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Oyler, C., Hooper, E. H., & Hamre, B. (2025). *Be the architect of your inclusive classroom: Building communities for learning*. Teachers College Press.

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Be the Architect of Your Inclusive Classroom by Oyler, Hooper and Hamre is a collaborative work based on K–12 public school teachers that critically analyzes classroom practices and draws our attention to strategies that are helpful to build an inclusive learning environment. The authors have worked diligently throughout their respective careers in supporting teachers and students to promote inclusive classroom practices. Their experiences and efforts are reflected in chapters that draw readers’ attention to different strategies and suggested actions. The book is a great resource for practicing K-12 teachers, teacher educators, and preservice teachers, who seek to deepen their pedagogical intentionality and foster inclusive mindsets in their classrooms or teacher preparation programs.



BE THE ARCHITECT OF YOUR
**INCLUSIVE
CLASSROOM**
Building Communities
for Learning

CELIA OYLER
ERIKA HUGHES HOOPER
& BRITT HAMRE

In eight chapters, the authors discuss human differences, racial trauma, principles for the design of accessible classrooms, frameworks for creating curriculum, formative assessment as well as context outside the classroom which are essential to ensure inclusive teaching and learning. The “fearless inventory” box at the end of each chapter can be used as a self-assessment tool. It is called “fearless” because these inventories refer to finding a direction to move forward acknowledging that the education system is racist, classicist, ableist and so forth.

The book starts with the discussion of existing strategies, approaches, materials, and methods that might not work for all. So wrote Stubbs (2008): “There is no blueprint for ‘doing’ inclusive education; it is a dynamic, organic, cultural and context-specific process” (p.52). The context of teaching is always shifting depending on racial position, ethical perspective, linguistic identities, socio-

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economic status, current or previous traumas, the cultural situation, social media influences, and the like. Strategies that work best can be a flop depending on the context and time. The authors argue that “Teaching is all about building relationships: with students, with their families, and with their communities” (p. 1). Building relationships generates a feeling of safety among the students who trust educators with their learning struggles. Many teachers “[s]pend most of their time thinking, first, about what they will do . . . rather than first considering what the learner will need in order to accomplish the learning goals” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 15). The authors provide a critical overview of ideological frames which are barriers to inclusivity and suggest some steps to think about curricular and instructional practices.

In Chapter 1, the authors outline the human differences in the U.S. classrooms and highlight “people’s individual identities, social locations, and intergenerational histories interact in diverse ways with classroom curriculum and school structures” (p. 13). The discussion of how schools’ positions differ is very engaging. The authors effectively employed different examples from U.S. society to represent learners in the classroom. The example of left-handed people not having a pair of scissors that work best for them connects readers with the difficulties faced by the learners with special abilities.

In Chapter 2, six principles are presented for creating equitable learning spaces where everyone can access all curricula. Readers are invited to consider students’ competence and challenging behaviors. One of the important discussions in this chapter is the historical responses and the reframing of the dilemma of differences. The authors successfully provide readers with a view of six possible foundational practices including ongoing formative assessment, contingently responsive instruction, using multimodal materials, and the like. Thus readers are encouraged to think critically about creating opportunities for equitable learning spaces. In an equitable learning space “Inclusion is about increasing participation for all children and adults” (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

The authors discuss students’ diversity and teachers’ way of handling their commitment of inclusivity in Chapter 3. These ways of acting on the commitment to inclusivity involve the physical environment, routines, and materials; each way is illustrated through different stories. While building connections, teachers must look for the “complexity and richness” that each student brings. The authors strongly argue that creating an inclusive classroom environment requires ongoing work, and this work never ends. Agreed: Teachers are lifelong learners and designers who must remain flexible, reflective, and committed to equity across time and context. Readers are asked to reflect on their own classroom environment by means of the “fearless inventory” at the end of this chapter, which can be effective in improving their own practices.

In Chapter 4, light is shed on two frameworks: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014) and Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), for creating curriculum. The authors’ attention to cultural and linguistic diversity resonates with Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), which argues that teaching should sustain students’ cultural and linguistic identities. Referring to educators as “Architects,” the authors write, “We, as a society, need teachers who

ask questions, push back, and raise questions about power and voice, positioning and access” (p. 63). This idea resonates powerfully with me as a teacher.

Unfortunately, most often teachers do not have the opportunity to change a curriculum even if they think change is important. Here the authors explain and distinguish among the frameworks focusing on “Critical Consciousness” for both the educators and learners. A clear vision of curriculum, design, culturally sustaining pedagogy, student engagement, and the like is represented via two units where each unit showcases different ways of considering the local conditions, resources, and obstacles focusing on the needs of the students. Finding that sometime the learning can be difficult to measure, the authors write, “Sometimes learning is quite difficult to measure, and just because something is difficult or even impossible to measure, does not mean it is not worth teaching” (p. 81). This idea causes me to re-think my teaching practices. Following this, Chapter 5 includes a discussion of instructional planning and participation structure as two very important features to consider when promoting inclusivity in the classroom. This chapter reminds the readers of the challenges faced by educators during the COVID-19 pandemic and suggests a “mixed-match” approach to enhance student engagement. Readers are encouraged to think about adapting activities that suit the learners and highlight students’ participation with multiple modalities.

Chapter 6 addresses formative assessment which is at the center of inclusive teaching and learning practices: “It is our job” as a teacher or student “to get as close as possible to uncovering learning” (p. 123). The key dilemmas and practices in classroom assessment are discussed with examples from the classroom. Using different charts and tables, the authors highlight how teachers grapple with these dilemmas and implement their practices. The examples are engaging; they helped me examine my own experiences. Chapter 7 reminds the reader that nothing is perfect in this world, and even though there can be a universal design to create inclusive classrooms, unpredictable challenges can change the scenario. Educators are advised to adopt a stance of “Critical inclusivity” and view the disruption as valuable assessment data rather than blaming students or looking for fixes. Reflection, curiosity, and compassion work best for unexpected disruptions. Based on “Conflict” and “Individual student crisis,” three common types of disruption are mentioned by the authors. They argue, working with disruptions and conflict is “[i]ntensive work that should not be undertaken in isolation” (p. 142). It is always better to have a second opinion when you are working with something sensitive.

In Chapter 8, the authors emphasize that teachers’ work can be affected by the context outside of the classroom. Then again there are ways by which educators can obtain support, care, and advocacy to sustain their work. Though teachers being futurists can shape the curriculum and promote participation for all students, it contrasts with the historical purpose of schooling that is aimed at uniformity. This chapter conveys the understanding that schools are a central place for democratic and pluralistic engagement, yet inclusive teaching cannot solve the world’s problems.

The authors conclude by encouraging educators to struggle for democracy, equity, and justice as the goal of inclusive teaching practices. Images and tables used in chapters were helpful in understanding the contents, whereas metaphors like “Gardener,” “Architect,” and “Futurists” referring to the educators were interesting

to contemplate. After reading the book, as a teacher, I feel a sense of responsibility to change some of my classroom practices to make them more inclusive. The knowledge, values, and beliefs of the teacher create an effective learning environment for all students. The book outlines the inclusive practices that benefit experienced educators or teacher educators who can translate big ideas into practice. But it offers limited examples of lesson design or assessment strategies that may challenge preservice teachers or early-career practitioners who need structured models.

Instead of providing quick tips, the authors encourage readers to think deeply about their teaching practices. The book is a valuable guideline to creating an inclusive and engaging classroom. However, the best part of this book is this: It encourages readers to think deeply about ways of making their own classroom inclusive for all. Overall, *Be the Architect of Your Inclusive Classroom* contributes to inclusive education scholarship by portraying teachers as designers of social and pedagogical space.

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About the Reviewer

Mussarath Mehedi is a promoter of inclusive learning environments that honor and sustain the cultural and linguistic diversity of all students. Her focus centers on culturally sustaining pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching as frameworks for equity and belonging in education. She has worked as an assistant teacher of English at Cambrian School and College, Dhaka, Bangladesh, for about six years. She is currently a doctoral student at the School of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University, IL, USA. She also serves as a graduate research assistant at the same institution.



About the Book Authors

Celia Oyler began her teaching career as a special educator, moving from self-contained settings into fully inclusive schools. She obtained her PhD in curriculum from the University of Illinois, Chicago, with the goal of preparing all teachers to teach all students. She is the author of *Actions Speak Louder than Words: Social Action as Curriculum*; *Learning to Teaching Inclusively: Student Teachers' Classroom Inquiries*; and *Making Room for Students: Sharing Teacher Authority in Room 104*. Celia ended her career in education as the vice dean for Teacher Education at Teachers College, Columbia University.



Erika Hughes Hooper has supported teachers and school leaders growing inclusive classroom practices since 2010. Formerly a senior staff developer with the Teachers College Inclusive Classrooms Project, Erika works with New York City Public Schools, designing transformative professional learning experiences for educators. Her work is grounded in the beliefs that all students can learn and that teaching is deeply relational and intellectual work.

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