

Preface

You have probably heard of the Chinese proverb: Give me a fish, and I eat for a day; teach me to fish, and I eat for a lifetime. This statement reflects the learning strategies philosophy. The strategies approach teaches students *how to learn and be independent learners* rather than isolated skills or facts.

RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

Special and general educators from all grades and subjects are searching for ways to be more effective and efficient in their teaching. They are looking for ways to help students eat for a lifetime. School administrators and teachers must demonstrate that students are making academic and social-behavioral gains. For various reasons, some students are more challenging to teach, and they require more powerful instructional tools in order to make significant gains. The good news is that years of research—as well as our experiences teaching adolescents with mild disabilities—support the strategies approach.

Middle and high school students with disabilities are especially well suited for strategy instruction, because they are expected to meet rigorous general education curriculum standards and pass state and district tests. To accomplish these tasks, students need more than exposure to skills, which is an approach that helps them only to eat for a day. Rather, they need powerful and effective methods to help them understand, retain, and apply difficult skills and concepts. Because the strategy approach teaches students a new way of thinking, it requires more deliberate and explicit instruction (especially teacher modeling) and therefore takes more time than other approaches, but the results, we believe, are well worth it.

Secondary students are also unique because they have only a few more years remaining of their K–12 education. Unless secondary general and special education teachers use powerful instructional approaches, students may not make sufficient growth to meet goals on their individualized education program (IEP) or meet annual yearly progress goals

under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) / No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Further, without an approach that emphasizes independent learning, students are at a higher risk for dropping out of school and accepting and maintaining entry-level jobs over the course of their lifetime.

In addition to identifying a need for powerful instructional strategies, researchers have questioned existing instructional practices at the secondary level. One concern is that resource rooms often function as modified study halls, where students primarily complete homework for their general education classes. This often leaves little time for strategy instruction. Admittedly, students need support to maintain satisfactory progress in their general education classes. The challenge (and not an easy one) is for special educators to find the balance between helping students with their class work and teaching them strategies that help them become more independent in those classes and with future tasks.

Researchers have also noted confusion about the secondary special education teacher's role in co-taught classrooms. Many secondary special education co-teachers function as assistants in general education classrooms because they have not mastered the content to assume instructional parity with their general education co-teaching partner. The one-teach one-assist model is the most frequently used yet least effective co-teaching approach. This model often does not expose students to powerful instructional strategies. In contrast, special educators in co-taught general education classes can establish themselves as strategy experts by teaching efficient and effective learning, organizational, study, or behavioral strategies to all students in the class.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

With these thoughts in mind, we present this practical book on instructional strategies for secondary (middle and high school) students with mild disabilities. The first two chapters provide the context and background for teaching secondary special education. Chapter 1 introduces the array of instructional approaches used by secondary special educators. Of the approaches discussed in Chapter 1, the strategies approach is the focus of Chapter 2 because many experts in the field recommend this approach for initial skill instruction. Strategy instruction is the focus of this book.

The remaining chapters are of two kinds: assessment chapters and methods/strategies chapters. Using case studies and the strategies approach, each assessment chapter connects student informal assessment

results to IEPs, and in the subsequent corresponding methods/strategies chapter, evidence-based strategies are connected to IEPs. The assessment chapters provide background information about the skill or content, informal assessments, and the student's IEP. Methods/strategies chapters describe strategies teachers taught to meet the student's IEP goals in each case. Therefore, “matching” chapters (e.g., chapters 3 and 4 on vocabulary) make more sense if read together. Many chapters provide ready-to-use forms as well as teacher think-alouds for modeling the featured strategy. Subheadings direct readers to a specific strategy, and end-of-the chapter questions provide application activities. This book is also unique in that rather than providing short descriptions of numerous strategies, chapters provide a more intense look at specific evidence-based vocabulary, reading, writing, study, textbook, self-regulation, math, and science strategies.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Strategy instruction can occur in general, special, and Response to Intervention (RTI) settings and is appropriate for all learners (students with and without disabilities) who are learning common core state standards. Therefore, the informal assessments, suggested IEP goals and objectives, and think-alouds provide templates for you, whether you are teaching in inclusive, resource, or self-contained settings; consulting or co-teaching with general educators; designing RTI approaches; studying special or general education as a preservice teacher; or providing district-level leadership as an administrator, teacher-mentor, curriculum coordinator, or staff development planner. Therefore, regardless of your current position, we trust that you will find the ideas in this book informative as you teach your students to eat for a lifetime.