

# Achieving Genuinely Inclusive Bilingual K–12 Education: Using UDL to Shift the Bilingual Classroom Irretrievably Away From Deficit Model Practices

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*This chapter examines the pervasive and perpetuated deficit model perspective which informs much of the second language instruction which occurs, in relation to diverse learners—particularly learners with disabilities—in the Canadian K-12 sector. The chapter argues that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has a key role to play in shifting language teachers away from deficit model views in this context and has the potential to revolutionize the bilingual classroom. The chapter also demonstrates the extent to which UDL aligns seamlessly with communicative method approaches in second language instruction. The chapter explores and analyses phenomenological data drawn from the author’s lived experience as a second language teacher over a decade. The chapter considers the repercussions of this reflection on pre-service teacher training, in-service professional development, and leadership practices for inclusion.*

## **INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

For far too long bilingual education – in all its forms (traditional second language classes, bilingual classes, or full immersion programs) – has been off limits to students with disabilities, particularly those affected by learning disabilities (Hoover et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2015). Myths have abounded and been perpetuated, claiming that cognitive disabilities made it impossible for students to acquire a second language (Tangen & Spooner-Lane, 2008). More recently, the literature has finally debunked these myths and highlighted that the limitations experienced by students with cognitive disabilities in second language acquisition have more to do with issues related to pedagogy than with their actual impairment (Sowell & Sugisaki, 2021). All evidence suggests that students with disabilities are just as able to acquire a second language and to navigate the bilingual classroom as their peers (Mady, 2017; Skinner & Smith, 2011).

This does not mean that, in practice, students with disabilities now have a more seamless access to the bilingual classroom. Despite all recommendations emerging from the scholarship on inclusion, the field is still reluctant to move away from ability grouping practices, from segregated education, and from a deficit model view of students with disabilities (Mady & Arnett, 2016). While the bilingual classroom is now conceptually seen as entirely suitable to the diverse learner, in the field, bilingual education remains an area that is rife with hurdles for these students because of teacher misperceptions and beliefs (Arnett & Mady, 2017; Bourgoin, 2016; Cioe-Pena, 2017). In many ways, bilingual education has in fact become a tool for schools to inconspicuously create ability streaming where such segregated practices are prohibited by the legislation or policy (Mathewson, 2020).

Bilingual education remains perceived as the playground of highly-performing – and behaviourally compliant – students (Delcourt, 2018). The reason why the field is so slow to evolve is that language educators are reluctant to acknowledge that acquisition of second language is not impossible for students with disabilities. They are reticent to accept that such a task is challenging only when language pedagogy is teacher-centered, conventional, rigid, and textbook focused (Cioè-Peña, 2020; Wight, 2015). When communicative methods are adopted, students with disabilities are perfectly able to integrate bilingual education and to flourish within these learning environments. When language pedagogy is furthermore inclusive and accessible by design, these students succeed seamlessly in these classes (Wise, 2012).

The first section of the chapter contextualizes the tension which has been described above between traditional bilingual education and the needs of students with disabilities. It unpacks this tension and analyzes the ways traditional language education creates barriers for students with disabilities because of its teacher-centric nature and design. The second section describes and analyzes the ways Universal

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