

## **Drumming to the Beat of Different Marchers – Engaging Every Learner By Dr. Debbie Silver**

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As a child I was continually told that I “marched to the beat of a different drummer.” Teachers said that in an effort to get me to conform to their regimented classroom environments. My teachers made it clear that it was my responsibility to learn the way the teacher taught whether I liked it or not, whether it was appropriate for me or not. I thought then and I still believe that it is the teacher’s responsibility to try and reach the inner rhythm of the learners.

When a high value is placed on the teacher’s ability to deliver information in a uniform, regimented fashion, students often lose their ability to solve problems, their spirit of curiosity, and their inherent joy in the learning process. Thus the focus must be shifted from teachers delivering instruction in one lockstep manner to one in which the teacher ensures that instruction, assessment, and the classroom environment gives every student a **reasonable** chance at success.

As student advocates teachers must consider the distinctive ways that individual students best learn about their worlds. Multiple intelligences, learning styles, and even learning preferences are to be given due consideration. Curriculum must be flexible enough to meet the unique needs of learners and universal enough to guide them towards a common cultural literacy. Effective teachers study how best to advance the various student strength areas while compensating for areas of weakness.

Students enter our classes with different levels of knowledge, background experiences, adult support, strength areas, and interests. It is incumbent upon teachers to assess and address these various points of diversity. Research shows that if a student experiences genuine success just **one** time during a school day, there can be a carry-over effect into the rest of the student’s day.

In examining the perspective of a student-focused curriculum, it is evident that attention needs to be shifted away from the static, absolute curriculum, which plows ahead regardless of the learners. The focus needs to move towards a place where the “one size fits all” mentality is not as valued as a curriculum that builds student achievement along with self-

efficacy. The challenge is to foster students' abilities so that they can continue to learn and to build their understandings as they grow into the changing world around them. Every student deserves a teacher who infuses learners with confidence, with enthusiasm, with hope, and with promise – a teacher who drums to the beat of different marchers.

This is a song written by Debbie Silver and Monte Selby based on Debbie's book, *Drumming to the Beat of Different Marchers: Finding the Rhythm for Differentiated Learning*, 2005. Incentive Publications: Nashville, TN.

**Beat of a Different Marcher**  
By Debbie Silver & Monte Selby

Bobby marches to the beat of his different drummers  
Jeffery does his reading, but he can't do numbers  
Shawna's up and talkin' 90 miles an hour, again  
Can't find his book or pencil, that would be Ben  
Hyperactive, dyslexic, class clown, non-reader  
Upper class, no class, off-task, bottom feeder  
Little Arty's a challenge; Martin's a dream  
We've seen them all, they all need to be seen.

All children in reach when we find their rhythm --  
The step, the dance, the song within them  
That's a better journey, but so much harder  
Too extraordinary, but so much smarter  
To drum to the beat of each different marcher.

Sandy's in the slow group, a proven low achiever  
She's the small quiet one, not a class leader  
Crayons in her hand, she can draw what she knows best  
But no room for pictures on the standardized test.  
Ballerina, bricklayer, biochemist, ball player  
Diesel driver, drum major, diva-destined, dragon slayer --  
Some kids have a chance, with a different choice

To show what they know, they must have a voice.  
All children in reach when we find their rhythm --  
The step, the dance, the song within them  
That's a better journey, but so much harder  
Too extraordinary, but so much smarter  
To drum to the beat of each different marcher.

Introspective, oversized, minimized, criticized  
Round holes, square lives, not much room for compromise.  
There's a new song not yet written  
For each and every child, will we listen?

All children in reach when we find their rhythm --  
The step, the dance, the song within them  
That's a better journey, but so much harder  
Too extraordinary, but so much smarter  
To drum to the beat of each different marcher.  
Let's all dance to the beat of each different marcher!

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