

Preface

During the fifteen years I spent teaching sixth-grade through twelfth-grade students who had learning problems, I learned many things, among them: middle and secondary school teachers love their disciplines. Their disciplines hold precious gems for them, rare and exquisite. They hunger to share the beauty with their students. When, in the vernacular, students “blow them off” with a sneer, their arms folded across their chests and eyes glazing over, content specialist teachers die a little inside.

I have listened to their laments in the teachers’ lounge, not griping about students, but rather wondering how to reach the reluctant learner. In the thousands of hours I spent with my friend, Dr. Rosemary Grant of Monett, Missouri, the finest high school teacher I have ever known, I came to sense the fire she had in her breast to make every student love history and the humanities as she did. I came to feel her despair when a student seemed apathetic about the things to which she cleaved so dearly: democracy, freedom, rigorous intellectual inquiry, and intellectual integrity.

As a special education teacher, I desperately wanted to help. We knew how to work with students with special needs in the special education classroom in those years, but we did not know much about good inclusion strategies. We now have powerful research to guide us in including the learner with special needs in the general education classroom. But as Mastropieri and Scruggs (1994) wrote, “It is commonly agreed by educators that findings from experimental research are of little value unless it is shown how such findings can be adapted and implemented in actual classroom practice” How true. That is why I decided to write this book: to help practitioners access what the research tells us about teaching students with disabilities in middle school and secondary school classrooms.

Many inclusion books for elementary teachers are on the market, but those books do not satisfy the needs of middle and secondary school teachers. I wanted this overlooked population to have a quick resource for research-supported strategies, or for those showing great promise, that they could keep on their desk and reach for when needed. I wanted it to be a book of strategies that I or my students had field tested and found teacher-friendly. That was the sort of book I ached for when I was still working in public schools. The practitioners who reviewed the initial draft of this book for Corwin indicated that this, too, was the sort of book they wanted. I was greatly encouraged.

The first edition of this book met with success. Teachers across the world use it. Academic and public libraries throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, and Asia have it on their shelves. But a half-decade has passed since the first edition, so the time has come for a second—with information on Response to Intervention (RtI) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), updated research, and new strategies.

From this point onward, I will write in the first person plural in order to represent, in addition to myself, the thoughts and feelings of the many special education

teacher-researchers whose work led us to the findings I report, my students who have used and enjoyed these strategies in their fieldwork, and their teacher friends who have embraced the strategies as well.

May this book provide the keys that you need to help all of your students unlock the doors to learning so you can invite them in, introduce them to the jewels of your discipline, and help them develop the tools they need to turn rough gems into beautiful rings and tiaras.