
Preface

Sarah McNary recalls: My first full-time teaching contract began in October 1991. I was following a parade of substitute teachers into a highly unruly and disorganized home economics classroom. Gradually order returned and I was able to focus my energies on quality lesson planning.

Using district guidelines as well as the objectives developed by the local community college that partnered with my program, I created a broad meal plan overview course that focused on budget and nutrition. I was proud of my curriculum and the class seemed to be running smoothly with the exception of one group of students who was just not “getting it.”

In those days, special education students had most of their classes with special education teachers and then would “mainstream” for an elective and PE. My foods class was an obvious choice because “everyone needs to eat.” At my inner city high school with over 2,500 students, I had 11 to 13 students with special needs in every class—several with severe handicaps. I found myself questioning my “one size fits all” approach to instruction as I realized that some of my students simply could not complete the lessons as I had designed them.

More and more, my thoughts returned to those students and I began to experiment with alternative assignments that would still convey the objectives of the lesson while being achievable for these students.

I asked myself, “How can a student on crutches stand at the stove to make stir-fry?” In that low-income school there were no special stands, stools, or adaptive equipment, but the staff room did have a hotplate to lend.

As the year progressed, I found myself drawn more and more to this population. It became a challenge to puzzle out the possibilities to arrange everything so that learning could take place. I knew that I was making a difference and it was addictive. The following summer I accepted another full-time contract—this time teaching a special day class at the middle school. I was hooked!

Later, I became a resource specialist, and although special education has changed substantially over the years, the one thing that hasn't is the concern that it brings out in general education teachers. Many teachers have expressed their worry, dismay, and sometimes anger at the number of students with special needs they find in their classes. Whether the students have difficulties with language, reading delays, or behavior, the teachers' concern continues. After listening to their complaints, I began to hear a common thread. These capable and concerned teachers were sharing a common emotion—fear. After priding themselves on being excellent and dedicated teachers, the fear of having students who might not learn was overwhelming. I believe that given the right tools and strategies, almost any teacher can provide a positive learning environment for almost every student.

As I began to work with these teachers, I realized that they needed validation (yes, it is more challenging to teach diverse learners), concrete suggestions for effective instruction (practical tips to use today, not theory and philosophy), and time to practice these ideas (support over a period of time using a reflective model that allows the students to give feedback in addition to the teachers' ongoing reflective practice).

In today's world of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) mandating the "Least Restrictive Environment" and No Child Left Behind which requires that highly qualified and credentialed teachers deliver instruction to students, more and more students with disabilities will be receiving instruction in general education classrooms. There is ample research out there, but where do we go to find out what works and what doesn't? Unlike many other professions, primary literature generated from educational research, experimentation, and investigation is usually a world away from the day-to-day grind of the classroom teacher. Rarely does that type of information filter into a teacher's professional life or development. Yet it is there. People conduct research on how teachers teach, how students with special needs learn, and how all stakeholders in the educational environment influence each other in the process. Yes, there are others out there concerned about the quality of the instructional experience for those students who don't fall into the average range.

For us, "research" is defined as the final product of a scientific investigation of measurable and observable phenomena. This concept of research differs from a person's anecdotal feeling, thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. Research results and conclusions supported by real data help define what works and what doesn't. This information can make us all better at what we do. Research literature is selected based on a journal's or article's validity and its ability to connect us, in new more useful ways, to authentic classroom situations and the common problems teachers routinely face in their professional environments. If it is good, we condense the knowledge contained in the literature and share it, much like all of us freely share our knowledge with our everyday colleagues. We write about the research in

the same way we would verbally share it in the school lunch- or workroom. The book is not intended to be a review of all educational research literature on a single concept. Our applications filtered out the very best new ideas from the most relevant research articles coming from a large number of sources.

While experience is a great teacher, there are faster, more humane, and more efficient means of teaching and learning, which coupled with experience become empowering, effective, rewarding, and beneficial. The purpose of this book is to give a voice to the research and the researchers who create the questions about how special learners learn most effectively. Filtered through our own experiences in schools, we hope to make the valuable products of their inquiry available to all those involved in teaching students who need additional supports to facilitate their learning.

This book is not meant to be read as one would read a novel, but rather our objective is to focus on useful and practical educational research that translates into a range of choices and solutions to individual teaching and learning problems typically faced by teachers working with diverse learners. Within these chapters we present a large range of instructional strategies and suggestions based on educational, psychological, and sociological studies. The strategies are based on research conducted with teachers and students. Strategies within the chapters are structured in a user-friendly format:

- **Strategy:** A simple, concise, or crisp statement of an instructional strategy.
- **What the Research Says:** A brief discussion of the research that led to the strategy. This section should simply give the teacher some confidence in, and a deeper understanding of, the principle(s) being discussed as an instructional strategy.
- **Application:** A description of how this teaching strategy can be used in instructional settings.
- **Precautions and Possible Pitfalls:** Caveats intended to make possible reasonably flawless implementation of the teaching strategy. We try to help teachers avoid common difficulties before they occur.
- **Sources:** These are provided so that the reader may refer to the original research to discover in more detail the main points of the strategies, research, and classroom applications.

It is our hope that if those new to teaching students with disabilities accept some of these ideas, maybe they can avoid the “sink or swim” mentality that many of us experienced when we first started. We can make the “learning curve” less steep in those first few years. Veterans can also benefit from knowledge gained from the most recent research. Given the critical need for teachers now and in the future, we, as a profession, cannot afford to have potentially good teachers leaving the profession because

they don't feel supported, feel too overwhelmed, or suffer from early burnout or disillusionment.

For teachers reading this book for the first time, there may be strategies that apparently don't apply. As in many new endeavors, there may be a tendency to "not know what you don't know." We ask that you come back and revisit this book from time to time throughout the year. What may not be applicable the first time you read it may be of help at a later date. Veterans can refresh their teaching toolbox by scanning the range of strategies presented in the book and applying these strategies to their own classroom environment.

Teaching, and education in general, have never been more exciting or more challenging. Expectations for teachers, students, and schools continue to rise. The more resources teachers have at their fingertips to assist their practice along their educational journey, the better the outcome for us all. We hope all teachers will find this book useful and practical in defining and enhancing their teaching skills.

Sarah J. McNary
Neal A. Glasgow
Cathy D. Hicks

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the people at Corwin Press, especially Faye Zucker, Stacy Wagner, and Cyndee Callan for their complete collaboration and support.

Sarah McNary is indebted to coauthors Cathy Hicks and Neal Glasgow for their ongoing confidence and unwavering support. Their dedication to educational practice based on research rather than fashion is an inspiration. Deepest appreciation is due to the students with and without disabilities that she has worked with over the years. Working with all of them has been an honor and a delight. She has learned more about teaching from them than from anything covered in her training coursework. Loving gratitude goes to her husband, Dave, and her children, Erica and Alex, for their confidence. Last, her deepest thanks go to her mum for her gentle support; and her sisters, Jacqueline and Caroline, who are always ready and willing to listen as well as offer their help and solutions.

Neal Glasgow gratefully acknowledges the many special education teachers he has worked with over his career. As a career mainstream teacher, which includes a short journey into "ESL" science, one of his roles in special education has been that of an educational consumer. Everything he has learned about learning disabilities, accommodations, and everything in between has come from very knowledgeable and dedicated special education teachers. Their dedication and professionalism stand out