

# Preface

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All students are able. Students are able to achieve, and able to maximize their abilities, given the appropriate guidelines and accepting environments. Disability awareness is not an isolated subject to be taught, but a prevailing level of acceptance that must be shared and practiced by all students and adults. This includes using effective instructional strategies for curriculum delivery and promoting positive attitudes about disabilities for peers, colleagues, and families in schools, homes, and communities.

Teachers modeling *disability etiquette* treat all students as capable individuals, regardless of their weaknesses or differences, be they cognitive, physical, cultural, social, behavioral, perceptual, or sensory. Maximizing students' assets translates to each educator maximizing his or her own assets, as well, to reach each and every student. An ideal societal attitude toward those with differences involves inclusive mindsets both inside and outside of the classroom. *Embracing Disabilities in the Classroom: Strategies to Maximize Students' Assets* illustrates how literature, role-playing, interdisciplinary lessons, teachers, students, administrators, families, legislators, and community members can all act as conduits to maintain, promote, and foster the equal participation of students of all abilities.

We cannot judge a person's worth based upon what we see or think we know about an individual. Some disabilities or differences are hidden, while others are more visible. Is it the disability or difference that disables a student from achieving his or her potential, or is it the reaction of others that is more disabling or isolating? How we treat others in society very often influences how individuals feel about themselves. The media sends out messages that influence both the young and old, in both overt and subliminal ways. Some disabilities or differences even have their own cultures or viewpoints. Others were and may still be subjective recipients of skewed viewpoints held by some people in society. Classrooms are communities of young learners who create our future. Educators can effectively model and establish positive attitudes about disabilities in an *accepting*—not *excepting*—way!

*Embracing Disabilities in the Classroom* gives the historical background of some past exclusive attitudes toward students with disabilities, compared to today's increasingly more sensitive and inclusive practices. In addition, the book delineates classroom interventions and lessons to promote and propagate societal inclusion to differentiate attitudes and expand opportunities. To counteract any existing negativities, everyone needs to get on board and act as a crew who wants to cheer and celebrate the achievements and possibilities of others. How do we know what lies beyond a disability, if we never stretch our mindsets to realize that differences are not only okay, but welcomed? Throughout

*Embracing Disabilities in the Classroom* there are numerous curriculum connections and lessons to teach about differences. Educators can concretely connect the idea of differences to successes when the focus is on strengths and potentials. When appropriate accommodations are applied in school settings, individual student profiles are maximized. The purpose of the lessons, tables, rubrics, and charts in the chapters of this book and the appendix is to increase and improve interactions, information, and introspection about disabilities in school settings and beyond. When a student with a disability enters a classroom, he or she will succeed if the best instructional designs, programs, support, and attitudes are in place. These classroom designs include collaboration among planning teams with accommodations and modifications that are intended to recognize a student's level. The preplanning, interplanning, and postplanning are ongoing! Educators who proceed forward with a positive attitude say to their students, "Yes, you can, and we'll figure out how!"

Maximizing the potentials for students with disabilities means that everyone else who comes into contact with these students is maximizing their potentials, too! This type of differentiation of attitudes does not let a disability define a person, nor a school program. Strengths exist in all of us. Our assets can yield a future filled with bright horizons. Empower students with and without disabilities to sail into the sunset, charting their own course of destiny, with abilities that match their own possibilities and strengths, not the limitations or anchors imposed by others. So what if a student cannot do something in the same way as others. Maybe a different way is even better! Differentiate the student from the disability. Differentiate attitudes, too! Remove the prefix, and focus on the ability!

**D**isability

**I**s

**S**ometimes

**A**ddjusted

**B**ecause

**I**ndividuals

**L**earn

**I**t's

**T**ime to

**I**ncorporate

**E**veryone's

**S**trengths!

