has none. Our profession is filled with educators who notice and care, and we take it all home with us. Faces scroll through our brains at night as, instead of counting sheep, we fret about whether we're doing enough to foster inclusion, to differentiate to support the range of learners, to get to the root of challenging behaviors, to motivate a heel-dragger, to slow down a roadrunner, or to facilitate independence. We constantly ask ourselves, *Is there anyone who is falling through the cracks?*

The Demands of School

When students with autism are young, school is usually highly structured. They benefit from explicit instruction combining verbal, step-by-step instruction with visual exemplars; scaffolding of tasks; student repetition of those instructions;

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and lots and lots of practice of skills. Compared to when they are in later grades, children in primary classrooms more frequently produce individual work and encounter a greater emphasis on rote learning of the basics, even in highly hands-on and centres-based classrooms. This allows autistic students to use their strong logical and rule-bound thinking and to feel successful. They often have show and tell, where they can dazzle teachers and peers with their enormous knowledge of their favorite topics. When educators use strengths and a positive relationship to motivate and encourage, students love coming to school.

As these students move up into middle school, they are at greater risk of falling through the cracks. They are expected to have a level of mastery over some thinking skills that are thought to be core difficulties of autism: perspective-taking (see Chapter 2), generalizing and context blindness (see Chapter 3), executive function and seeing what's important (see Chapter 5), and sensory and emotional regulation (see Chapter 6). The curriculum tends to require them to infer, predict, decipher causal relationships, connect, interpret meaning, think critically, and see from others' points of view (Garcia Winner, 2013). I once opened the Grade 6 language curriculum and highlighted any expectation that would be contingent on these particular skills. The pages were soon a sea of neon pink! To complicate matters, assessment activities become even more social with each passing grade. Students participate in presentations, group projects, inquiry-based learning, and classroom discussions. Teachers take a step back, expecting their students to take greater ownership over their learning. Instruction becomes less explicit and is often delivered verbally in multiple steps, and students are assumed to possess certain prerequisite skills that have been absorbed intuitively over their years in school. They are faced with open-ended questions, choices, and tasks that can be approached more than one way and still must somehow be correct. They must transition not just between subjects, but between rooms and teachers, bringing the right materials with them to each class. And the classroom rules—those hidden rules—are always changing! If we fail to connect or notice what's going on for students with autism, it can have long-term implications.

Let's put on our autism lens for a moment. To get a better sense of what school can feel like for students with autism, we'll examine two hypothetical children who are composites of many students I've supported. Gino is in Grade 3, carries a Pokémon plush doll with him everywhere, and always knows the weather report. Annie is in Grade 7, loves K-pop and anime, and is teaching herself to speak Korean (she is not Korean). As you read, think about what strengths and developing areas you can identify.

Pseudonyms are used for all students mentioned throughout this book.

	Gino's Day	**Annie's Day**
8:30 a.m.	Gino is still in his mother's car. It's a cloudy day, and he is afraid of rain. His family once went camping and they were caught in a thunderstorm; he screamed all night. Now, no amount of bribery or force can get him to brave a storm, and cloudy days are almost as bad. As usual, a struggle ensues to get him out the door and into the car, and then out of the car and into the school. He is late entering the building, his whole body taut with tension.	The school bell rings. Annie has been waiting for the bell. She doesn't feel comfortable joining the groups of her peers in the yard before school, so she waits against the wall where her class lines up, listening to K-pop with her headphones on. She is always first in line. As her peers bump and cluster into line, she doesn't look around. She doesn't say hi to anyone; what if they don't say hi back?

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8:45 a.m.	Gino storms into the classroom, even though the teacher is teaching about procedural writing. "I hate school!" he yells. The teacher tells him to come in again, more politely. He refuses, more loudly. There is a collective inhale as the other students anticipate a showdown, but the teacher takes a breath and asks the educational assistant, Miss G, to help Gino calm down and unpack his bag. The teacher continues teaching, thankful that Gino has support in a class with many identified needs, four English-language learners, and a handful of students with their own unidentified learning challenges. Miss G prompts every action required of Gino: "Hang up your bag. Unzip it. Take out your books. Zip it back up. Bring your books…" When they are seated at the back of the classroom, Miss G lets Gino talk about Pokémon for a few minutes. He becomes animated and the morning stress washes away. Finally, Miss G says, "It's time to open up your spelling notebook. We're going to continue what we were doing yesterday." Gino complies right away.	Annie unzips her bag and everything falls out. Some of it she forces back inside; some she takes to her desk. She doesn't know to zip up her backpack to prevent future spillage. The teacher announces it's language time. The other 29 students know, without being told, that this means they must take out their language duotang, a pen, and the novel they began reading yesterday. Annie sits there. She is caught up in her imagination, where she is up on stage with her favorite K-pop group. Everyone who has ever made fun of her will see the video on YouTube of her shining moment. They will fall all over themselves to apologize, to ingratiate themselves to her… *Tap, tap, tap!* The teacher raps on her desk to get Annie's attention and asks, "Annie, what should you have out in front of you?" Annie mumbles an apology and feels around in her desk. It is jammed full. When she eventually finds her novel, the cover is bent out of shape. She needs to be reminded about the duotang and pencil. During the lesson, Annie sits still and keeps her eyes toward the front. Although her body is in class, she's somewhere else in her imagination.
9:30 a.m.	Gino's teacher calls out to Miss G, "He can be part of this lesson." Miss G tells Gino to focus on the front, but he keeps trying to talk to Miss G. She shushes him and points to the teacher. The teacher asks the class if anyone knows the components of soil. Gino's eyes light up and Miss G whispers, "Raise your hand!" Gino does. His arm begins to wave. The teacher picks someone else. Gino's face falls. "But I have something important to say!" he calls out. The teacher tells him to wait his turn. She picks someone else to share their idea. Gino explodes: "I HAVE AN ANT FARM AT HOME!" Miss G tells him to apologize and explains that teachers don't pick everyone. Sometimes, we must keep our thoughts in our heads. Gino grumbles, loudly, "But I know all about soil!" "Why don't you tell me three things you know," Miss G says. Gino relaxes and quietly tells her some facts. She then prompts him to copy the notes on the board. He starts the first sentence and erases a few times. The letters don't look how he'd like them to. When Miss G tells him to copy the next sentence, he protests, "My hand hurts!" The bell is about to ring, so Miss G writes the rest for him. While she writes, Gino gets up out of his seat to check out the window. Still cloudy.	Annie's teacher tells the class to find groups for their science projects. They should be coming up with a hypothesis and dividing the work today. There's an experiment to conduct and document, charts and illustrations to create, and a presentation to prepare. Annie sits at her desk while her peers swarm into groups, calling across the room or making visual contact with friends to establish who belongs where. Annie tried to join a group once before, and ended up standing at the front, alone. She didn't know what to say or how to position her body so that peers would notice her. Since she thinks no one probably wants her in their group, she begins writing her hypothesis. Soon, her teacher notices she isn't with a group and asks Annie if she'd like to join Andrea's group. "I'd rather work by myself," Annie replies. "It's a lot of work if you're on your own," her teacher says. "Fine." "If that's what you really want, Annie."

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10:00 a.m.	Miss G calls Gino back to his desk. "But it's snack time!" he protests. The teacher announces, "Please stay in your seats for a minute. I want to explain about the trip tomorrow before we get snacks." Gino looks at the clock. At 10:01, he makes his way to the bin and snatches his snack. Miss G and the teacher call to him in unison. He looks at Miss G and comes back to the desk, opening the snack and cramming the crackers into his mouth. The teacher dismisses the other rows, one at a time for snack. She picks Gino's row last, because "not everyone was listening." The kid in front of Gino turns around and glares at him. Gino doesn't know why. "He's bullying me!" he cries. Miss G tries to talk him down. Gino notices the time. He stops listening and makes his way to the window again.	Annie's teacher asks her if she'd like to hand out the snacks from the nutrition program. "No, thanks," says Annie, not realizing this is a request rather than a choice. The teacher asks someone else. Annie nibbles on the crackers but refuses the orange. The thought of it makes her gag.
Morning recess	Gino is late going out. He drags his heels and is the last one to the coat rack. He waits until everyone else has left. Miss G prompts him. He keeps glancing at the window. Finally, he gets an arm inside one sleeve. Then the other. It's hard to tell if it's reluctance or fine motor difficulties slowing him down. Probably both. It's still cloudy. By the time he gets outside, only five minutes remain. He steps out tentatively to find it isn't raining. He runs back and forth by the Kindergarten yard, flapping his arms and clinging to his Pokémon. He talks to it about ant farms. He is the last to line up to go back in, but pushes his way to the front of the line. The kid at the front protests and Gino protests right back, "I have to be first!"	Annie sits against the wall. She has brought out her binder of writing. She writes stories and her imagination is so vivid, she feels as though she can walk around inside of them. It is a 4-D experience. She doesn't notice anyone or anything else.
10:30 a.m.	In Gino's math class, he doesn't follow along while the teacher takes up the answers because his mom corrected it all at home. Miss G isn't there to tell him why it's important. Instead, he reads his favorite Pokémon book. He misses the lesson but at least he's quiet. During the work period, he calls out, "I don't know what to do!" The teacher comes over and tells him which questions to work on. "Is it the same as everyone else?" he asks. The teacher explains she gave him fewer questions and he insists, "I need to do all of it! I can do it!" When she walks away, he realizes he doesn't know where to start. The questions fall right out of his head. Miss G would normally write each question down on a sticky note and show them to him one by one. "Help me!" he calls out again. When the period is over, he has barely started. He keeps trying to write, saying, "Oh no, oh no, oh no, I'm not done!" As he becomes more anxious, his volume increases.	It's math time. Other Grade 7s take up the homework. Annie forgot all about the homework so doesn't have anything to review. She can't possibly look up each question and cross-reference with what's on the board, so she doesn't try. She is still and quiet, and no one notices she isn't following along. During the lesson, her teacher asks an easy question. The boy next to her gets it wrong. Annie raises her hand, perfectly straight. She gets picked! "Daryl was incorrect. It's 563, not 556," she states. The teacher confirms the answer. Annie turns to the boy and says, "Beat you!" Some kids laugh. Annie so rarely talks, they find this surprising. During the work period, Annie sings to herself in Korean. She doesn't notice the looks of classmates nearby. She doesn't regulate her volume. Finally, the boy next to her says, "Shut up!" Annie recoils out of her K-pop music fantasy and shoots him a withering look.

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10:30 a.m. (cont'd)	Finally, the teacher says, "If you don't stop, Gino, I'll have to tell your parents!" "Okay, okay, okay! Don't call them, please don't!" he repeats, putting down the pencil, eyes wide.	
11:00 a.m.	Miss G comes back to help Gino with the transition to gym. He doesn't want to leave. "No!' he says. Miss G asks him what's the matter. "She hasn't said she won't call them!" he replies. The teacher looks surprised and says, "Gino, I'm not going to call." "Promise?" "Yes. Just go to gym." Miss G prompts him to line up in his spot. "I can't find it!" he complains. "What number are you?" Miss G asks. "10!" "Why can't you find it?" "I lose count!" Miss G asks him who he is supposed to stand beside. "John and Kalim." "So, don't count. Look for them!" "Okay!" At gym, they're playing basketball. Gino puts his Pokémon on the bench. He dribbles low to the ground and slowly. He is usually on the fringes, trailing behind the others, ten seconds late to cheer or boo. When his team scores, he cheers and says, "In your face!" Most kids laugh, so he repeats it. He gets tired after a few minutes and daydreams on the spot. He wonders if Bulbasaur is watching him play. He is nearly hit by the ball when a peer misses a pass. "Gino!" someone calls and he startles, then chases after the ball with a huge grin, fumbling the pickup for a moment. He dribbles with both hands, travelling when he isn't supposed to. The kids know not to point it out. But one of the kids sees an easy target and steals the ball. "He did that on purpose!" says Gino. "It's part of the game," says the gym coach. When someone else scores, Gino gets teary-eyed. "No! I lost! I hate basketball!"	Annie goes to art class, collecting all her materials. Her pencil case opens (she never can manage the clasp) and everything inside spills over the floor. She is late to class, and blushes when all eyes turn toward her. Her teacher welcomes her and holds up her work for the class to see. Annie's heart races and she wishes she could turn invisible.
Lunch	Miss G gets Gino's lunch out for him since he is still upset about gym. She waits until he's eating, and calmer, before going on her own lunch. Gino tells the kids around him, "Be quiet" and "You're supposed to stay in your seats!" He threatens to tell their parents. Eating his lunch takes so long, he often stays behind with the lunch monitor to finish. He misses half of recess. Miss G catches him on his way out.	Annie doesn't eat. She isn't hungry. The boy next to her has tuna and the smell is overwhelming. Annie plugs her nose and says, "Your lunch stinks!" She waits until the bell rings and then gets her lunch—pretzels—out of her bag. She takes them with her to the Kindergarten class where she helps at lunch. She loves playing with the children and telling them what to do. She doesn't have to think hard about

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Lunch (cont'd)	"Who are you going to play with?" she asks. "I don't know his name." Miss G guesses he means Chad, a sweet boy in his class. "I can't wait to hear all about it after recess!" she says. Gino shadows Chad and his friends as they move around the yard. Maybe they see him, maybe they don't. Gino gives up after a while and defaults to running by the fence, back and forth.	how to fit in or what words to say. Kindergarten is much easier. And the kids love her.
12:30 p.m.	Afternoons are always tough on Gino because he's tired. Today is worse. There's a supply teacher for French and no one told him. The supply teacher tells the class to settle down. Everyone gets louder when it's not their regular teacher. The teacher raises his voice and says, "Do you think I'm playing games here?" The class falls silent. Gino calls out, "We're not playing games, either!" "Do you think you're funny?" the supply teacher asks. Gino covers his ears. The teacher starts to reprimand him when Miss G walks in. She sits next to Gino, and the teacher recognizes he jumped to the wrong conclusion. "Sorry, buddy," he says. Miss G pulls Gino to finish the test from the day before he didn't complete. "No, it's too hard," Gino says. "You can do it, Gino." "Don't tell me what to do!" "You don't want to get a bad mark, do you?" "Just give me a 0!"	It's soccer in gym class. Annie shudders. She had a bad experience once when she worked up the courage to ask a group of girls to join. They said okay but then no one passed to her. She has avoided playing ever since, especially with those girls. The gym teacher asks Annie what position she wants. "None," Annie replies. "I want you to participate, Annie. Pick one." Annie freezes. There are no good options. "Goalie or forward?" Annie groans, teeth gritted like it's a life-or-death question. Finally, her teacher picks for her. "Forward. Get in there!" Annie walks, head down, into the game. She stands there unsure of what to do. The game goes on without her. Again.
Afternoon Recess	Gino takes his time getting ready. "But it might rain!" he calls out. The teacher tells him it won't. Miss G soothes him, distracting him with his Pokémon. "What are you and Bulbasaur going to do at recess?" They walk and talk until he's at the outside door. He sees how dark the sky is. "No!" He cries. "No!" "I don't know why you're upset," says Miss G. "Use your words!" Gino makes a guttural sound, falls to the floor to one side of the doorway, and buries his head under his arms. He is still there after all the classes come inside. His teacher tries to get him into class faster by saying, "Do we have to call your parents?" "NO!! YOU PROMISED!"	Annie's afternoon recess is the same as the morning one. The same as most days. She escapes into her writing and tunes out everything and everyone else. It begins to drizzle so she shuts her binder and imagines without it.

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2:00 p.m.	It takes the rest of the day to calm Gino down.	Annie forgets her binder outside and panics. She leaves the class without asking and the teacher calls after her, "You're supposed to ask permission!" "Sorry!" Annie says, hitting her head, "I'm so stupid." "It's okay. You can go." When Annie comes back, a writing prompt is on the board: *Where will you be in ten years?* She stares at the board and the paper. How does she know? How can she possibly answer? And because she can't, she doesn't. At the end of the period, her teacher asks who still needs to present to the class. Annie does, but she doesn't raise her hand. She stutters when she speaks in front of others. She hopes that if she doesn't say anything, her teacher won't notice.
2:45 p.m.	Miss G writes Gino's homework for him in his agenda, packs his bag, and helps him to put on his coat. He hugs her, holding on. "What a terrible day," he says, "I hate school." When they get outside, his mom asks for a full account of the day. Miss G fills her in. Gino hangs his head and clings to Bulbasaur. The last thing he wants is to relive this day again.	Annie doesn't write down the homework. It takes too long to do and she thinks she can remember it. She forgets two of the books she needs. The permission form for tomorrow's trip falls out of her bag and she doesn't notice in her rush out the door. She just wants to be home.

Unless you have an understanding of how the autistic brain is wired, it can be hard to spot all the challenges these students face each day at school or the very real communication breakdowns that can occur between teachers and students with autism. Annie and Gino worry me, for different reasons.

Annie's struggles are under the radar, so teachers might not recognize the many issues just below the surface. She does well academically but issues with socialization, organization, and anxiety will likely worsen with age. Like most students with autism, she has greater difficulty each year from about Grade 4 on, as the curriculum requires greater critical thinking, inferential thinking, and collaborative methods of learning (Garcia Winner, 2013). As with many females on the spectrum, as social nuances increase, she will be less successful at masking and may be at risk for mood disorders (Cai et al., 2018).

In comparison, Gino has more obvious needs and will probably always receive some form of support. He is also at risk for anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Ashburner et al., 2010; Mayes et al., 2013b; Mukaddes & Fateh, 2010). Gino reminds me very much of a student who told me he wanted every day to be an 100% good day and his day would be completely ruined if it did not meet this exacting criteria. I can't even imagine if this was my benchmark for success. As with most teachers, I'm satisfied on any given day if I get through a third of my plans and no one goes to the hospital!

Let's break down some of the difficulties we saw in Annie's and Gino's day at school and where we'll learn more about each topic:

Social Issues (See Chapter 4)

- Not knowing how to interact with others

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- Not knowing how to join others
- Either not aware of or misperceiving their impact on others
- Misperceiving intent of others
- Feeling or being bullied
- Social isolation
- Tendency to retreat into imagination as a coping mechanism
- Black-and-white thinking about friendships
- Interests not always age-appropriate or consistent with peers' interests
- Not knowing names of peers

Anxiety and Challenging Moments (See Chapters 6 and 7)

- Not being able to accurately predict reactions of others
- Significant phobias
- Difficulty letting go of past negative experiences
- Rigidity around the schedule, unexpected changes (e.g., supply teacher)
- Difficulty with transitions between subjects or classes
- Overly competitive, taking losses to heart
- Power struggles and large reactions in response to punishments or threats
- Fear of being singled out
- Perfectionism, such as erasing work and avoidance of difficult tasks, including not even trying if they think they can't do something well
- Fear of negative reports home
- Needing support to self-regulate and problem-solve

Organization (See Chapter 5)

- Physically losing materials or forgetting homework or assignments
- Difficulty with backpacks, pencil cases, and hidden rules about how to manage materials
- Missing group cues of when to take things out or put them away
- Trouble managing time and breaking down tasks on their own
- Lacking timeliness with deadlines, finishing lunches, tidying up

Hidden Rules (See Chapters 3 and 4)

- Blurting out
- Difficulty with not being picked to answer
- Not understanding why group activities or rules apply to them (e.g., taking up work)
- Incorrectly generalizing a rule based on one bad experience
- Misreading polite requests as real questions
- Pointing out mistakes of others or correcting others for minor infractions

Motor Skills & Coordination

- Difficulty with fine motor skills makes copying notes or writing in agenda laborious
- Difficulty with gross motor skills affecting participation in gym or recess games and causing embarrassment

Sensory Processing (See Chapter 6)

- Oversensitive to noises, smells, tastes, etc.
- Difficulty processing too much information at once
- Difficulty finding place in line amongst many moving bodies

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It's interesting to note that during the COVID-19 school shutdowns, many of my students thrived academically, though after several months of online learning they all reported that they missed school, especially peers. Their performance on school work improved because demands that were hard for them—interpreting social information, communicating face to face, peer interactions—were removed. Instead, they could work more at their own pace. Teachers delivered information in smaller chunks. Technology and visual aids were used. There was no need to assimilate and perform in one way.

Independence (See Chapters 5, 6, and 7)

- Prompt dependence
- Wanting to be treated the same as others, even when accommodations would level the playing field
- Reluctance (and not knowing how) to participate in group work
- Preferring to work alone

Communication (See Chapters 3 and 4)

- Literal thinking and lack of understanding of figurative language (e.g., rhetorical questions)
- Difficulty with open-ended tests
- Expecting adults to keep their word perfectly
- Bluntness and a lack of filtering thoughts that should be kept in their heads

My brother Danny's differences become a "disability" only when he is in settings that are not designed to support him. Figuring out under what conditions our autistic students thrive gives us a lot of information about how to design better classrooms. While you were reading the preceding section, you probably thought of some strategies you'd use in your classroom to help Annie or Gino. Maybe you felt overwhelmed at first glance, to see so many developing areas requiring support. You might have reflected on kids you've taught, and wished you'd had a better understanding of what was going on in their brains. Don't be hard on yourself. We don't do this job because it's easy! Language like "best practices" can make it seem like there's one right way to do something that will magically solve all your students' most challenging behaviors or struggles. But students and our relationship to them are complicated. What we see in September is just the tip of the iceberg. Depending on what we put in place, by June they might seem like a completely different child. But how do we know where to start?

I was lucky enough to collaborate with an exemplary teacher, Jasmine, for about five years. The first year, Jasmine felt inspired by my PD on autism and left wanting to make many changes to her own practice. She soon felt frustrated. How to accomplish it all? Never one to give up, she decided to pick one change to make at a time, slowly adding to or adjusting her practice. I now draw on this wisdom when I work with teachers. There is much we're already doing well; we do not need to reinvent the wheel. We choose what works for our unique classroom context. So when you don't know where to start, start with one thing.

I have chosen to use person-first terms like "student with autism" and identity-first terms like "autistic student" interchangeably. Person-first language is often touted by neurotypical people as a reminder to see the commonalities and the person regardless of their autism. Many people with autism prefer to call themselves autistic, as their unique brain wiring shapes how they think about and experience the world. I hope readers will see value in both perspectives.

A Note on Terminology

My students are wonderful children from Grades 4-8 who have autism and average to above-average cognitive and language abilities. This is often referred to as *high-functioning autism*, *Asperger Syndrome*, or, the current medical term, *autism level 1*. This book focuses on these learners on the autism spectrum, who are usually integrated in general classrooms.

Throughout the book, I have tried to steer clear of terms like *high-functioning* except where relevant to a study. Though still often used, this term is loaded with assumptions about the perceived level of intelligence or autism severity of an individual. Yet someone can score high on intelligence tests and struggle tremendously with daily life, or vice versa. This is probably why preferred terminology keeps changing; labels can never fully encapsulate the strengths and challenges of complex human beings.

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The Boring Stuff

Let's get it out of the way. Let's cover some of the facts and figures that are important but less engaging than the rest of this book. As I sometimes say, I'm not a life-saving doctor, just the kind that can bore you to tears at a dinner party! Here's what we know—and don't know—about autism.

What is autism, anyway? That is the question! It's hard to nail down. What we know for sure is that autism is a complex, lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018). In North America, the current criteria for a diagnosis is laid out in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, known as the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). In brief, autism is characterized by significant impairments to communication and socialization, restricted patterns of interest or behaviors, and difficulties with other areas of functioning. Some individuals with autism might present with other co-morbid conditions, like intellectual disabilities, sleep disorders, language impairments, gastrointestinal issues, sensory processing difficulties, seizures, Tourette syndrome, ADHD, or anxiety (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018; Smith & Samdup, 2018). Autism looks vastly different from person to person, which is why it is often referred to as a spectrum (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018).

My brother Danny was slow to talk and didn't show joint attention or respond to verbal prompts. His hearing was tested more than once and he spent many sessions with a speech pathologist as my parents tried to figure out why. Although there weren't earlier signs, Danny's brain had already begun its unique pattern of arranging and wiring itself, starting when he was in utero.

Autism starts, well, at the beginning. In the first trimester, a fetus (who may one day be diagnosed with autism) is developing and organizing its brain in an unusual way, resulting in developmental differences that show up later on (Beversdorf et al., 2005, as cited in Smith & Samdup, 2018). There aren't reliable biological markers yet, so doctors diagnose autism based on behavioral symptoms. You can't look at a newborn and tell, because all babies are born looking pretty similar—their eyes don't usually focus, and they sleep and cry a lot. By 6 to 12 months of age, babies are expected to display certain milestones. This is when the trained eye might first notice that babies who will later be diagnosed with autism are not developing along a neurotypical pathway. Children with autism can be reliably identified by age two (Smith & Samdup, 2018), though most are diagnosed after age four (Baio et al., 2018).

After birth, the brains of autistic children begin growing rapidly, so that when they are about four years old, their brains are close to maximum volume, a stage their peers won't reach for another eight years (Courchesne et al., 2003). This overgrowth comes at the expense of neural connections. Autistic children tend to have strong clusters of brain connections in localized areas, but areas of the brain that are farther apart do not develop the pathways that connect strongly to one another (Vermeulen, 2012). I've always found this interesting, because every autism deficit seems to me to be a problem with connection. Connecting to others; connecting the right expectations to the context; connecting the right meaning to words or figurative language; connecting cause and effect; connecting and integrating many skills when approaching complex tasks… I could go on! It's also the challenge of those around them to connect to autistic folks and to imagine, as best we can, how much harder our lives would be if all types of connections were not intuitive and often unconscious processes.

Sometimes, people ask me about the "vaccines cause autism" myth, caused by a faulty research study using falsified data. It has been retracted, and many other peer-reviewed, large scale studies have disproved its findings (Chen et al., 2004; Hviid et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2014). While vaccines can cause side effects in some cases, autism is NOT one of them.

No one knows all the possible causes of autism. What research overwhelmingly shows is that genetics are involved. Autism tends to run in families. I can look across my family and see one or two brilliant thinkers who might qualify for a diagnosis today that wasn't available or needed when they were growing

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up. I have a couple of cousins with Asperger Syndrome. I consider myself more neurodivergent than neurotypical, though I do not have an autism diagnosis. Hundreds of genes, of all kinds, have been identified that can make a person more likely to display autism symptoms (Ansel et al., 2017).

Now, I vaguely recall learning in high school biology that not all genes are expressed. It's the same with autism. Genes can also be activated by certain epigenetic triggers, such as environmental factors in utero, and researchers continue to study these (Smith & Samdup, 2018). There's also a gender difference. Autism is diagnosed four to five times more often in males than in females (Baio et al., 2018; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018; Smith & Samdup, 2018), and females who are diagnosed tend to have many more genetic mutations or differences than males (Jacquemont, 2014). In other words, autism susceptibility genes might be there, but fewer of these are required for autism to be expressed in males. It's also possible we just aren't as good at diagnosing autism in girls. Current diagnostic tests are based on male behaviors, and girls, especially those without intellectual delays, are better at masking their symptoms (Attwood, 2007; Cook et al., 2018). Recently in Australia, researchers developed a screener to identify more females on the spectrum, though this tool is still being validated (Ormond et al., 2018). We also know there is tremendous gender and sexual diversity across the spectrum, and more research is needed to consider autistic experiences in all folks.

I suspect in my lifetime there will be considerable change to our understanding of autism and how we diagnose it.

Autism seems to be everywhere these days. Maybe it's because social media curates my experiences, but TV shows, movies, and articles about autism abound, and many more memoirs and perspectives are available from autistic people than when Danny was growing up. In North America, autism is estimated to be as common as 1 in 36 to 1 in 68 (Baio et al., 2018; Blumberg et al., 2013; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018; Xu et al., 2018). That means, at least every few years, teachers will have a student with autism in their class.

We also don't have exact answers for why autism rates have risen over the last 30 years. It could be we're getting better at diagnosing kids. Rates of learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities have decreased, so we may also be shifting people from one category to another (Shattuck, 2006). It could be society is more aware of the signs of autism, so parents know what to bring up to doctors. One of the most probable reasons that autism seems to be increasing is that we've broadened the definition. In 1995, Asperger Syndrome was added as a possible diagnosis, allowing people with no intellectual delay to be diagnosed with autism for the first time in North America. Doctors had a whole new category to consider. Since 46% of people on the spectrum have average to above-average intelligence, that's a lot of folks who were previously missed (ADDMN Surveillance Year 2010 Principal Investigators, 2014). In the version of the DSM released by the APA in 2013, distinct categories of autism like Asperger were removed in favor of a general autism diagnosis and specified level of support. As we learn and expand our thinking about autism, this definition might continue to change.

Still, we're still not catching everyone. Autism is under-diagnosed in rural and lower socioeconomic areas and in Black or Latinx children in North America (Antezana et al., 2017; Baio et al., 2018). Other barriers exist, such as long wait lists for assessments through schools and the high cost of private assessments. Cultural stigma also plays a part, as autism may be considered taboo, a Western phenomenon, or simply "bad behavior," which could also affect rates of diagnosis. Diagnostic tools have not yet been developed to be relevant to all demographics, and so questions might reflect a significant bias. For instance, a typical screening

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question might ask about how a child lines up their toys, assuming a child has many toys to line up in the first place! It's also important to note that Western cultural norms value certain behaviors, such as independence, competition, and outgoing interpersonal skills; individuals who fall outside of those margins could be seen through a deficit lens in that context. It's entirely possible they would not need a diagnosis somewhere else, where other qualities are valued.

You may have realized, by now, that I lied about this being boring. I find this stuff endlessly fascinating! One of the factoids I like to tell my students is that genetic researchers discovered that early modern humans evolved to have different kinds of brains, whereas Neanderthals did not. They speculate that diverse minds, including those with autism and ADHD, allowed the human species to innovate and survive, while those without neurodiversity failed to thrive and eventually became extinct (Weiss, 2015). I can still hear one group of students cheering, "WE'RE IN THE ONE PERCENT!"—their statistic, not mine! It's important to remember, regardless of definition, that autistic people have always been here; it's just that we have not always looked at people's behavior through a microscope the way we do today.

One of the hardest parts of conversations about autism is that needs vary widely across the spectrum. For some, autism presents incredible barriers to a fulfilling life for people with autism and their families. These families may be desperate for support and may wish for a "cure." For others, autism comes with gifts and is just another way of being and thinking; while there can be significant challenges for these folks, they are more likely to reject interventions that aim to dull uniqueness and that require conformity. My goal in working with families is to help them—and their children—to know that autistic ways of thinking and being are as valid and worthy as "neurotypical" ways. Receiving a diagnosis isn't always clear cut, and families may not know how independent, social, or successful their child could be one day. It is a process riddled with anxiety, and families need our support and understanding. No matter where families and individuals are on their journey, as teachers we can play a powerful role in improving their quality of life. We can also help peers to become more compassionate—a step toward a more empathetic, less judgmental society.

As teachers, we're sometimes the first to notice that children are developing differently from their peers. Children I work with, who have autism and average to above-average intelligence and language skills, are more likely to be diagnosed much later than those with intellectual delays and autism (Christensen, 2016; Safran, 2008; Shepherd & Waddell, 2015). This is a disadvantage, as research is brimming with the benefits of early intervention (Clark et al., 2018; Matson & Konst, 2013; Smith & Samdup, 2018), and we know that high IQ doesn't always mean the person will have adaptive skills they need to succeed (Clark et al., 2018). This is not to say that any child with autism can't succeed or won't. They simply need our help, and we need to know what to really look for. It also means that it often falls to teachers to bridge the gap in services for students with autism who can keep up with grade-level work. We have to understand more than the textbook definition of autism. We have to understand what challenges our students might experience in the classroom and how to mitigate them.

Let's pretend, for a moment, that I didn't give you all that background. Here's the description of autism I much prefer to all the clinical stuff, from someone who knows what they're talking about (and who would be the most interesting person to talk to at a dinner party!). In the words of my student Amanda, "Autism is when everyone else wants cotton candy and all you want is a grape."

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Marsha Costello

Managing Student Behavior

How to identify, understand, and defuse challenging classroom situations.

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1

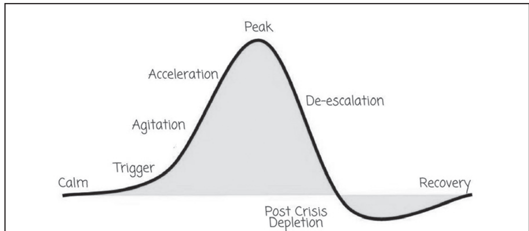
Understanding Behavior

As a teacher, you are an expert in curriculum, instruction, and learning. As you facilitate curriculum and learning on a daily basis, you must navigate student behavior issues as best you can. In fact, many teachers often become well-versed in some of the most common challenges. Although there is no way that you can be an expert in all aspects of student behavior, learning more about the causes and functions of behavior will help you better manage behavior issues in the classroom.

Keep in mind that students with the same issues or conditions do not always present with the same behaviors. For instance, a student with academic difficulties may become very quiet and "invisible" in class to avoid drawing attention to themselves and being noticed by the teacher. Another student could behave in the complete opposite way to get kicked out of the classroom so they do not have to face their struggles/challenges. Behavior is complex and can occur for a multitude of reasons.

The Behavior Cycle

To help you understand the complex nature of behavior, think about behavior as being part of a larger cycle, as illustrated in Figure 1.1.



Source: https://hes-extraordinary.com/6-powerful-nvci-skills-for-handling-meltdowns

Figure 1.1: The behavior cycle

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Although student behavior may appear to quickly escalate, there is generally a pattern to the escalation. As shown in Figure 1.1, something usually triggers a student to transition from a calm and productive state to an agitated state. It is sometimes difficult to recognize these triggers, but you can often determine them through data collection, which we will discuss in later chapters. An agitated state, if not settled, can escalate into a meltdown (peak). This is where you see the most challenging (and sometimes dangerous) behaviors, including flipping desks, physical aggression toward peers, staff, or self, and more. When the meltdown subsides (de-escalation), the student is often mentally and physically exhausted, described as post-crisis depletion. After a meltdown (recovery), students can experience feelings of guilt or shame. It is very important at this stage to rebuild a positive relationship with the student.

This book will provide an in-depth look at each stage in the behavior cycle, as well as provide strategies and supports to respond to each stage.

To successfully address challenging behaviors, you will need to understand the purpose behaviors serve in each stage of the cycle. This book will provide an in-depth look at each stage in the behavior cycle, as well as provide strategies and supports to respond to each stage.

Contributing Factors of Behavior

The factors discussed in this section are not exhaustive; in fact, they are just the tip of the iceberg.

TIP **Keep in mind that the diagnoses or root cause(s) of behavior help provide an understanding of why behaviors occur. But regardless of the diagnosis or root cause, you still need to consider and address the behaviors.**

Medical Difficulties/Diagnosis

Vision and/or hearing problems, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), autism, anxiety, chronic medical conditions, epilepsy, sensory needs, and more—multiple conditions can affect learning and/or behavior. This does not mean that students with these conditions should be permitted to misbehave because of their condition(s). Rather, you can use this information to anticipate challenging behaviors, understand why they are occurring, and proactively plan for them. Despite the presence/diagnosis of a condition, you can still address behavior in a positive and successful way.

Some conditions have overarching characteristics that are very common from student to student. For instance, ODD is characterized by oppositional behaviors such as refusal to follow requests or guidelines, being argumentative, and having negative responses to authority. ADHD also has common characteristics such as impulsivity, hyperactivity, and a short attention span. Though commonalities such as these exist, some characteristics are prevalent in more than one condition. For example, anxiety can present in a similar way to ADHD, but these two conditions are very different and your approach to each may differ. Therefore, it is important to look at the data (see Chapter 7) and consider all aspects of the student's profile when determining a course of action to address behavior.

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Academic Struggles

Some students may believe they can't do the work or don't know how to do it. Others may be scared to try it or have accepted that they will never be able to do it. Students may struggle with non-preferred tasks or may have a learning disability in a particular area. In addition, absenteeism can create learning gaps. When students experience these types of academic challenges, they may engage in behavior to avoid academically demanding situations.

Sensory Difficulties

In basic terms, students may be over- or under-stimulated by their environments, which in turn can lead to problem behaviors. A student who is over-stimulated by their surroundings may tend to avoid activities and/or experiences with increased sensory input. Students who are under-stimulated by their environment may demonstrate increased or exaggerated responses to their environment.

Sensory difficulties can often be overlooked or misunderstood. Because these issues can have a significant impact on classroom behavior, we will explore them in more depth in Chapter 3.

Although the understanding of how adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) impact children first originated in 1995, it is still a relatively new concept for many educators. ACEs are common across all socioeconomic levels, with nearly two-thirds of the population experiencing some level of adverse childhood experiences. The more ACEs a child experiences, the greater their risk of life-long impacts.

More recent research demonstrates that the impact of ACEs can be reduced through positive childhood experiences (PCEs). The ACES Too High website (a news site that reports on PCEs and ACEs) states:

> This means that it's really important to have positive childhood experiences, no matter how much adversity you have in your life. And if you have a lot of adversity and a lot of positive childhood experiences, you are less likely to suffer the consequences of ACEs. However if you have no positive childhood experiences and few ACEs, the consequences of the ACEs are more likely to appear. (https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/)

The importance of relationships cannot be understated and is a recurring theme throughout this book.

Having strong and positive relationships with your students contributes to positive childhood experiences and can help make a difference in terms of the impacts of ACEs. The importance of relationships cannot be understated and is a recurring theme throughout this book. (See the Recommended Resources section at the end of the book for more information about adverse childhood experiences and childhood trauma.)

Home Stress

Abuse, chronic illness, or death in the family, financial stress, substance use problems, mental health problems, separation/divorce—all these types of adverse childhood experiences can lead to behavior problems in the classroom. Abuse, neglect, and household challenges have an impact on children and have been linked to poor outcomes later in life, as well as poor academic achievement.

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School Stress

Students may experience bullying, social media stress, limited/lack of friendships, social difficulties, personality conflict between student and teacher, limited supports and resources, lack of understanding of a learning/medical/behavioral condition, and more. This stress can lead to poor academic performance as well as an increase in disruptive behaviors. Although it is important to address behaviors as they occur, it is even more important to support students in reducing the stress they are experiencing so they can fully engage in their learning.

Trauma

Behavior stemming from childhood trauma is often the most difficult to address as it can take years for the student to get to a place where they are ready, able, and open to engage in meaningful learning (academic or otherwise). Trauma can be very complex and extremely challenging. Children who have experienced trauma can present as though they are significantly impacted by ADHD and even ODD. Receiving support from a trauma specialist is an important part of support for the student and the school team.

Steps for Addressing Problem Behavior

Regardless of the type of behavior you are trying to address, the approach will be the same:

- Meet with the school team.
- Complete any necessary assessments and/or referrals.
- Collect baseline data (this may happen before or after the meeting).
- Identify triggers.
- Identify possible reinforcers.
- Create a plan that considers
    - Alternate behaviors
    - Proactive strategies
    - Education and supports
    - Reinforcement
    - Consequences
- Collect data.
- Analyze data to determine if the strategies are working.
- Follow up with the team to review data and tweak the plan as needed.

The remainder of this book will provide information about this approach.

KEY IDEAS

- Behavior is complex and can occur for a multitude of reasons.
- To successfully address challenging behaviors, you will need to understand the purpose behaviors serve in each stage of the behavior cycle.
- Contributing factors of behavior can include medical difficulties/diagnosis, academic struggles, sensory difficulties, home stress, school stress, and trauma.

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- The steps for addressing problem behavior include meeting with support staff, assessing and making referrals, collecting baseline data, identifying triggers and reinforcers, creating a plan, collecting data, analyzing data, and following up with support staff.

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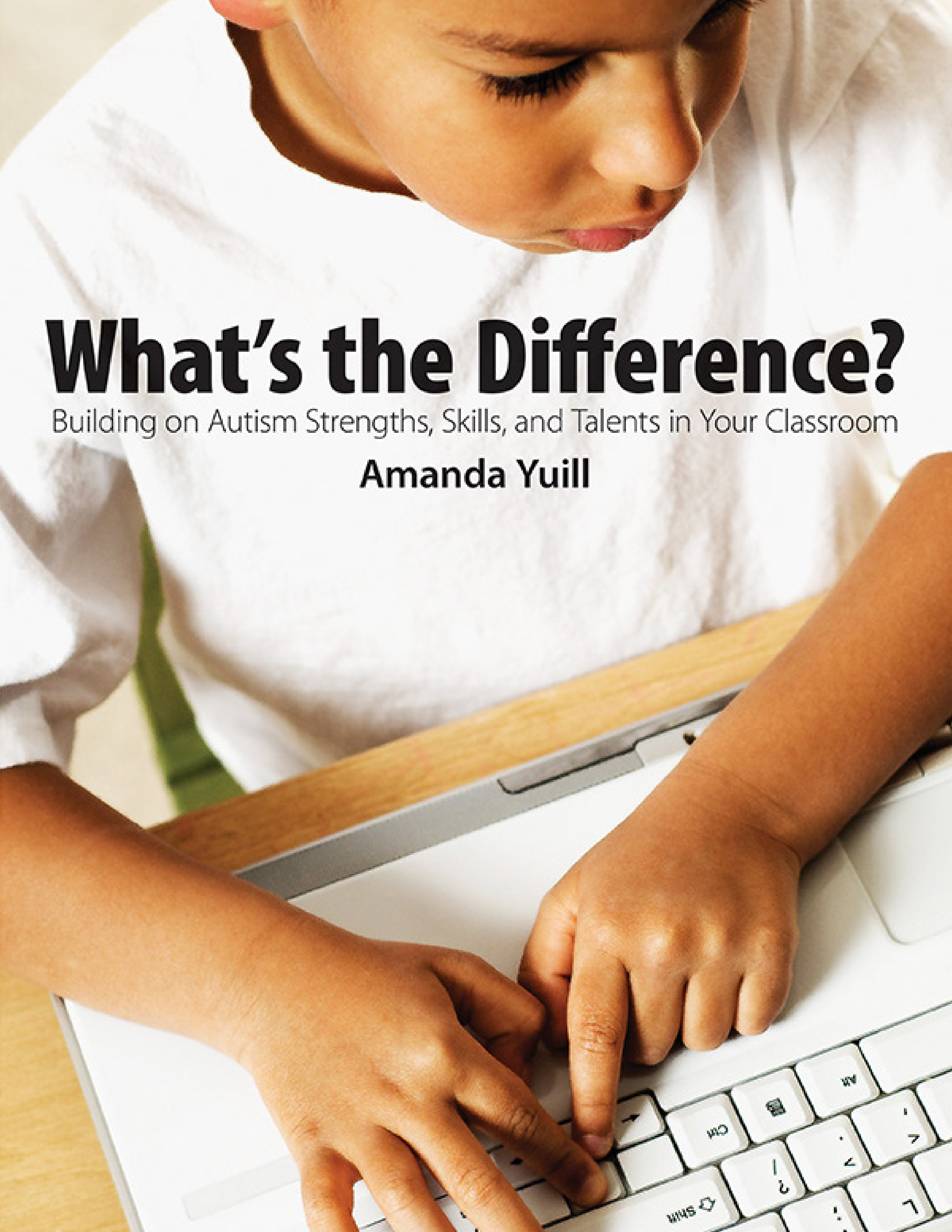
What's the Difference?
Building on Autism Strengths, Skills, and Talents in Your Classroom
Amanda Yuill

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1

Preparing for Autistic Students

I spoke to the mother of one of my Kindergarten students about two weeks into school. I told her that I had noticed that her son didn't speak very much in school. She said that it was a symptom of his autism. She and I were both surprised that I didn't know her son was autistic. Because he had just been diagnosed and they did not yet have the doctor's report, it wasn't in his student record. Her husband was supposed to tell me on the first day of school but didn't. I felt bad, because I was sure her husband was going to be in trouble when he got home that day!

Autism as a Way of Being

If you haven't had an autistic student in your class, you probably will soon. It's good to know something about autism and have some background information in order to be prepared to teach these students. Autism Speaks is an organization that advocates for and supports autistic individuals and their families. On their website (https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism), autism is defined as, "a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication." For example, in your class, you may have an autistic student who has a hard time making friends or understanding social cues. You may have a student who rocks back and forth or repeats certain phrases. Autism can include, but is not limited to, Asperger syndrome, Pervasive Development Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), and autism. It is good to keep this in mind when reading student records, since a student might have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum that is not specifically called autism. In fact, more than a century ago, Hans Asperger, after whom Asperger's Syndrome is named, said, "Once one has learnt to pay attention to the characteristic manifestations of autism, one realizes that they are not at all rare" (Asperger, 1991, p. 39). It is important to mention here that, while autism has traditionally been mostly diagnosed in boys, recently there has been progress in recognizing autism in girls and the varying symptoms most commonly displayed

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See page 112 for a list of people I interviewed to prepare for writing this book.

by girls. So if it seems like there are more autistic students in classrooms recently, it is due to improved diagnosis (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006). In the schools where I work, it is common to have one or two autistic students in a class. Now that we know there will be an increase of autistic students integrated into our classes, what can we do?

Eva Kyriakides, Special Education Advisory Committee Chair for a board of education, states, "Integration is excellent with the proper supports, and that's key—that's the part we are missing and not something school boards can address easily." So, if integration is excellent, but we don't have the proper supports, what can teachers do to prepare? One of the most important things we can do is to make sure that we have a good attitude, without bias, toward autistic students.

There has been a long history of discrimination against autistic people. Science writer and activist Steve Silberman (2015, p. 1132) tells the story of Bill, the real person on whom the character Rain Man was based (*Rain Man* is a 1988 movie with Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman—definitely worth seeing!).

> He had never been taught how to tell time or handle money, and had never received proper dental care. Like the other inmates, he was paid the equivalent of 30 cents to $1.50 a month—redeemable only in goods from the hospital store—for backbreaking work like pushing food trolleys through the miles of dank tunnels that connected the various areas of the hospital (Silberman, 2015, p. 356).

Bill had been declared a ward of the state against his mother's wishes and she was not allowed to take him out of the hospital for the feeble-minded. Brown and Radford (2015, p. 11) reveal that in Canada from the 1920s to the 1940s there were forced sterilization programs for institutionalized autistic patients.

This discrimination, although perhaps less blatant, is still around today. Paula Kluth and Patrick Schwarz (2008, p. 61), state, "Sometimes opportunities are taken away from a student with autism under the guise of safety or simply because the individual has a disability. This can result in subtle to very blatant discrimination." Joseph Hancock, a young adult on the autism spectrum, shares that, in his experience, many people think that *autistic* means "idiot," sometimes because he doesn't like talking. He says that it is important for people to realize that, in many autistic brains, one part of the brain is larger than another. Although he may not be very talkative, he is excellent at math, statistics, numbers, and patterns. Michelle Dawson (2004) asserts that if your goal is to extinguish autistic behavior, your goal is to extinguish autistic people. The sterilization programs have perhaps simply taken a new form.

Of course, as teachers, we want to help our students. We want to treat them well. How do we do that? I suggest we ask the autistic community themselves how they would like to be treated. John Elder Robison (2007, p. 5) says, "Asperger's is not a disease. It's a way of being. There is no cure, nor is there a need for one. There is, however, a need for knowledge and adaptation…" This is echoed by Oliver Sacks when he talks about a family of four, all of whom are autistic. They had come to feel that their autism was a "whole mode of being and an identity." In fact, it was more than just an identity, but also something of which to be proud. Sacks cites Grandin, who says that people with autism, dyslexia, and other cognitive differences could make contributions to society that so-called normal people are incapable of making. She says that if she could snap her fingers and be non-autistic, she would not, because it would not be her. Therefore, it is important that we, as educators, don't treat autism as a disease, but as another way of

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being. In fact, I wonder if it is time to drop the word, "Disorder" from Autism Spectrum Disorder and just call it the Autism Spectrum.

Donna Williams (1996) reminds us, "Some [individuals] really need to ask themselves whether they might not be able to have a little more tolerance of eccentricity than they already have, not just regarding the 'autistic' people in their care, but in themselves as well" (p. 229).

If we treat autism not as a disease, but as a way of being, it leads us to accommodate our autistic students in the way they need in order to learn. It also involves seeing autism as a strength. As Kluth and Schwarz say, "To put it another way, we feel that talking and thinking about students in ways that are more positive, hopeful, and strengths-based is not only more kind but also more helpful." (2008, p. 125) Everyone can learn. Everyone has strengths. It's simply a matter of getting to know our students and unlocking those strengths—unlocking the way they learn. Yes, this can take more time. Yes, this can be more difficult. Yes, we do need to find a balance. However, we didn't become teachers to have an easy job. We became teachers to help children. All children.

Your Autism Vocabulary List

A Note on Terminology

"Autistic students" is used instead of "students with autism" because the autistic community prefers this terminology. Saying "students with autism" can seem to indicate that autism is a disease, and there is no scientific basis for this (Michelle Dawson, 2004). However, every individual on the autism spectrum needs to decide for themselves the terminology they prefer. It is the intention in this book to honor this through the language used.

The first time you speak to the parents of your autistic student you might think that they are both doctors. They use technical vocabulary, acronyms, and words you don't know, and they talk as though you are following along. This is because autism has its own vocabulary. It helps to know some of the terminology before you start teaching your autistic students. And so, reminiscent of when you were in Grade 5, here is your vocabulary list. Don't worry, I won't make you write out the words 10 times each and then use them in a sentence. Just a note, there are many more words than I have included here that could come up in discussions about autism or autistic students. There is always new terminology as autistic culture and research advances. This is just an overview of the more common words you will hear.

Words Describing Autism

ASD, or Autism Spectrum Disorder. "Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are complex neurodevelopmental conditions, characterized by a range of difficulties including impairments in social cognition, deficits and delays in language and communication abilities and restricted interests or activities, as expressed by repetitive patterns of behavior" (Cantiani et al., 2016). The important thing here is that it is a range. Autism comes in a spectrum. A BIG spectrum. Although this definition indicates a range of deficits and delays, there is also, and more importantly, a range of strengths and talents. In fact, Joseph Ronca, who teaches an autism class, says that, in his opinion, the differences between his autistic students are greater than the differences between autistic students and neurotypical students (see below for the definition of neurotypical—this is just a teaser).

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Asperger syndrome or *Asperger's*. "An autism spectrum disorder (ASD) marked by impaired social interactions and limited repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities" (Psychology Today). The main difference between autism and Asperger's is that children with Asperger's do not have significant delays with language. Though this term is still widely used, it is no longer an official diagnosis.

Aspie. Slang that people with Asperger syndrome use to refer to themselves.

Autism. See ASD

High-Functioning. This term usually describes students who are able to function well in life most of the time. People with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome are usually considered high-functioning. This term is also mostly obsolete. Kyriakides explains that labelling a student high-functioning can confuse teachers. These students are intelligent and yet still can have poor emotional function (e.g., they can understand algebra but not why it's important to refrain from telling their mother she gained weight), which can lead to the student being overwhelmed and experiencing a sensory correction (see *Meltdown* below).

Low-Functioning. This usually refers to an individual who is minimally verbal or has severe challenges. This term is quickly becoming obsolete, as it can hinder a student's progress. Rob Lovering Spencer, a Special Education teacher who has taught autistic students for years, relates how he taught one student who was functionally mute when she came to his class and says, "Now, you can't stop her from talking." According to Silberman (2015 p. 425), Grandin didn't speak until she was three years old, and now she is very successful. He also tells of a mother who preferred to call her son High-Octane Boy so that she wasn't constantly defining him in terms of his deficits (Silberman, 2015, p. 79). Many autistic people who are considered low-functioning in their youth become high-functioning later in life.

On the Spectrum. Short for *on the autistic spectrum*. It is basically a synonym for autistic. For example, if someone says, "My son is on the spectrum and he always corrects his teacher's math," they mean that their son is autistic (and better than the teacher at math).

PDD-NOS. Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified, the diagnosis used for "children or adults who are on the autism spectrum but do not fully meet the criteria for another ASD such as autistic disorder (sometimes called "classic" autism) or Asperger syndrome" (Autism Speaks Canada). For example, a student might have good social skills instead of the limited social skills traditionally a large part of an autism diagnosis, and still receive a PDD-NOS diagnosis.

Words Describing Common Characteristics of Autistic People

Echolalia. The way that autistic people sample the speech they hear around them and repurpose it for their own use (Silberman, 2015, p. 46). Young autistic students will often repeat back to you what you just said. Their whole vocabulary might be comprised of lines from the movie *Frozen*. No, thank you, I don't want to build a snowman.

Meltdown. I'm guessing I don't have to define this term. However, in an effort to use more positive terminology in this book, I will be using *sensory correction* instead of *meltdown* (as recommended by Lovering Spencer). One of the most common causes of meltdowns is a student being overloaded with

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sensory issues. The meltdown is often a way to try to restore the balance in these sensory issues.

Stimming. Short for *self-stimulation*. It is most often a repetitive body motion; for example, flapping hands or rocking. When neurotypical students do this, we call it fidgeting. Researchers have found that autistic people stim to reduce anxiety and because it feels good; it, in fact, facilitates learning by allowing the student to think about the matter at hand instead of thinking about how to stop stimming (Silberman, 2015, p. 48).

Words Describing Therapy

ABA. Applied Behavior Analysis, "a set of principles based on the science of behavior that are used to change behavior" (Children's Support Solutions). ABA is a very controversial therapy for autistic children that aims to increase functional skills and decrease problematic behavior by using rewards and punishment. The autistic community mostly hates it and it is spoken of as punitive and abusive (Kohn, 2020). Some parents love it because, for example, it stopped their child from habitual self-harm. There is much research on the benefits and deficits of ABA.

DSM-5. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed, the rather large book used by doctors to diagnose autism (and by their children to hold the door open). While you might not hear parents or teachers of autistic students talk about this book, if you do any research about autism, you will certainly come across it.

IAS. Independent Activity Schedule, a set of pictures or words that signal a child to complete a group of activities (Surrey Place). It enables children to do activities independently with minimal supervision. (That means, as the teacher, you can finally sneak a snack).

As teachers, we are not expected to do ABA or IBI therapy, as we are not trained in their use.

IBI. Intensive Behavioral Intervention uses the same principles as ABA for treatment, designed to improve key learning skills in the areas of cognitive, language, and social development with the goal of increasing the rate of learning (Surrey Place). As it is based on ABA, it is also controversial. In Ontario, ABA is offered to parents to help the child learn a particular skill. IBI is offered to help a child catch up to their peers. ABA or IBI therapists could come into a school to work with a child. Parents might ask you to follow a particular routine learned through ABA/IBI in order for their child to acquire a skill and, whenever possible, I do this, as it usually benefits the student and me.

Words Describing the World from an Autistic Point of View

Neurotypical. A person who is not autistic or does not have other developmental differences (e.g., dyslexia). This phrase was first coined by Autism Network International (ANI), an autistic-run advocacy organization for autistic people.

Neurodiversity. The idea that differences in the brain are normal, not diseases or disorders. This includes the idea that we are all different and we all have strengths and weaknesses. Embracing the concept of neurodiversity can help reduce the stigma around children who think or learn differently. In an effort to advance this idea, Grandin uses engineering words instead of medical terms when talking about autism in her seminars (Leading Edge Seminars, 2020).

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Neurodiversity Is Cool!

The year I was 15, I was very sick. I had a lot of stomach pain and we didn't know why. I went to a lot of doctors and had many *unpleasant* tests done. The doctors couldn't figure out why I was sick, and in the end told me it was all in my head. I was very upset. However, my mom believed me and she decided to put me on an elimination diet. It turned out I had food allergies. I didn't need a pill; I needed someone to believe me. In our classrooms, our autistic students don't need a pill in order to be cured of autism; they need a teacher who believes in them. You are that teacher.

In the past, autism was seen only in light of its deficits and difficulties. Having a neurodiverse classroom means that we acknowledge that everyone learns in a different way, has strengths, and makes contributions. We are not trying to make everyone fit into the same mold—instead, we are enjoying the variety. We are helping students not only to accept differences, but also to embrace them. More than this, we are trying to take away the idea of *us vs. them*. They *are* us. I love what Robison says about this:

> When I wrote *Look Me in the Eye*, I wanted to show readers what it was like to grow up feeling like a freak or a misfit. I thought my book would show how people with Asperger's are different from everyone else. To my great surprise, my book actually shows the opposite: Deep down, people are very much the same. (Robison, 2007, p. 284)

When we can show that stimming and fidgeting are the same thing, when we can show our students (and ourselves) that our differences are shallow and our similarities are deep, it becomes easier to embrace neurodiversity because we realize that we really need each other. Consider this:

> When "*diversity becomes the norm*" pupils have been reported to feel more able to face the challenges and embrace the opportunities of the mainstream school environment. Participation is achieved when there is a sense of normalcy, and the diagnosis of ASD ceases to be a person's main attribute. (Krieger et al., 2018, p. 20)

Good speech, you may think, but how do I do that? One of the main things we need to do as teachers is to help students understand that we will not be treating everyone the same. Instead, we will be giving each student what they need to succeed. "But that's not fair!" the students' war cry rises. *Fair* is *very* important to them! We need to help students change their mindset and their perspective on this. We need to show them that *fair* is not getting the same help as everyone else, but instead is everyone getting what they need in order to learn. Janice Cook, who has been a child and youth worker and therapist working with autistic children, says it is helpful when a teacher really emphasizes diversity and that the classroom is a safe place for everyone. Gill Lea, a vice-principal, agrees. She says it is important to make sure the students know that what is outstanding for one person might not be outstanding for another person. I taught physical education to a Grade 7/8 class and a Grade 6/7/8 autistic class at the same time. One class we played a game and one of the autistic students won the game for his team. While he didn't exactly follow the rules, he followed the rules as best he could. To their credit, the Grade 7/8 class congratulated him on his win! At its best, neuro-

See page 25 for a checklist for Preparing for Autistic Students.

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diversity in the classroom allows us all to "learn how to use [our] uniqueness to [our] advantage and find [our] place in the world" (Plank & Grover, 2004).

One for All and All for One

Kyriakides tells the story of an autistic girl who brought a cushion and a weighted stuffie (little-kid slang for a stuffed animal) to her Kindergarten class to help her sit in place and be comfortable. Other students started asking why they didn't have a cushion and a stuffie at school. So the teacher sent home a note inviting parents to send a cushion and a stuffie to school with their child. The result was that the cushion identified each child's space. If they were on their cushion, they were in their own space. The students became more comfortable and less fidgety, and they were better behaved in assemblies and in the classroom. Now I'm feeling all nostalgic about my pink and grey teddy bear…

"Six characteristics of successful inclusive schools emerged: committed leadership, democratic classes, reflective educator, supportive school culture, engaging and relevant curricula, responsive instruction." (Krieger et al., 2018 p. 13)

This story is a great example of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The principle behind UDL is that what is necessary for one is beneficial for all. For example, when it is snowing, clearing the ramp is necessary for a student with a wheelchair and beneficial for all students, as they can also use the ramp instead of the stairs to enter the school. (And personally, I appreciate not having to clear more stairs!) In the past, we have been taught to teach the average student and then assist those who need extra help. However, if we aim to teach those students who need more support or have more challenges, we will teach all children, and this leads to a supportive school culture.

The Physical Classroom

For more on sensory perception, see My Clothes Are Too Itchy! on p. 30.

In setting up a UDL classroom, we help not only our autistic students, but also all of our students. There are many things we can do to create a great physical environment that is welcoming to autistic students and all students. Some autistic people have unusual sensory perception that can make noises, light, smells, and spaces feel intimidating and overwhelming and can hinder participation (Krieger et al., 2018, p. 14).

Traditionally, teachers have been encouraged to have fun, colorful classrooms in which almost every inch of the wall is covered. This can be very overwhelming for some students. In preparing a UDL classroom, it is best to keep posters and wallcovering to a minimum. Neutral and natural colors are best—think of the paint on hospital walls. You also want to keep the lighting low and to avoid music and loud or repetitive noises. You want to make sure that there are no overwhelming smells, including the shampoo or deodorant you use (FYI: organic does not always mean scent-free, and organic deodorant might not be as effective in odor elimination…). It is a good idea to speak with the student or parents before the first day of school to see if there are any sensory issues that you can address in your classroom before school starts. As you get to know your students, you can make adjustments to your classroom. For example, I know an autistic boy who cannot stand the smell of berries or yogurt, and the sensory distraction hinders his concentration. I often have strawberry yogurt for lunch, so I would make sure to eat it in the staffroom and not in the classroom. Or I could have chocolate pudding instead. Mmmm, chocolate…

Barbie Schiller, who has many years of experience working with autistic students in high schools as an educational assistant, emphasizes the strategic placing

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of seating. You want to be able to help your students quickly if they need it, but you want it to be unobtrusive. She observes that it is good to have a kind, mature student sit next to a student who might need more help. Hancock agrees that seating is important. He says that he paid the most attention in class when he was at the back of the class, because then he knew people would not be looking over his shoulder. He needed to be sure that he had space to do his work; but if he looked like he was struggling, the teacher could come over and ask if he needed help. Kyriakides suggests that, along with strategic seating, having healthy, non-messy snacks that students can eat at any time available on their desks or in the classroom. This helps keep the students' blood sugar levels even, which can prevent behavior issues related to hunger and allow students (and teachers) to eat when they are hungry or tired.

Sari Lansimaki worked with autistic students and found that a visual schedule brought peace to her students' day because they knew what to expect and it was not as chaotic. Krieger et al. (2018, p. 15) found that, in autistic adolescents, order and predictability could be a "security blanket," making demands familiar. A visual schedule brings order and predictability to students, as it shows exactly what is going to happen throughout the day. The schedule is posted on the board or on every desk, with each activity marked with a picture beside the time. As each activity or period is completed, the picture can be taken down so that students know exactly where they are in the daily schedule. For younger students, it is a good idea to take a photo of students doing the activity and use that picture on the visual schedule.

Along with visual schedules, the use of a visual timer is recommended. You can use an online timer (I like www.online-stopwatch.com) or you can buy a physical countdown timer. Just be sure it is quiet. Some of them buzz. An annoying *buzzzzz*. Timers allow students to see how much time is left for an activity. It's a good idea to give a warning when there are five minutes left for an activity, as transitions are difficult for many students. You might want to start out giving many warnings: e.g., five minutes left, three minutes left, one minute left. Just be sure not to be like my grandma who, when she took us to the pool, used to yell, "Five minutes!" to let us know we would leave soon, and then talk to her friends for 30 minutes!

Sensory Corner

Did you ever buy a fridge, dishwasher, or oven when your children were young? What was their favorite part of your new appliance? That's right—the box! They made it into a house or a castle or a spaceship, and you were roped into helping. Or at least you helped cut out the windows so they wouldn't bleed all over your rug! Well, you can put those skills to good use again by making a sensory corner in your classroom. This is a space in your classroom where students can go to be alone, take a break, and calm down. You can set up a pup tent or simply put a blanket over two bookshelves. It can have headphones (so students can block out sound), fidget toys, bean bags, glow balls, glitter sticks, books, weighted vests, bubble-making materials, and pillows. Or it can be simple, with just a blanket, pillows, and books. As you get to know your students, you can change the sensory corner to tailor it to your class. Some schools have a separate room called a sensory room or a Snoezelen room. Similar to a sensory corner, it would have many items and activities for student to use to calm down.

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Class Pet

This is only for very brave or very desperate teachers. Classroom pets can be a huge help to autistic students. Animals help many children calm down when nothing else will work. A rabbit, a hamster—even fish can have a calming effect. After you've taught students how to look after the animals, one student can take the animal home each weekend. You might be able to give it to one of the students at the end of the year if you haven't fallen in love with little Hammy yourself by then!

Schoolwork

Besides the physical environment of the classroom, UDL also includes how we introduce schoolwork. A UDL paradigm boils down to offering choices for how students learn and how they demonstrate their learning. Just like some people prefer chocolate and some people prefer vanilla (chocolate is best, of course), students prefer to learn and show their learning in a variety of ways. We want to engage our students with multiple modalities to help them get excited about what we're teaching. For example, I might explain a new math concept, show an example, and then allow students to work with manipulatives; in this way, I have used oral, visual, and kinesthetic teaching methods. I might allow students to have the choice of showing their understanding of a history unit through a research paper, an oral presentation, a video, a detailed poster, or a historical fiction piece. Of course, many teachers already use these strategies in their classroom, but it is important to plan to teach all lessons with many different learning styles in mind and to offer a choice in most, if not all, classroom work. This takes some planning, but it is worth it because it lets students enjoy learning and feel more confident that they can do well. They really surprise me sometimes with the quality of work they produce and end up doing much more than I would have required if I made all the decisions instead of offering choice!

More on helping autistic students do schoolwork is presented in chapter 3.

The Teacher

Of course, as teachers, we are a big part of our classroom environments. Over and over, I have heard people say that it is important that we remain calm, no matter what is going on in the classroom. This builds trust with our students. Schiller reports that, even when one of her students threw a computer around the room, she remained calm. She recommends that you don't yell and don't act startled, but "step back and speak as calmly as your best inner actor can allow." Students need help de-escalating first, and then you can deal with the issue. This is more difficult than it sounds—and it sounds difficult. It is easier with practice, and I have found that role playing with other teachers really helps me prepare. If we are able to maintain our calm, the reward is that we will be able to help the student calm down instead of escalating into something more dangerous. Students are often more upset at the idea that they will be in trouble or that they have done something wrong than at what happened. We can reassure them that they are not in trouble and that we will work it out. (Being "in trouble" often means that someone will yell. We are not going to yell.) I remember there was a young student who would answer me only with one-word answers, while she would speak

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in sentences to the other educator in the room. I realized that I simply spoke too loudly for her. After that, when I spoke to her, I tried to remember to use my very quiet voice, something I don't do naturally. (I tend to be the loud, enthusiastic teacher.) And she started giving me longer answers!

Even though we provide different ways for students to learn, students still want to be treated the same as everyone else. If it looks like we are giving special treatment to one student, they might not accept the help. Krieger et al. (2018, p. 19) found that "Overt staff attention can be perceived as negative, as it accentuates the differences… Skilled support should be provided subtly and in the background to reduce the attention that adolescents with ASD get." *Give sneaky help* is the moral of the story here.

As much as possible, we want to use humor that our students understand to keep the classroom environment fun. Trina Meloche's daughter, Delilah, did not like gym; in fact, she would not go into the gym but would stand outside in the hallway. Her gym teacher would sing, "Hey, there Delilah, what's it like out there in the hallway?" Delilah would laugh and go into the gym to participate. So, let that inner entertainer come out! You know it's in there—all teachers have it. Use that song you've been practicing in the shower for your America's Got Talent audition!

What Do I Do on the First Day?

You're dressed nicely. The classroom looks good. You baked them cookies—no? Okay, so you bought them Timbits. You've practiced their names and put their desks in order. Now what? Your first day is going to be pretty much the same as all your other first days. Schiller recommends greeting autistic students with a friendly smile, having a matter-of-fact attitude about the expectations in your class, expecting students to do the work, and asking questions but not forcing them to answer. The main difference is going to be how you introduce autism to the class. "Many adolescents with ASD express the fear that disclosure of their autism may lead to negative reactions, or even result in stigmatization" (Krieger et al. 2018, p. 15). So you want to make sure you have spoken with the student and their parents first to find out how they want to handle it.

A good place to start is with the idea that we are all different. Mary Boff, a special education teacher with many years experience with autistic students, recommends an activity called Being Unique, for which students need to write four ways in which they are unique. The idea is to normalize diversity. If students and parents agree, Lovering Spencer has parents come into his classroom as guest speakers to help normalize autism; he finds this works for Kindergarten to Grade 6.

Many educators recommend starting with a book, such as *All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome* by Kathy Hoopmann, a picture book suitable for Kindergarten to Grade 12. Lea recommends *Same But Different: Teen Life on the Autism Express* by Holly Robinson Peete, RJ Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete for middle-school students. RJ is autistic and he, his sister, and his mother wrote about what it's like to be an autistic teenager, a sister of an autistic brother, and a mother of an autistic son. No matter what book you use, the idea is to introduce autism as one of the many ways children are unique, as Krieger et al. (2018, p. 19) assert that "sensitively handled disclosure can facilitate understanding, empathy, and positive relationships." When autistic students feel that differences are normalized,

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there is a greater chance of their participation and enjoyment of the class—even on the first day! (And they may even notice that you look nice, too!)

Parents as Partners

Silberman (2015, p. 49) tells the story of an autistic boy who loved the green Starbucks straws. When his mother had trouble getting enough straws herself, she started a group called L.U.S.T.—the League of Unrepentant Straw Thieves. Many friends and family members joined the group and gathered as many straws as they could for the boy. This is the kind of thing that parents of autistic children do all the time. They know their child, they love their child, and they simply want the best for them.

Leo Kanner, the first to propose autism as a diagnosis in 1943, also proposed that autism was the result of a cold, unloving mother (Silberman, 2015, p. 188). The idea that autism is caused by bad parenting continues today, even though, as Silberman points out (2015, p. 261), it has been proven that autism is a congenital condition based on genetics and neurology. Even so, parents of autistic children are constantly judged to be the cause of their child's problems. One parent, tired of being blamed for her child's behavior, blurted out, "I have two other children. Do you think I parented this child differently from the other two? If I could have 'fixed' him, I would have 'fixed' him a long time ago!" Just to be clear, this parent felt it was the teacher's strategies that needed fixing, not her child. Over and over, I hear stories from parents about teachers blaming them for the difficulties the teachers are having in class. We need to change this. WE NEED TO CHANGE THIS. Blame is not helpful and will not improve our situation.

Instead of blaming them, I propose we see parents as partners and work with them as a team, as many teachers already do. Kyriakides suggests that we sit down with parents and honestly hear what works for them at home, because they know their child's interests and triggers. She tells the story of a teacher who called and asked a parent for suggestions to help with her child in school; the parent, who was driving, pulled over and cried from happiness because it was such a difference from her normal interactions with teachers. Lea suggests that you discuss your goals for your student with their parents. Beth Cubitt, a mom of two autistic children, describes how one teacher would discuss with her what she, as the teacher, could have done differently when Beth's child had issues in the classroom. The point was not to blame the teacher, nor the child, nor the parents, but instead to find a good resolution to the issue. Together, they would work as a team to find a good solution when neither of them knew the answers. Meloche, a parent of two autistic children, comments that communication with high-school teachers and the special education department are important to her. When there are meetings about her children, she prefers to be informed and makes herself available as a resource to provide advice or strategies. For the most part, parents want to help. We, as teachers, can see parents as teammates and as a valuable resource to use to the benefit of our students, not to mention ourselves. No, I am not just angling for better Christmas gifts—but I will mention that baked goods and Amazon gift cards are my favorites…

Lovering Spencer explains that there are many autistic students whose families are new to the country and so they don't yet have resources or connections. Part of working with parents is providing them with resources in your area to help their child. For example, there may be Boy/Girl Scouts, cooking classes, sports

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programs, craft programs, respite care, or summer camps that accommodate autistic children. Lovering Spencer also encourages parents to keep trying to use different resources, as they will benefit their child in the long run, even if they are unsuccessful at the beginning. Let parents know that, even when it significantly bombs and they are no longer welcome at that cooking class after the flour and spider fiasco, they can try something else. Some programs will be a better fit than others.

Another way we can be on the same team as parents is to help them recognize when it would be beneficial for their child to see a doctor and get assessed. Emily Crafting, a parent of two autistic children, recognizes that parents don't always "put two and two together" and sometimes might need help. We, as teachers, might have concerns about a child but be unsure how to approach the child's parents. Sue Hucklebridge, an ASD specialist working with autistic students at Durham College, recommends that you let parents know what your experience is with the student, not simply tell parents you think their child is autistic. She recommends talking with the parent many times and slowly easing them into the idea of having their child assessed; with the approval of the principal, you can offer to write a letter, describing what you have been seeing, which the parents can take to their doctor. If the child is six years old or younger, you can also suggest the Nipissing District Developmental Screen (NDDS) website at www.ndds.ca for access to the Looksee Checklist, commonly known as the Nipissing Test. It is a quick survey of skills a child should master by a particular age, not a diagnostic tool or formal assessment. If there is a No answer to any of the questions, a follow-up with a health-care provider is advised. You have to sign up for the website, but it is not difficult and it is free. The idea is to help parents come to the realization that their child might need an assessment; also, that this is actually a really good, not a horrible, thing. Remember when you counted your child's fingers and toes when they were born? We need to act with compassion as we help parents assess their child and realize that they may need some extra help in their lives.

Lesson Plan: Introduction to Autism

The purpose of this lesson plan is to introduce autism to the class. This lesson plan is best done in the first few days of school or in the week before or after your new autistic student joins your class.

Before using this lesson plan, it is really important to speak with the autistic student and their parents about having a lesson to introduce autism to the class and to find out if they are comfortable with this plan. Would your autistic student like to help present the lesson? Would they like to be part of the class, or would they like to be absent when you present the lesson? Would the parents like to help present the lesson or would they like to observe? Is there anything specific the student or parents would like the class to know about autism or about their child?

Introductory Activity : KWL Chart

1. Prepare a KWL chart on chart paper or on the board.
2. Ask the class what they know about autism. Write their responses in the first column under K for *Know*.
3. Next, ask students what they want to know or wonder about autism. Write their responses in the second column, under W for *Want to know* or *Wonder*.

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4. Explain that the third column is for what they learned about autism during this lesson. Tell students you will fill it out at the end of the lesson (or partway through the lesson, if you decide to do it on the go).

Empathy Activity: Experiencing

1. Explain that autistic students often have unusual sensory perception; this means that they may hear things louder than others, or see things as brighter than others, etc. Explain that you will do an activity to help students experience what it might feel like to have sensitive sensory perception.
2. Have students form pairs. Partner A is the student; Partner B is the experience. Explain to the students that you will be asking them mental math questions for one minute.
3. Partner A's job is to ignore their partner and answer the questions.
4. Partner B will need a feather and a flashlight (they can use the one on their phones). Or you can choose one student to go around with a powerful flashlight, shining it into the eyes of everyone who is Partner A.
5. Read out mental math questions in a very loud voice, while Partner B shines a light into Partner A's eyes every now and then. Partner B also tickles Partner A with the feather, just at the seams of their shirt, every now and then.
6. Have partners switch so that the partner who was the student becomes the experience and the partner who was the experience becomes the student.
7. Explain that you spoke loudly because autistic students often hear noises as louder than normal. You had a light shone in their eyes because often lights are too bright for autistic students. You had them tickled with a feather because often the seams of clothing are too itchy for autistic students.
8. Ask students how the experience was for them. Ask them if it was hard to try to answer mental math questions when your voice was too loud, the lights too bright, and their clothes too itchy.
9. Write down some of the answers in the third column of your KWL chart, under L, what they *Learned*.

Information Activity: Book Discussion

1. Explain to the class that Asperger syndrome is a type of autism. Introduce the book *All Cats Have Asperger Syndrome* by Kathy Hoopmann to the class.
2. Read the book aloud. If you do not have that book in your library, you can find videos of readings on YouTube.
3. Be sure to mention that each person who has autism is different, so not everything in the book is true about everyone who has Asperger syndrome.
4. Add to the third column of your KWL chart by asking students what they learned about Asperger syndrome from the book.
5. During the discussion, reinforce the idea that everyone is unique, not only those with Asperger syndrome or autism. Look for similarities between students and the cat in the story; e.g., some students don't like it when their schedule is changed.

Sharing Activity: Revisiting KWL

1. Have students get into the same pairs as in the Empathy Activity. Have them share with each other things they learned about autism during the lesson,

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questions they might still have, or information they know about autism that wasn’t covered.

2. Have a few of the pairs share what they talked about with the class. Encourage discussion.
3. If the autistic student and parents are comfortable, let the class know that you have an autistic student in your class and let them know who it is.
4. If possible, allow students to ask the autistic student questions.

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Preparing for Autistic Students: Checklist

Autism as a Way of Being

- ☐ Understand what autism is, including doing research if necessary.
- ☐ Know that there has been historical discrimination against autistic people and it is still around today, including exclusion from school programs.
- ☐ Recognize that autism can be a strength; e.g., proficiency with numbers, computers, patterns, etc.

Neurodiversity

- ☐ Let students know that you will not be treating everyone the same way, but you will be giving each student what they need to succeed.
- ☐ Help students not only to accept differences, but also to embrace them.

The Classroom Environment

The Physical Classroom

- ☐ Keep posters and colors to a minimum.
- ☐ Keep lighting low.
- ☐ Avoid loud or repetitive noises.
- ☐ Avoid strong smells.
- ☐ Have an autistic student sit where they are comfortable in the class, but not too far from you.
- ☐ Allow students to snack anytime.
- ☐ Use a visual schedule.
- ☐ Use visual timers.
- ☐ Provide a sensory corner where students can go to calm down.
- ☐ Have a classroom pet.

Schoolwork

- ☐ Keep in mind various learning styles; e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic.
- ☐ Allow students to choose how they will be assessed; e.g. oral presentation, written report, detailed poster, etc.

The Teacher

- ☐ Stay calm to help de-escalate situations.
- ☐ Avoid the appearance of favoring autistic students or giving them special attention.
- ☐ Provide support subtly.
- ☐ Use humor.

The First Day

- ☐ Same as always: greet students with a friendly smile; be matter-of-fact about your expectations; ask questions but don't force answers.
- ☐ Start with the idea we are all different and the Being Unique activity.
- ☐ Speak with autistic student and their parents before the first day of school to find out how they would like autism introduced to the class.
- ☐ Ask parents of autistic student if they would like to be guest speakers to help normalize autism.
- ☐ Use read-alouds.

Parents as Partners

- ☐ Do NOT blame parents for their autistic child's behavior.
- ☐ Work with parents as a team.
- ☐ Ask parents what works for them at home and take what can be applied to the classroom.
- ☐ Work with parents to find answers to problems.
- ☐ Help families who are new to the country find resources.
- ☐ Slowly help families recognize that their child needs to see a doctor to be assessed.

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MENTORING EACH OTHER

Teachers listening, learning, and sharing to create more successful classrooms

Lana Parker | Diane Vetter

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1

The Mentoring Partnership

Mentoring can be challenging. In our experience, all mentees are sincere in their desire to achieve the objectives set out for them. In order to do so, they need a mentor who will commit to the task of mentoring, even when times get tough. This takes patience and compassion on the part of a mentor who must maintain their objectivity and communicate with the mentee in an honest and forthright manner. They must also communicate with enough empathy and sensitivity to avoid demoralizing the mentee, who may already be overwhelmed or fearful when things are not going smoothly.

Mentors may also be called upon to act as counsellors who raise a mentee's morale or remind them to inventory their strengths and abilities when they feel challenged by the demands of the profession. In all cases, it is not the task of the mentor to be the answer to a mentee's problem or to be the lifeline that saves the mentee from a difficult situation. Rather, the mentor needs to support the mentee in unleashing their own power to make the necessary changes to move from struggle to success.

Relationship-building is a complex process. All relationships function on both a conscious and a subconscious level. Within the mentoring process, this means that there will be elements of the relationship that mentor and mentee actively understand and control; other elements that affect the relationship might lie below their conscious understanding. For example, the mentor and mentee may share common interests or personal backgrounds that lead to a natural affinity whose roots can be identified. On the other hand, subconscious elements, perhaps resulting from experiences or relationships no longer part of your conscious memory—such as a past relationship with a great teacher…or a not so great teacher—can also have an impact on the mentoring relationship.

To support mentors and mentees in navigating this complex relationship process, we have identified a series of relational aspects to facilitate success. We begin by visualizing a **mentoring disposition** that is central to the role of mentoring. We look at the relationship as being underpinned by a **mentoring process** that sets parameters within which the relationship unfolds. To support relationship-building within the partnership, we make explicit the difference between **modelling and mentoring**. We examine the **attributes** that might cultivate a positive mentoring experience. Then we explore the element of **trust** that grows between

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collaborators. Finally, we acknowledge that within this relationship, there will always be **expectations** to be recognized and clarified.

A mentoring disposition
The process that guides mentoring
Mentoring vs. modelling
Attributes that support successful mentoring
Building trust in relationships
Clarifying expectations of relationships

To address these mentoring relationship topics we consider these key questions:

- What does it mean to be a mentor? (See page 9.)
- What does the process of mentoring look like? (See page 12.)
- How does mentoring differ from modelling? (See page 16.)
- What attributes best support the role of mentor? (See page 19.)
- How might we build trust in a mentoring relationship? (See page 23.)
- What do mentees expect of their mentors? (See page 25.)

What does it mean to be a mentor?

A Mentoring Disposition

The Oxford Reference dictionary explains the origin of the word *mentor*:

> In Greek mythology and Homer's Odyssey, Mentor was the guide and counsellor for Odysseus's son Telemachus. Educators and others have adopted the word to describe a formal or informal attachment between a teacher and a student or small group of students that goes beyond mere teaching or tutoring to include advice and guidance about many other issues and problems encountered by students.

We love that this definition identifies the importance of attachment (what we refer to as *relationship*) in mentoring, along with the understanding that mentoring extends beyond "mere teaching or tutoring." While a mentor may share knowledge and demonstrate skills, a true mentoring disposition moves the mentor to support mentees in broader ways.

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Stories from the Field: Seeing Ourselves as Mentors (Lana and Diane)

When we began working with mentors, we were surprised to hear that most of the teachers we spoke to did not think of their role as mentoring. Many saw themselves as giving back to the profession or paying forward an experience from their own days as preservice teachers. A few indicated they felt compelled by an administrator. Many teachers who had taken on the teaching-and-tutoring role saw themselves as experienced teachers with something to share with the teachers of tomorrow, but they did not consider themselves to be mentors.

Working with preservice or new colleagues, most experienced teachers felt they had few resources to rely on. To undertake their roles, they generally reflected on what had helped them when they were joining the profession, what host teachers in their past experience had or had not done to support the experience, and what just seemed right. Most often, those mentoring a colleague simply thought of themselves as teachers supporting other teachers, without naming their valuable role as mentoring.

We believe that all teachers supporting preservice, novice, or experienced teachers are mentors. Our research demonstrates that the mentors we encountered wanted to better understand and enhance their practice in order to better support their mentees. We also observed that effective teachers and effective mentors share a disposition that includes the following elements:

- *Honest Self-Reflection*: A mentor has greater experience in the field, yet has not forgotten that much of that experience has been gained from mistakes made and learning accumulated over time.
- *Openness to Listening and Sharing*: A mentor is a strong listener who takes time to appreciate with an open mind the cultural, social, emotional, and economic factors that influence newcomers to the profession, regardless of their age or prior experience.
- *Willingness to Make Professional Practice Public*: A mentor reaches beyond the sharing of knowledge and the demonstration of skills to support a mentee in understanding the thinking processes and the rationale that underpin the responsibilities, actions, and activities a teacher implements in the classroom. In doing so, a mentor deprivatizes and makes visible their practice, even though it may mean exposing their own vulnerability.
- *Recognition of the Value of Reciprocal and Active Learning*: A mentor is a willing learner who understands that a person inexperienced in the field of education brings skills and talents from which both the mentor and the students in the classroom can learn, and that learning is internalized through active engagement and meaningful feedback, rather than from passive observation and critical judgment.

See Chapter 3 for more on reciprocal learning.

- *Collaboration within Professional Communities:* A mentor is a partner in teaching and learning who inspires, motivates, counsels, and guides to allow a mentee to develop their independence, experience, knowledge, and skills in a safe, inclusive, welcoming, and supportive environment.

See Chapter 5 for more on creating a mentoring community.

The concept of the mentoring role as one of partnership, particularly with a newcomer to the profession, may seem discordant at first. Partnerships generally

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mean equity in a relationship, and an experienced mentor may seem to bring more to the table in terms of pedagogy and understandings. A mentor who is able to honestly self-reflect will come to see that professional growth and development flows naturally from a mentoring situation. Mentees also have much to share to enrich the partnership.

Stories from the Field: The Tuesday Teacher (Diane and Lana)

In a recent conversation we had with a group of experienced mentor teachers, a teacher commented that she tried to be the best teacher possible on Tuesdays. Tuesday, she went on to explain, was the day of the week when her mentee, a teacher candidate at a local education faculty, spent the day in her classroom. The mentor teacher told us that on Monday evenings she would take extra care to prepare for the next day by organizing her materials, cleaning her classroom, and preparing all her resources in neat piles on her desk. She worked hard on Tuesdays to exemplify being the "best teacher," assuming a persona of perfection so that her mentor didn't see her making any mistakes.

This story opened an avenue of discussion about many varied aspects of mentoring: the myth that we have to be perfect or on point all the time; the vulnerability involved in opening our inner selves, our spaces, and our practices to scrutiny; and the gap between what we believe is expected of us and what our mentees actually want to learn. But underlying all of these issue lies the crux of mentoring: that there must be a relationship between the two (or more) parties involved for there to be any kind of authentic learning or growth.

In essence, the role of the mentor is to offer an invitation to an inclusive, safe, and welcoming physical and intellectual space within which both mentor and mentee can thrive and explore creative new ways to enhance their practice and develop their teaching excellence together. To become comfortable in the role of mentor, it is helpful to begin by getting to know the mentee as an individual with unique qualities, interests, and experiences that can enhance learning for everyone in the classroom (mentor, mentee, and students).

Mentoring Move: Making Connections

Connecting Is Key

"The most important thing I learned is that the mentor/mentee relationship is a collaboration."
— Mentor Teacher, 2017

- Making connections facilitates relationship-building by creating a space for educators to share the experiences, histories, perspectives, and pathways that brought both mentor and mentee to teaching.
- Using a storytelling model, mentors and mentees establish and look for commonalities related to experience and history. These commonalities highlight shared experiences and perspectives even when backgrounds, age, and experience differ greatly.
- In a society that honors diversity, the celebration of difference might mask a myriad of commonalities that individuals share. The relationship-building process asks mentors and mentees to look beyond their differences to seek common histories, perspectives, and aspirations they share.

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3 Simple Steps

1. Mentors and mentees use the sentence starters in the Making Connections narrative template (see page 29) to share their teaching and learning stories. The objective is to find as many commonalities as possible. A broad opening can be refined to highlight common experiences. For example, the starter *I was born…* might result in a common finding such as *…the eldest in my family*, *…to immigrant parents*, *…thousands of kilometres from where we sit today*, or *…in the heart of a city*.
2. With a focus on similarities rather than differences, mentors and mentees seek ways they are connected to each other through shared experience. As they do so, the story becomes one story that reflects the common experiences of both. Using the Making Connections template on page 29 to make a cube, mentors and mentees write one common experience on each of the six faces of the cube.
3. After making several connections, the stories end with a glimpse into the future. Mentors and mentees share common aspirations that can include career objectives, learning goals, travel dreams, or shared visions of education, teaching, or other related issues, and they examine shared goals.

See page 29 for the Making Connections template.

Next Steps

- Focus on the common aspirations you share to move beyond the differences of the moment. Use the identified commonalities to celebrate connection. Acknowledge differences in ways of thinking or undertaking practice to mitigate challenges to the relationship and to highlight both commonalities and diversity as a strength of the partnership.
- Reinforce the connections between mentor and mentee through social conversation to relieve the stress of a busy day or challenging workplace situation. For example, two tea drinkers might share a cup of fine tea during a break, or two music lovers might enjoy some background music playing as they wind down the day.
- Focus on connections to strengthen the mentor/mentee relationship.

The Mentoring Process

What does the process of mentoring look like?

The mentoring process will differ as much as the individuals who engage with it. However, there are fundamental objectives that the process sets out to achieve. While the route to arrive at the objectives may vary, the final outcome of the mentoring experience should provide both mentor and mentee with a sense of shared accomplishment in having achieved these overall mentoring objectives:

- Development of a professional demeanor appropriate to the environment that reflects the requirements of the faculty/school district/governing body.
- Development of skills to enhance ongoing professional communication, collaboration, engagement, and learning.
- Development of an understanding of learners, the learning environment, and the community.
- Development of knowledge, skills, and strategies relative to the field.

See Chapter 2 for more on knowledge and skills development.

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Professional Demeanor

Stories from the Field: Wearing your Profession (Diane)

In my work with a large urban faculty of education, I am often required to support preservice teachers who are struggling in their practice. For those who have challenges with what I classify as the technical aspects of teaching (lesson planning, assessment, organization), I have strategies to share and resources to recommend to facilitate stronger practice.

A much more difficult issue to address is professionalism or, more specifically, the lack thereof. For preservice teachers who have yet to develop a fulsome understanding of what it means to be a professional educator, the theoretical understandings that they bring from university coursework are often overlooked. Particularly during times of stress, reactions to classroom situations or interpersonal issues in the placement can result in inappropriate or unprofessional responses. Such incidents generally cause greater concern for mentors and schools. While a misstep in lesson-planning might simply indicate a need for more experience, a misstep in professionalism often affects the future of the mentoring partnership.

A colleague once suggested that preservice teachers focus on maintaining their professional demeanor by "wearing" their profession. For some, consistent visualization of themselves as professional educators was a sufficient reminder to maintain a professional demeanor. For others, this might mean physically dressing in a manner that reminds them of their role as professionals, or working with a heightened sense of awareness of how they are representing themselves in manner and communication within the school environment.

Some preservice or novice teachers have found it helpful to think of donning their professional cloak as they cross the threshold into the school. A visualized professional cloak does not hide the authentic person; it allows a newcomer to the profession to access to the role of teacher as they internalize the manner of communication, ethical standards, and ways of being that are expected, and often legislated, within the professional environment. It is not about presenting yourself as something you are not. Rather, it is a means to try on a role as you adjust the fit and become more comfortable in the environment.

Another strategy we use is asking mentees to think of the teacher who inspired them when they were students. How would they describe that teacher? How might they become that teacher for a student in their host classroom? What specific aspects of that inspiring teacher's demeanor might they bring to their own work? What would a mentee expect of a teacher responsible for the education of their child, younger sibling, or family member? Mentors are advised to do likewise. How did their mentor inspire and enhance their practice? How are they actively inspiring and enhancing the practice of their mentee?

The reality is that newcomers to the profession will make missteps as they gain professional understandings. As guide and counsellor, the mentor needs to support a mentee through sharing their experience, maintaining a nonjudgmental stance and facilitating supported decision-making that calls on the mentee to think through issues and the implications of teacher response.

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Communication Skills

Teaching is all about relationships. We maintain relationships with students, parents, colleagues, administration, teaching federations, policy makers, and the community surrounding the school. One of the pillars of any relationship is effective communication. In an age when social media and online representation can instantly damage reputations, it is of particular importance that mentors and mentees think within and beyond the classroom when considering how professional communication affects relationships.

No doubt, everyone has heard horror stories about Internet posts going viral. A derogatory passing remark overheard in the hallway or other public place can do as much damage.

Stories from the Field: Rewind (Diane)

I recall ….

- A mentee who shared a coffee with her mentor in a local café at the end of the day. As she complained about a student who had challenged her all day, she didn't realize the father of the student was sitting at an adjacent table.
- A novice male teacher who accepted a Facebook friend request from a female student. The student boasted to classmates about her new Facebook friend and shared the social posts and comments the teacher had made on his page. It soon got back to parents, who felt the teacher's action required his removal from the school.
- A student teacher whose reply to a faculty advisor's email included a litany of complaints about her mentor, not realizing that her mentor had been copied on the original message and, therefore, on the reply.

We often use the toothpaste analogy when talking about professional communication: Once it is out of the tube, it is impossible to get it back in again. Maintaining a professional stance in all types of communication (face-to-face, written, or electronic) avoids much potential embarrassment, offence, and conflict. Open and nonjudgmental conversations about professional communication and communication protocols will avoid most concerns. The following tips will help mentors and mentees:

- Remember that a mentoring relationship is professional. That does not mean that it cannot be friendly; however, an awareness of the professional nature of the relationship should always be recognized.
- Use a workplace or university email address for all online communication, with consideration of the fact that any communication may potentially become public.
- Schedule a time and private professional space for confidential or challenging conversations. Library seminar rooms or other workspaces often allow for private conversation.
- Talk about evidence (what you have observed) and its impact on students, learning, and the classroom environment, avoiding accusations, unconstructive comments, or flippant remarks that might be misperceived.
- Check out these Mentoring Moves to shift from evaluative feedback to supported- and self-assessment: Targeted Feedback (page 47); Stoplight Self-Assessment (page 50); Scaling Questions (page 96).

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Understanding Learners

One of our primary objectives as teachers must be to understand the learners with whom we work, the environment within which we are working, and the community that influences both the learners and the environment. Without these understandings, we are simply delivering content that may or may not be relevant, may or may not be engaging, and/or may or may not be valuable to our learners.

Stories from the Field: Make Yourself at Home (Diane)

When I welcome a mentee into our environment, it is important to me to help them feel at home. As a classroom teacher, I spend a lot of time and energy each fall making my classroom a welcoming space. The beginning of a new academic year generally includes ice-breaking activities, establishment of classroom relationships and routines, and creation of a physical space that reflects the faces of our students. Many of us dedicate the first few weeks of a new academic year to prioritizing the creation of a classroom community because we know that learning is greater when students take ownership of the space, the community, and, subsequently, the learning. The importance of developing an understanding of the learners, the learning environment, and the greater community is equally important for newcomers to the teaching profession. I believe that a focus on developing these understandings at the beginning of a mentoring relationship will lay a foundation for future success. Mentoring a new colleague or preservice teacher may not coincide neatly with the beginning of an academic year. A newcomer to the profession might be arriving to fill a leave of absence or for a preservice practicum experience. Re-creating that first-few-weeks-of-school experience mid-term may not be practical. However, simple activities can provide opportunities for mentor, mentee, and students in the classroom to get to know each other at any time of year.

Mentoring Move: Jumpstart the Relationship

Integration Is Key

"After having time to talk with (my mentee) today, I rethought the way I would be with a (mentee) next year."
— Mentor Teacher, 2017

- Mentees beginning a relationship mid-term often feel like outsiders in the well-established relationship between the mentor and the students.
- Time is rarely available for the kind of relationship-building activities that are often undertaken at the beginning of an academic year.
- Integrated activities that engage the mentee and students in curriculum-related conversation can facilitate getting to know each other and help to jumpstart the relationship between mentee, mentor, and students in the classroom.

3 Simple Steps

See page 30 for the Jumpstart the Relationship template.

1. Mentor, mentee, and students use the sentence starters from the chart in the Jumpstart the Relationship template on page 30 to identify themselves relative to the age-level and curriculum content. For example: *If I were a historical figure, I would be…* This can also be used as a group activity, with the group agreeing on an animal that represents them all. For example: *Our group chooses a rabbit to represent the group, because W is always on the go, X is a vegetarian, Y is quiet, and Z is a good listener.*

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2. Respondents support their choice with rationale, which helps the newcomer/mentee gain insights into each respondent's personality or characteristics.
3. Depending on time available, whole-class sharing can take place via face-to-face discussion, a bulletin-board post, or an internal class web post.

Next Steps

- Encourage the mentee to recognize what the responses reveal. The student who identifies as a giraffe (because they are quiet) may reveal to a classroom newcomer that the student feels intimidated if called on to answer a question in front of the class.
- Encourage the mentee to use a student's "I would be…" choice as a conversation opener. For example, they could ask "Have you read…?", "Did you know…?", or "I wonder…" in keeping with the student's interest.

Active Engagement

For more information, please see Chapter 2 for focused conversation related to Knowledge and Skills, including the following Mentoring Moves:
- Articulation to Action (page 38)
- Thinking Aloud (page 44)
- Co-acting for Learning (page 41)
- Targeted Feedback (page 47)
- Stoplight Self-Assessment (page 50)
- Needs Analysis (page 52)

Our overall experience in working with mentors has clearly shown us that knowledge, skills, and strategies develop gradually over time, supported by many opportunities for active engagement by the mentee in the daily practice of the classroom. While observation may happen concurrently, active engagement is key to the internalization or acquisition (Gee, 2008) of learning. Facilitating active engagement in the classroom can be challenging in certain situations. Teachers ask, "What does active engagement look like in the classroom?" and "How can I provide feedback to a mentee if we are both immersed in the work of the classroom at the same time?" We discuss these important questions in detail in Chapter 2.

How does mentoring differ from modelling best practice?

Mentoring vs Modelling

Teaching is a profession of caring and nurturing. Teachers want to give their very best to the students in their classrooms. Since mentoring is a responsive process that sees the learner as an individual, the goal of mentoring is to facilitate the mentee's development of their best professional self. A mentor values the strengths of the mentee and respects the mentee's individuality as they develop understandings and gain experience in the profession.

Stories from the Field: Modelled Practice (Diane)

I recall joining a new school to teach Grade 1. After having set up literacy circles, putting up an environmental print wall, and teaching reading strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), I was delighted with the progress my students were making. One day after school, a colleague with 25 years of experience came to the classroom to express concern that I permitted the students to sit in groups and talk. The colleague then modelled the practice she had used for those 25 years, which included writing fill-in-the-blank sentences on the board. A series of magnetic drawings (ball, book, cat, dog, etc.) were then inserted in the blank spaces and a pointer was used to tap the blackboard at each word so that students could read in unison. To engage non-participating students, my colleague suggested that I tap the pointer more firmly and loudly on the board to get students' attention.

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A few days later, the colleague returned to my classroom to remark that when she looked in my door, she had noticed that I did not seem to be following the modelled practice. I suggested that perhaps we had two different philosophies of teaching literacy and might agree to disagree on best practice; however, the colleague was upset that her model had not been adopted in my classroom.

This example from personal experience highlights the objective of modelling, rather than mentoring. Modelling generally has an expert demonstrate best practice and a learner copy or mimic the practice. Through modelling, a learner becomes indoctrinated into a club of others who think alike and follow like practices. Modelling is a form of direct instruction that leaves little room for independent thinking on the part of the learner or for consideration of alternative ways of doing, being, or knowing. Modelling is not responsive to the specific needs of the learner; rather, it demands that the learner adopt the method as demonstrated by the expert. The expert provides the model and the newcomer internalizes it, then performs by following the same pattern and practice. In doing so, the learner becomes a replica of the model.

To provide an example of how modelling and mentoring differ in practical application, the following sample conversation demonstrates the two approaches.

Grade 7 Literacy Block

Modelling	**Mentoring**
Mentor: *I noticed that Group A is struggling with the text. They don't seem to be grasping the author's meaning. I don't think they are making connections between the text and their own experience or other similar texts.* *Today I would like you to sit with that group and talk to them about the importance of making text-to-self and text-to-text connections to improve meaning making.* *Here is an activity with prompts that you can use with the group during our Literacy Block. Following the lesson, we can look at the activity sheets to evaluate if the students have bettered their meaning making skills.*	Mentor: *I read an interesting article about enhancing meaning-making for adolescent readers. I would be happy to share it with you. I have observed that Group A needs support.* Mentee: *We discussed meaning-making in a literacy course I took. Our course director gave us an interesting article about developing metacognition to help adolescent readers make meaning of text.* Mentor: *That sounds very interesting. Perhaps we could swap articles, then discuss the best way to help students in Group A. They really seem to be struggling and it would be great to collaborate to find creative ways to support them.*

Having mentored teachers at all stages of their careers, we understand the busy-ness that mentoring while teaching can create. Initially, it might seem easier to simply act as a model, providing support and direct instruction to the mentee. However, if you set the precedent of modelling early in the mentoring relationship, it can result in mentees expecting to be handed what they need throughout the mentoring period. The danger is that the mentee becomes dependent on the mentor to provide lesson plans, activities, and/or solutions to classroom concerns and is thereby reluctant to take ownership of or responsibility for the learning.

There is an old adage: Start the way you mean to finish. While we would agree that this is sage advice in all aspects of life, it is particularly apt when talking about mentoring. It is important that, at the beginning of the relationship, you

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make clear that collaboration, creativity, and responsibility are mutual expectations within a mentoring relationship.

See Chapter 2 for Mentoring Move: Thinking Aloud.

A mentee who is less eager to demonstrate independence at the beginning of a mentoring relationship may need support in gaining confidence. Undertaking a task, planning a lesson, or thinking for a mentee will not support confidence-building. If you share responsibility for a task, collaborate in lesson planning, and think aloud through a pedagogical process, it will allow a mentee to engage actively with the work of the classroom while gaining confidence in their own abilities.

Modelling practice on an ongoing basis becomes a chore. Mentoring is an action of professional development shared between mentor and mentee; consequently, mentoring is a process that supports the professional growth and development of the mentor and the mentee without adding significantly to the mentor's daily workload. A true mentoring relationship is mutually beneficial to the mentor and the mentee, and also to students in the classroom, whose learning is enhanced by the presence of two collaborating professionals.

Mentoring Move: Model to Mentor

Mentoring Is Key

"We are all constantly learning, not just imparting knowledge based on our experiences."
— Mentor Teacher, 2017

- A mentor creates an open and inclusive environment that encourages a mentee to demonstrate the best of their professional self, to take calculated risks in practice in order to develop a comfort level in the profession, and to become the professional they aspire to be.
- The objective of mentoring is *not* to create a clone of the mentor nor to inculcate a novice.
- To move from model to true mentor, it is important to set aside preoccupations with the way it has always been done and to honor the intentions, and the professional decisions and aspirations, of the mentee as an empowered critical thinker and educator.

3 Simple Steps

1. Mentor and mentee discuss the learning outcomes of a proposed lesson/unit to brainstorm novel, out-of-the-box thinking and alternative instructional strategies.
2. Using a lesson study model, mentor and mentee collaborate as participant observers to develop, implement, and observe all aspects of the lesson and the learners. Following the lesson, artifacts of learning or student work are brought to the discussion.

See page 31 for the Model to Mentor template.

3. Based on prompts from the Model to Mentor template on page 31, mentor and mentee engage in collaborative analysis of the lesson, using observations of artifacts collected as evidence of student learning. Mentor and mentee highlight specific strengths and challenges of the lesson, aspects of the lesson that worked or did not work for their personal teaching styles, and suggestions of how they might change the lesson for future implementation.

Next Steps

- Collaboratively develop a teaching strategy that might address concerns or support student needs as highlighted by evidence from the lesson observation.
- Engage students in providing feedback about how the lesson affected their learning.

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- In collaboration with other mentors and mentees, undertake the process of assessing how the learning outcomes for students vary due to factors of classroom dynamic.
- Write up the findings of the lesson study to share with colleagues at a staff meeting or on a blog.

What attributes best support the role of mentor?

Attributes of a Mentor

The attributes of an exemplary teacher are those of a strong mentor. They may not be skills that are generally taught, but they are qualities that can be developed through honest and conscious self-reflection. A mentor who is able to honestly self-reflect will be able to empathize and show compassion for a struggling mentee, or watch as a stellar mentee takes flight to innovate or initiate new ideas that the mentor has yet to ponder.

Stories from the Field: What Makes a Great Teacher? (Diane)

When I meet teacher candidates for the first time, I ask them to share adjectives that describe a teacher who has motivated them to join the profession. These words describe the character and the ethical essence of a teacher. They also paint a picture of teachers who share their passion for learning and for their subject, rather than those who simply know their subject well. This word graphic displays the most common adjectives used.

When we have compiled the list, I read it back to teacher candidates and tell them that they have demonstrated that they know exactly what it takes to be an exemplary teacher. I tell them that, beyond those attributes, which we trust they have brought with them to the profession, we will be happy to add theoretical learning and practical professional experience to ensure that they become that exemplary teacher who motivates and inspires students in their future classrooms.

To apply concrete understandings to adjectives that might seem to be abstract, we have created some questions that teachers who are ready to become mentors may wish to consider.

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How do I react to challenging situations?

Effective mentors are problem-solvers who are willing to address challenging situations in a calm and organized manner. They seek ways to communicate and dismantle roadblocks to continue on the journey. They are open-minded to new ideas and new ways of thinking, being, and knowing. They see constructive criticism as a tool for professional growth.

Am I open to collaboration with colleagues?

Effective mentors are keen collaborators who understand that stronger teaching in all classrooms enhances student learning and reflects well on the entire school community. They share resources, ideas, and experiences to the benefit of all. They are motivated by collective excellence.

Is my classroom door usually open or closed?

Effective mentors are willing to deprivatize their practice. They are confident that the work they are doing in the classroom is worthy of sharing, even when the calculated risks they take with their pedagogy fail to yield the anticipated results.

Do I engage willingly with professional learning opportunities?

Effective mentors would rather seek new opportunities to learn than rush to defend historical ways of teaching. They value of professional growth with the understanding that knowledge, like water, needs to shift and flow to avoid stagnation.

When faced with negativity, how do I choose to react?

Effective mentors refuse to turn to judgment when considering the actions or reactions of others. They attempt to understand what motivates the behavior. They also reflect on what story is told by their personal reaction in a given situation, asking themselves, "What did I feel in that situation and why?"

What type of relationship do I have with my students?

Effective mentors recognize that they are human. They recognize mistakes or misspeakings that challenge relationships and set aside pride to mend them. If you asked students in your classroom to describe you with character adjectives, what would they say? What might you do differently moving forward?

What does the physical environment of my classroom say to an outsider?

Effective mentors create a physical space that reflects the students in their classroom and their philosophy of teaching and learning. The space is invitational, inclusive, and in harmony with the objectives of the learning.

What does my school involvement look like beyond my classroom?

Effective mentors respect the fact that lives and families demand attention at the end of the working day. They set realistic expectations for themselves and invite their mentees to do likewise. They understand that what is possible for one teacher might not be possible for others, due to personal, family, or economic circumstances. Occasional or preservice teachers might be holding down an evening or weekend job to adequately support their families as they pursue their dream to teach. All teachers may be juggling faculty coursework or additional qualifications.

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What do I know about the community surrounding my school?

Effective mentors understand that the school does not exist in a vacuum. The community grounds the school and imposes certain values on the work. The realities of life in the community put demands on students, whether that be high academic or athletic achievement, economic strain, social pressures, or other responsibilities. Effective mentors know the community well. They encourage mentees to do likewise by taking a community walk or participating in a community event so that they might see their students in a different setting.

As teachers, all of us bring specific strengths and challenges to our work in schools. To suggest that there is a specific skill set that all mentors possess would be misleading. Nevertheless, in our experience, effective mentors are

- Well-organized in their practice: Mentees are generally looking for key strategies to get them off on the right foot. A mentor's organizational strategies might not suit the mentee's personality; however, the value of organization when entering a world that can seem overwhelming and chaotic cannot be overstated.
- Knowledgeable in their subject, grade, or division: Inviting a mentee into the classroom when the mentor is becoming acclimated to a new subject, grade, or division can put undue stress on both mentor and mentee. If it is a new grade, subject, or division for the mentor, there should be an immediate openness about the learning journey that will be shared.
- Capable of engaging their students in learning: Mentees need a stable and consistent environment in which to develop their teaching skills. Mentees need to see the impact of engagement on learning. A stable and consistent learning environment allows mentees to pursue their learning objectives without fear that chaos will ensue if there is a break from daily routine or if a lesson fails to hit the mark.

Positivity

We have all heard the saying, "They will forget what you said—but they will never forget how you made them feel" (Buehner, in Evans, 1971). Mentors need to ensure that their mentees feel they can succeed. Certainly, mentees will make mistakes; we all do. However, the frustration of feeling that it is impossible to succeed can be soul-destroying. Many preservice or novice teachers over the years who have floundered in a mentoring situation that made them feel incompetent in the profession have gone on to soar to great achievement when placed with a mentor who believed in them and demonstrated the positivity that made the mentee feel that success was within reach.

Mentoring Move: Positivity as Practice

Positivity Is Key

"I feel like I'm walking away with a plan and goals. I feel like I have an opportunity to improve."
— Teacher Candidate, 2017

- Positivity requires a mindset that focuses on enhancing practice through a positive stance. In contrast to a deficit or corrective mindset that seeks to identify and correct errors, positivity positions mentors and mentees as inquiry-based learners seeking ways to improve both the mentoring relationship and classroom practice.

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- Mentors and mentees will explore their understandings and the impact of positive feedback to enhance the mentoring relationship and as a form of inquiry-based professional development.
- Positivity as practice does not deny mistakes or challenges; rather, it chooses to acknowledge them as realities of learning, and then cast them in a light of positive challenge and opportunity for growth.

3 Simple Steps

1. Seek evidence of learning (or nonlearning) in student work through assessment, then use the evidence to provide feedback to the mentee on lesson implementation. Brainstorm ways that teaching practice might be adapted to support stronger results in student understanding. For example:

> Mentor: "I noticed that the students were not able to complete the task independently, although they were doing so with your help."
>
> Mentee: "Maybe I should have asked more questions so I had a better feel for their level of understanding before moving on to independent practice."

See page 32 for the Positivity as Practice template.

2. Use Questions and Prompts from the Positivity as Practice template on page 32 to discuss the types of feedback that were most helpful, how using evidence of student learning could improve practice, and how applying feedback could result in change. For example:

> Mentee: "I found it really helpful when you provided evidence of where the breakdown in learning occurred. It allowed me to realize that I need to develop my questioning skills to better understand where students are in their learning during a lesson."

3. End with affirmations of the learning from the process. State concrete changes to practice that will be implemented as a result of the conversation and record on the chart on the Positivity as Practice template on page 32. For example:

> Mentor: *I will make a conscious effort to share my observations about student learning to help you think of ways to improve your planning.*
>
> Mentee: *I will prepare higher-level probing questions for students so I can better understand where they are during guided practice.*

Next Steps

- Consider specific objectives for future inquiry to support the enhancement of practice; e.g. readings, research, inquiry conversations with colleagues.
- Continue to work with evidence from student work to support professional learning conversations.
- On an ongoing basis, think about how the tone and language of a message you communicate is being heard by the listener. Does it sound judgmental instead of being a genuine demonstration of support or inquiry? Does it respect the other within the professional mentor/mentee relationship?

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How might we build trust in a mentoring relationship?

Building Trust

In their research, Bryk and Schneider (2003) concluded, “Relational trust is the connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students.” They found that the most successful schools showed evidence of strong relations between teachers, while the least successful schools were marked by poor relations between teachers. Within a relationship founded on trust, there is much opportunity for self-expression and creativity because the other has confidence that their partner is acting at all times in good faith. When challenges present themselves, the foundation of trust allows for mistakes to be accepted as part of the learning experience and assurance that there was no ill intent. Bryk and Schneider (2003) identify four elements that are critical to establishing trust: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity.

Respect

Respect is defined as genuine listening and valuing opinions of others. We define genuine listening as listening between the lines.

> **Stories from the Field: Say What You Mean (Diane)**
>
> I recall a mentee who asked a mentor to take a quick look at a lesson. The mentor spent a great deal of time reviewing the lesson and shared detailed suggestions, each of them prefaced by a polite phrase, such as “You might want to think about…” or “If you wanted to, you could…” The mentee, after thinking about the suggestions, decided not to implement the changes, as acting on them would have entailed significant changes in the lesson for which there was little time.
>
> The mentor was disturbed that the advice had not been taken. In hindsight, it was clear that neither had listened between the lines. The mentee had asked for a “quick look” rather than a reconstruction of the lesson. The mentor had phrased the suggestions in such as manner that the mentee took them as good suggestions for future planning, but not changes required to meet the objective of the lesson. Therefore, the mentee presumed it was fine to go ahead without implementing the suggestions. The miscommunication was eventually resolved but could have been avoided with more careful listening.

Personal Regard

Personal regard reflects a willingness to extend beyond formal roles and an effort to reduce others’ sense of vulnerability. In the mentoring context, this reflects our original Oxford definition of mentoring as going “beyond mere teaching or tutoring to include advice and guidance about many other issues and problems encountered by students.” A mentor’s role does not begin and end with modelling a lesson, activity, or practice. A mentor offers support, which includes guidance and advice about professional standards and ethical concerns, classroom relationships, and management; open communication with all of the stakeholders involved in the learning; and more.

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Competence

Competence is the ability to execute one's responsibilities and the recognition of the interdependence of roles in attaining objectives. In the mentoring context this means

- Making the time to discuss matters of importance to the mentor or mentee
- Meeting deadlines for tasks or activities
- Accepting ownership of and responsibility for their part in supporting student learning
- Providing feedback in a timely manner (to each other and to students in the classroom)
- Creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive classroom environment

Personal Integrity

Finally, personal integrity is demonstrated through consistency between what one says and what one does. This means that a mentor and mentee must be able to rely on each other to meet commitments, to behave in a manner consistent with the values that they share as professional educators, and to demonstrate dedication to achieving the shared objectives.

Mentoring Move: Relational Trust

Trust Is Key

"Mentoring is really important. When I face new challenges, I like to build that relationship with someone who's been there before. So, I wanted to do that with them [mentees]."
— Mentor Teacher, 2017

- Relational Trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) has been identified as a major factor in advancing education in schools. Building trust takes time but trust can be quickly undermined by inattention or careless action.
- This Mentoring Move helps mentors and mentees establish an understanding of the core elements of trust and builds awareness of the importance of maintaining that trust in a strong professional relationship.

3 Simple Steps

See page 33 for the Relational Trust template.

While this Mentoring Move can be used at any time, implementation is recommended subsequent to Mentoring Move: Making Connections, which builds a foundational relationship upon which this move can be launched.

1. Mentors and mentees review the key elements of trust as outlined on pages 23–24: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and integrity.
2. Dedicated time is set aside to examine each key element and to collaboratively determine what each element looks like in practice within the specific work environment. Using prompts from the Relational Trust template on page 33, mentors and mentees identify the specifics of what relational trust means within the mentoring relationship.
3. End with the creation of a brief joint commitment statement. This statement will take the format of *The Mentor will…* and *The Mentee will…*, and will take into consideration the specific requirements of the environment, the identified competencies, and the needs of both mentor and mentee.

The Next Steps

- Print out a copy of the joint commitment statement as a reminder of the importance of maintaining the trust.
- Use the key elements of trust as the standard against which you measure the appropriateness of your responses or reactions to conflicts or issues that arise in the teaching environment. Ask yourself if your response enhances or erodes relational trust.

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- Presume only the best intentions of your mentor or mentee. Remember that a sharp word or a tired look your way may have nothing to do with you; rather, it might reflect a response to factors beyond the classroom.

What do mentees expect of their mentors?

Clarifying Expectations

Dissatisfaction in relationships often results when prior expectations are not met. During schoolboard workshops with mentors and their mentees, we asked mentees what they were looking for in a mentor. The following table provides their responses, further details that we retrieved from comments during the session, and the Mentoring Moves we developed in response to the comments of both mentors and mentees in our research.

Mentee Response	Clarification	Mentoring Moves
Make time for us	Mentees understand that a school day is busy; nevertheless, they know that setting aside time to talk is critical to their learning.	Walk 'n' Talk (page 27) Targeted Feedback (page 47)
Be open to our ideas	Mentees have much to contribute to the classroom. Many have had significant prior experience working with students in a number of capacities. Their skills and talents can enhance classroom learning.	What I Bring (page 63)
Let us flop and be supportive when we do	We all learn from experience, including unsuccessful experiences. Mentees appreciate the opportunity to take calculated pedagogical risks. They seek a mentor in whom they can confide their concerns about practice without censure or judgment.	Positivity as Practice (page 21) Relational Trust (page 24)
Display emotional intelligence	Mentees appreciate mentors who are empathetic to the challenges they face.	Making Connections (page 11) Relational Trust (page 24)
Explain the *whys* of your practice	Mentees may be able to see what you are doing and how you are doing it, but why you use specific strategies or the rationale for choices of resources might not always be clear.	Articulation to Action (page 38) Thinking Aloud (page 44) Opening Up Practice (page 88)

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Be reflective	Mentees want to know the human side of the role of a teacher and how mentors have come to develop their practice.	Making Connections (page 11) Storytelling (page 116) Sharing Values (page 65)
Be supportive	Mentees want to feel that a mentor will guide and support them as they plan lessons and interact with students in the classroom, while also facilitating their independence.	Co-acting for Learning (page 41)
Be equity-minded	Mentees are keen to feel welcome in a safe and inclusive classroom environment.	A Space for Open Minds (page 90) A Critical Lens (page 98)
Give in-depth feedback	Mentees are eager to hear constructive feedback on their work. Saying that a lesson was "good" does not provide the specifics that they need to improve.	Stoplight Self-Assessment (page 40) Scaling Questions (page 96) Targeted Feedback (page 47)
Lead by example	Leading by example is not about modelling practice; rather, it is about demonstrating integrity and competence.	Relational Trust (page 24) Tomorrow's Leaders (page 100) Model to Mentor (page 18)
Adapt to new technologies and practices	Mentees are seeking a mentor who is willing to be a co-learner in exploring new ideas and pedagogies.	Inquiring Collaboratively (page 76) Wondering (page 93)
Be approachable	An approachable mentor is open-minded and in tune to the needs of a mentee.	Needs Analysis (page 52)
Be fun and engaging	Mentees hope to find a mentor in whose company they can be comfortable. They seek a mentor who shares their love of teaching and engages with the mentee in daily practice.	Inquiring Collaboratively (page 76) The Important Thing (page 73)

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Be energizing	When acclimating to a new profession, learning new ways of thinking and being can be challenging and exhausting. Mentees who are juggling course work or busy personal lives can find themselves wearied by academic and emotional demands. A mentor keeps the energy level up with positive encouragement to support a mentee in achieving their full potential, and with encouragement to identify and focus on the important issues or skills in that particular moment.	Positivity as Practice (page 21) The Important Thing (page 73)

To help keep everyone on the same page, a shared electronic calendar can be of value. Both mentor and mentee can record upcoming tasks, deadlines, and other expectations. Another handy tool is a shared electronic folder and/or shared classroom basket that might hold lesson plans and reflections, readings or research of mutual interest, to-do lists, and other shared resources. A binder or electronic folder containing documented evidence of the mentoring journey will facilitate discussion about the progress of the mentoring relationship or, if required, assessment or evaluation information for submission to a faculty or governing body.

In the end, what a mentee expects and what a mentor is able to give may perfectly align. If not, it is important to have that conversation sooner rather than later.

Mentoring Move: Walk 'n' Talk

Communication Is Key

"I desperately want to mentor you but don't have much time."
—Mentor Teacher, 2017

Communication between mentor and mentee is the key to building a relationship. When open communication exists, the opportunity to share thoughts, concerns, and celebrations deepens the relationship and supports it when challenges arise. Time is always an issue. Talking while walking can be a great stress reliever and allows for deeper reflection and more open sharing when eye-to-eye contact is replaced by a shoulder-to-shoulder proximity.

3 Simple Steps

See page 34 for the Walk 'n' Talk template.

1. Find time during lunch or recess to reduce stress, improve wellness, and communicate openly by taking a brief walk together. Allow the Walk 'n' Talk experience to become a get-away from the fast pace of the school day.
2. Use questions like the ones on the Walk 'n' Talk template on page 34 to strengthen the relationship. While there may be times when pressing pedagogical matters dominate the conversation, this time is best used for mentor and mentee to get to know each other better. Take time to share glimpses into individual aspirations and expectations for the mentoring time together.

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3. Ensure that the Walk ’n’ Talk conversations remain privileged between mentor and mentee. A confidence shared during a Walk ’n’ Talk should never be shared beyond the partnership.

Next Steps

- Be patient. Getting to know each other and feeling comfortable enough to speak more openly takes time.
- Once the pathway to sharing has been opened, the Walk ’n’ Talk activity can become a catalyst for richer conversations that reach into the classroom environment.
- The Walk ’n’ Talk can also become a wonderful brainstorming environment that inspires both mentor and mentee to think outside the box about professional learning or new pedagogies they might want to explore together.

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