

The New Inclusion

Differentiated Strategies
to Engage *ALL* Students

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Foreword by Lim Chye Tin



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Introduction

WHY DID I WRITE THIS BOOK?

I wrote this book because so many teachers in general education classrooms have not felt prepared to teach students who struggle with literacy and learning. Historically, interventions were the responsibility of trained specialists. Times have changed, and so have instructional practices. There are many schools that strive to assist and support teachers to help all students become proficient readers and writers in an inclusive setting. Curriculum standards provide another opportunity to encourage implementation of more effective instructional practices because they promote an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to learning.

Furthermore, teaching approaches should take into account that there are many different kinds of students in every classroom and that instruction should not be limited to a one-size-fits-all approach. There are many practical strategies teachers can use to make a difference with these students who learn differently. Another reason I wrote this book with an emphasis on literacy skills is that learning to read is critical to students' academic success and has a tremendous impact on their social and emotional development as well as their achievement. "[Students] are tender individuals, easily frustrated and ashamed of deficient reading skills once they notice that many of their classmates read so effortlessly" (Lyon, 2000).

Supporting students who have difficulty learning is a pervasive challenge across all of the year levels. For example, a struggling Year 4 student can neither read the words nor develop meaning from the words that they *can* read in a Year 1 levelled book. In another example, a secondary school student struggles to understand an article on photosynthesis for a research report because they have little background knowledge on the topic. These two examples highlight the need for schools to support students who struggle throughout their education. Although resource specialists, reading specialists and literacy coaches assist, many schools and teachers need to develop techniques for use in the general education classroom to support those who struggle with literacy learning.

Additionally, many students struggling in reading and writing do not qualify for special education services because of the differing criteria used in various school districts for support programs or because of lack of sufficient funding for special support programs (Spear-Swerling & Steinberg, 1996; Wang, Reynolds & Wahlberg, 1988). Struggling readers may or may not qualify for special education services. However, all students need effective and differentiated literacy instruction in their general education classrooms to help them succeed.

Therefore, it is important that teachers learn practical strategies for use in their inclusive classrooms that can reach all learners and boost their literacy achievement. Teachers need to learn how to design and implement effective literacy lessons that use brain-based research to maximise learning and promote student engagement. The strategies in this book will help teachers support students' unique learning styles, their cognitive and emotional needs, and their literacy development.

Furthermore, my 35 years of teaching experience as a general educator, special educator, reading specialist/literacy coach and curriculum coordinator, along with my investigation of recent brain research, has provided me with a better understanding of powerful instructional practices that are not only essential for struggling students and students with special needs, but also benefit their peers.

The instructional tools presented in this book will help teachers face the challenges of engaging learning for struggling students and teaching in an inclusive class and make teaching more rewarding and beneficial for all students. As a former teacher and current teacher educator, I find there is a definite need for a book that offers a collection of successful techniques to intervene with struggling students. Both my graduate students and the many teachers I work with in consulting with schools ask me to share "what works" with struggling students, "what works" to support reading in the content areas and "what works" to support teachers in reaching their struggling students.

In reflecting on the importance of this book, one of my graduate students in education wrote to me on her culminating assignment: "Teaching is not meant to be a practice in perfection. It is an opportunity to grow, learn, ask questions and overcome challenges. Even more important, teaching exceptional students is a collaborative endeavour – to make inclusion a positive experience for all."

There are many books that help teachers support the struggling learner, and this book does that too; however, this book is unique in that it goes beyond individual teacher assistance. This book provides creative techniques that are tailored to students' learning styles to maximise the impact on their achievement in the inclusive classroom.

The continuous growth of professional educators is what I hope to encourage and nourish with this book. Teachers will have the tools to determine what works with diverse learners. They will have the information to go beyond the specific strategies described in this book to create their own brain-based strategies to promote success for all students.

KNOWLEDGE BASE

There are so many aspects to consider in an inclusive classroom. However, literacy is the key to success in school and throughout life. When I started in the profession, I was told, "All teachers are teachers of reading." This is a challenging assumption (e.g. Brozo & Simpson, 2007; Fisher & Ivey, 2006). I have broadened my thinking about literacy success to include reading, writing, speaking, listening, thinking and communicating – encompassing all of the ways that students learn.

Therefore, all teachers need to use strategies to engage learners in all of these brain-compatible processes. This represents a significant conceptual shift from "teaching reading" to using these strategies to engage students in all of the literacy processes. My focus in this book is on research-based instructional strategies that promote learning and literacy in an inclusive classroom.

Schools traditionally assume that cognitive and academic achievement is congruent with but distinct from emotion. Respect for individual differences and sensitivity to culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is apparent in most schools' mission statements. However, translating that into practice and celebrating unique learning styles is not always apparent in these schools. Curriculum plans are usually based on learning specified content and developing specific skills aimed at meeting school standards. During the past decade, this approach has gained momentum and has informed educational policy and set national educational agendas.

This same situation exists in literacy instruction in an inclusive classroom. And the practice continues in spite of an extensive body of research suggesting that students who have low reading skills also experience low self-esteem in the general education classroom (Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991). The research is clear that well-structured cooperative group work is one set of strategies that teachers can use to effectively meet the needs of *all* students in a heterogeneous classroom (Cohen, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1993; Slavin, 1989).

A common problem is that teachers haven't been empowered with high quality strategies to equip them with the sophisticated range of skills and curriculum formats necessary to get the most out of an inclusive classroom. Therefore, I will not only focus on the research regarding the importance of learning styles, differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001; Gregory & Chapman, 2002) and cooperative, flexible grouping – I will also stress research-based conclusions regarding reading comprehension. This will include integration and application of the work of David Pearson (2008) regarding what works with struggling readers.

Research-based evidence supports the importance of directly teaching strategies to struggling readers. These strategies are: summarise, predict, self-question, paraphrase, clarify key issues and create images. Time is another essential factor – time spent in actual reading. Another research-based intervention is the use of discussion. This includes dialogue with peers and adults through language-based activities.

Furthermore, research suggests that there is no perfect or best curriculum for all children with learning difficulties; however, there are several key elements to look for that virtually every research-validated curriculum that is successful with diverse students includes in some manner. These elements are found in the recent summaries of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) research program concerning learning disabilities (Lyon, 2000).

In addition, little attention is given to helping teachers learn how children become proficient readers and writers. This lack of information is particularly unsettling because longitudinal studies of children who are having difficulty in learning how to read in the primary years reveal that they struggle academically and socially throughout primary and secondary school (Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Juel, 1988). Studies investigating student failure (Wasik & Slavin, 1993) show that literacy and learning difficulties emerge during the first years of school and that individualised instruction, provided by a knowledgeable teacher, will prevent a lifetime of failure.

As educators in inclusive classrooms, we want to support our struggling students while not letting our focus on their learning differences diminish the quality of teaching for the rest of the class. Fortunately, brain research has confirmed that strategies benefiting learners with special challenges are appropriate for engaging all learners. Understanding this brain research will increase educators' confidence in and competence with the methods that are most compatible with how students acquire, retain and use information to become more literate.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND

The strategies that I describe throughout this book are firmly rooted in research and very practical in their application for struggling students. When teachers use and adapt these strategies to meet the diverse needs of the learners in their classrooms, they will also reach the learners at the extremes of the continuum and prevent many from “falling through the cracks” of the educational system.

The core ideas include the following.

- The most successful instructional strategies are those that teach for meaning and understanding.
- The most productive and learning-conducive classrooms are those that are student-centred and yet high in reasonable challenge.
- Students who are actively engaged and motivated will strive to meet meaningful goals and standards.

TEXT TOUR

All chapters focus on practical strategies for students who are considered struggling because they are less-able or “at-risk” readers. In addition, information for implementation and adaptation is provided to accommodate the needs of teachers at various year levels in the inclusive classroom.

Here’s a chapter-by-chapter look at what you will find in this book:

Chapter 1: Creating a Positive Environment for All Students to Learn.

This chapter contains techniques for making all students feel special and welcome in the classroom. There is an emphasis on the belief that high self-efficacy is a vital component for all students to succeed in an inclusive classroom. Building a “community of learners” involves implementing strategies that allow students to support one another.

Chapter 2: Understanding the Struggling Student. Who is the struggling student in your classroom? This chapter looks at different ways children and young adults struggle with literacy across the curriculum. Teachers will learn how they can enhance the learning success of their struggling students by matching their teaching to students’ learning styles.

Chapter 3: Tactile Strategies: Hands-On Learning. This chapter provides dozens of ideas for tactile learners. Hands-on strategies are described, along with adaptations for tailoring the strategies to differing ages and ability levels.

Chapter 4: Auditory Strategies: Tuning in to Literacy. This chapter offers many suggestions for modifying the curriculum to utilise strategies designed to maximise the achievement of auditory learners.

Chapter 5: Visual Strategies: The Eyes Have It for Reading. Ideas for visual learners are shared, with specific curriculum connections for various ages and abilities. Emphasis is placed on boosting visual cues in the reading process.