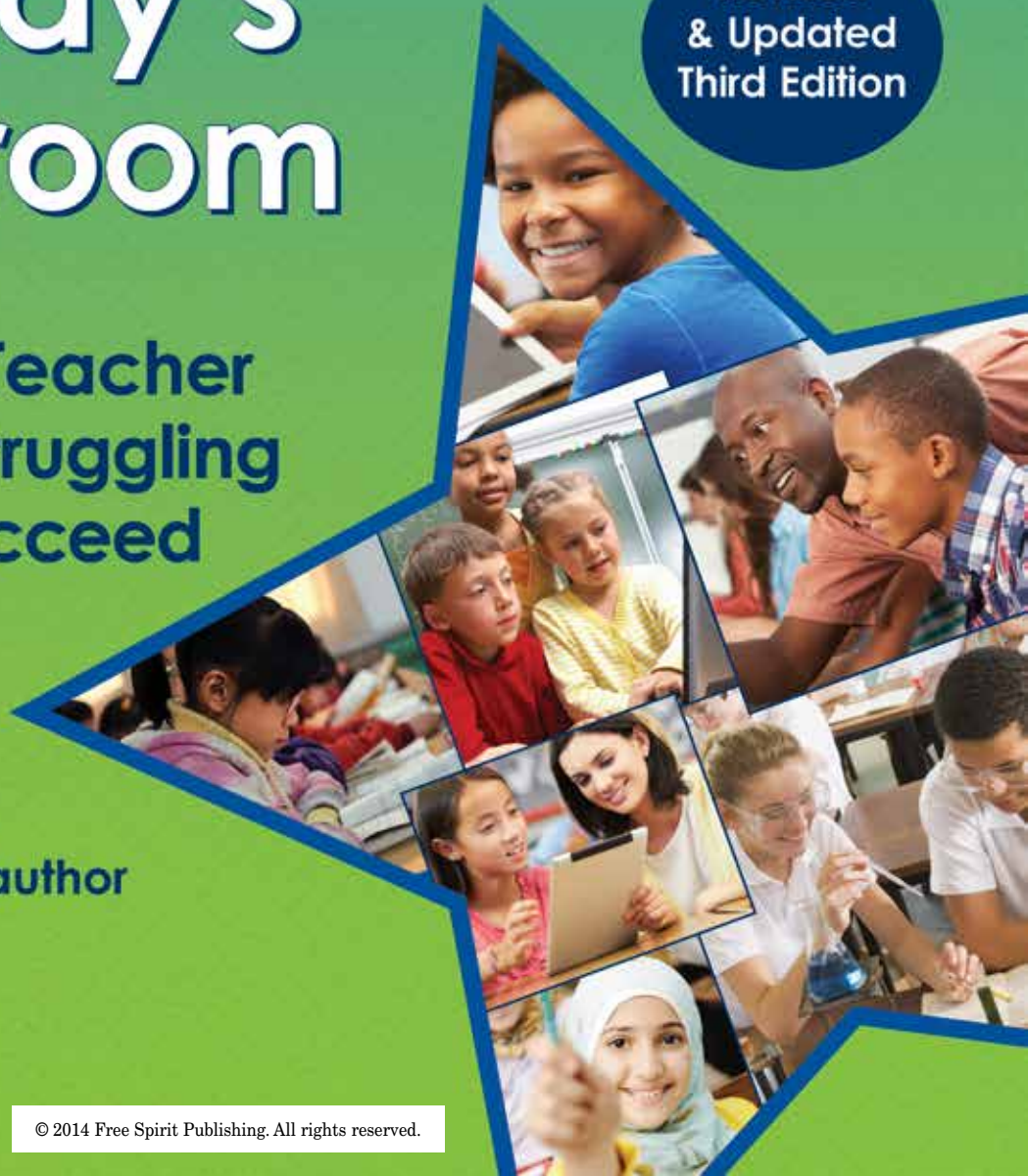Susan Winebrenner's

Teaching Kids with Learning Difficulties in Today's Classroom

Revised & Updated Third Edition

How Every Teacher Can Help Struggling Students Succeed

with contributing author
Lisa Kiss, M.Ed.

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with contributing author Lisa M. Kiss, M.Ed.

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This book is dedicated to all the teachers, parents, and grandparents who have struggled for many years, looking for ways to understand and help their children with learning difficulties experience success in their efforts to become educated.

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We are deeply grateful to the dedicated and creative educators who have so generously shared their teaching strategies in this book. In addition, thanks go to:

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Lisa thanks her husband, Doug, and her two children, Michelle and Brian, who showed how amazing they really are throughout this entire adventure by giving their complete support and unconditional love.

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Foreword
by Richard D. Lavoie

Parents and teachers need to come to the profound understanding that *kids go to school for a living.* It is their job. The classroom is their workplace. Their world. In fact, "school" is their entire identity.

Consider. When you bump into an 11-year-old from your community who you have not seen for a while, what is your greeting to him? *"Hi, Jason. How's school?"* His answer to that question determines his self-esteem, self-concept, and worldview.

Now imagine being a youngster who—through no fault or choice of his own—has marked difficulty learning at the same rate and in the same way that his classmates do. When you consider all this, it is small wonder that we find that kids with learning disorders are proportionally far more likely to abuse drugs, to have low self-esteem, participate in self-destructive behaviors, withdraw, act out . . . or drop out.

When I was trained in the early 1970s, these troubled and troubling kids were shunted off to special classes in isolated rooms in distant hallways. The inclusion initiatives of the 1980s changed all of that and now they "belong" to all of us. They are no longer the exclusive wards of special education; they now have a place in *every* classroom in *every* public school in America. And bravo for that!

But with the positive and humanistic goals of inclusion also come significant challenges for teachers. How do we deal effectively and fairly with these struggling students while—simultaneously—providing their classmates with the stimulating, fast-paced curriculum that they need and deserve?

This latest edition of *Teaching Kids with Learning Difficulties in Today's Classroom* by Susan Winebrenner and Lisa Kiss goes a long, long way toward answering that question. As I consumed this readable and user-friendly text, I was struck by one recurring theme: the antidote to misbehavior, frustration, anxiety, withdrawal, lack of motivation, and passivity for the "main-streamed" student is SUCCESS. If you were to do a word cloud on the pages of this book to find the word that the authors used most frequently, I would bet that "success" would be in the top five.

Ensuring that a child is successful in a classroom does *not* mean that you provide the student with an easy curriculum, non-fail strategies, and unearned praise. Quite the contrary. As Susan and Lisa so brilliantly demonstrate, the key to the student's *true* success is careful balance of support and challenge.

Support and *challenge* are the two cornerstones of effective special education. The teacher's job is to continually *challenge* the child by providing a demanding curriculum and, simultaneously, the *support* the student needs to meet those demands.

Support without challenge is meaningless. Challenge without support is destructive.

This balance of support and challenge is the essence of special education. Success must be a fundamental ingredient in every lesson plan. We must replace the timeworn phrase "If he only tried harder he would do better" with the more effective phrase, "If he only *did* better he would try *harder.*"

This theme is embossed on every page of this extraordinary book. The authors cover all aspects of special needs, from testing to reading to behavior management to organizational skills to homework. Particularly outstanding is their innovative approach to learning styles that goes far beyond the traditional VAKT (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile) approach that the reader may be familiar with.

So many curriculum guides begin with the premise that all the researchers, practitioners, and experts who preceded the author were wrong and the author has *the* solitary answer and solutions. Susan Winebrenner and Lisa Kiss take a far more enlightened view by building upon and expanding on some classic curricular approaches with a generous nod to the original authors. We all stand on the shoulders of giants.

This book will be an invaluable guide to the educator who is willing to commit the time and effort required to truly meet the unique needs of kids who struggle. This journey is not an easy one, but what important journey is?

With every good wish,

Richard D. Lavoie, M.A., M.Ed.
Author of *The Motivation Breakthrough* and *It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend*

Introduction

Has there ever been a more challenging time to be a teacher? Teachers face constant pressure to be sure all students can demonstrate they are learning at expected levels and to embrace and master ever-changing teaching models in a short period of time. Add to that the challenges that come with having a widening range of student achievement levels in any class, and you can understand how absolutely amazing teachers are!

In order to be a successful teacher for students who are struggling to learn, you need to understand that these kids are not necessarily less intelligent or less capable than the successful students. Many are simply less *lucky,* because they have rarely experienced a match between the way their brains comfortably process information and the way they have been taught. (Chapter 3 will tell you more about this hypothesis.) Although many of these kids have been labeled "learning disabled," a more accurate description is that they are "learning *strategy* disabled." Many have never been taught strategies that are compatible with the way they think and learn. Once we teach them the appropriate techniques that help them compensate for their areas of weakness, their learning problems diminish significantly, and achievement success is in their grasp.

When the right methods are used, it is not necessary to water down content or repeat it endlessly. For example, for many years students who failed to learn to read with a phonics-oriented program were given remedial phonics. The assumption was that everyone had to understand phonics to be able to read. When we taught outlining, we assumed that all kids should learn it the *right* way, in a sequential process. Now that we understand more about how the human brain functions, we know that rather than remediate, we must work to make matches happen between the content to be learned and the learning styles (modalities) of our students. When the right matches are found, the message we send to struggling students is "You can be successful learners by using the learning strategies your brains find most comfortable and can more easily understand."

In addition to the obvious benefit of getting better achievement from students with learning difficulties,

discovering how your students learn and teaching different kids in different ways provides other advantages. The consistent availability of differentiation opportunities shows your students that being different is just fine. It shows that you understand all kids don't learn the same way and that you happily accept all students exactly the way they are. Knowing that makes it less necessary for many students to mask their weaknesses with inappropriate behavior, so behavior may improve over time. Acts of bullying may also decrease, because it is harder to tease or ridicule people who are proud of their individuality.

> Although many of these kids have been labeled "learning disabled," a more accurate description is that they are "learning *strategy* disabled." Once we teach them the appropriate techniques that help them compensate for their areas of weakness, their learning problems diminish significantly, and achievement success is in their grasp.

Regardless of the curriculum you are teaching, the differentiation strategies described in this book will facilitate better learning success for students with learning difficulties. Meeting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) should provide numerous opportunities for you to use many of your favorite teaching methods—with a new emphasis on providing rigorous learning experiences for all your students, not just those who are advanced. The standards include many opportunities for students to interact with activities that integrate content areas and stress higher-level thinking where appropriate. For example, math lessons might correlate to the study of a U.S. region or to the implications of worldwide population growth while the U.S. birthrate is declining. The possibilities are endless.

Never lose sight of the fact that a crucial 21st-century job survival skill is a positive attitude toward being retrained. Retraining is a lot like going back to school. All the students you teach will have to change careers numerous times before they retire. The people

who will be successful at this are the ones who enjoy their formal schooling and therefore look forward to becoming students again. So our goal as teachers should be to instill in all our students a drive to be lifelong learners.

> Never lose sight of the fact that a crucial 21st-century job survival skill is a positive attitude toward being retrained.

A Positive Learning Experience Leads to a Love of Learning

To put differentiation in a positive light, we have used the following differentiation rationale for students with learning difficulties, which you might choose to share with your colleagues. If they agree with most or all of the statements, they are demonstrating readiness to do their very best to guarantee a consistently positive learning experience for all their students, including those with learning difficulties.

1. All students should experience learning at their own personal challenge level every day.

2. High self-esteem, and therefore learning productivity, comes from being successful with tasks the students perceived would be difficult.*

3. When students feel they have some control over what happens in school, they are more likely to be productive. This feeling of control comes from opportunities to make choices. Teachers can make choices available by offering several options for the type of expected task or product.

4. When learning modalities are attended to and curriculum is challenging and meaningful, students are more likely to choose appropriate behaviors.

5. The first place an educator should look to explain inappropriate behavior is the curriculum. Is it appropriately challenging? Does it incorporate students' interests wherever possible? Does the student understand why it must be learned? Does it allow access through students' learning modality strengths?

6. All students must feel they are respected and accepted for who they are and what they need in order to be successful learners.

This book presents a wide variety of teaching methods, so you can find the right match for every student in your classroom. We have collected these practical, easy-to-use strategies, techniques, and activities from a variety of sources. Actually, that is what makes this book unique. You don't have to do your own research

on what works for teaching kids how to read or how to remember their math facts. We've done the research for you. This book contains the most effective methods we have found for helping students with learning problems become much more successful learners. Simply diagnose the learning weakness a particular student exhibits, find the right chapter in this book, and match the strategies to the student. Using these strategies, you can help bring learners up to the level of the content rather than lowering expectations for some students.

All the strategies in this book have been proven effective when intervening with students whose academics or behavior do not reflect expectations. You will find these methods are effective with any curriculum type you may be using. They make curriculum differentiation much easier for you and more helpful for your students.

Throughout this book, we emphasize our belief that high self-esteem can be achieved only through hard work and genuine accomplishments. As author and educator Dr. Sylvia Rimm says, "The surest path to high self-esteem is to be successful at something one perceived would be difficult." Rimm goes on to say, "Each time we steal a student's struggle, we steal the opportunity for them to build self-confidence. They must learn to do difficult things to feel good about themselves."

When we combine Rimm's work with that of Dr. Carol Dweck, we fully understand the importance of training our students to welcome, rather than resist, hard work. Both experts agree that convincing students to welcome learning challenges is the key to their developing a lifelong appreciation for the link between serious effort and desired outcomes. When we praise young people for their effort and hard work, rather than their outcomes, such as grades or class rank, students are much more likely to develop the belief that hard work is more important for success in school and in life than innate ability.

Dweck's research is described in her book *Mindset*. She has found that learners who believe they have a fixed amount of ability have a *fixed mindset* and may conclude that they can never meet their desired goals because they lack the essential ability. Her work cautions us as adults to avoid using labels to describe young people. Adults can create fixed mindsets by calling attention to a person's innate advanced abilities or to a student's persistent trouble with creating successful learning outcomes.

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*Rimm, 2008.

Labeling students sends the message that they have only a certain amount of intelligence and must be careful not to use it all up. However, students who attribute their success in school to their own hard work learn that they have more control over learning outcomes than they originally thought, and they exhibit a *growth mindset.* They notice the link between their willingness to work hard and the likelihood of getting the outcomes they desire. When we emphasize this link, students are more motivated to work hard to learn, and they are more likely to stay engaged in a learning experience, believing that hard work will lead to better outcomes. When you combine Rimm's and Dweck's research with the "Goal Setting" section in this book (page 61), you will see amazing improvement in student attitudes and learning outcomes.

Nothing is quite as powerful as our ability to communicate high expectations for success to our students. Over the years, many studies have shown that we get what we expect. For example, the Pygmalion study in the 1960s demonstrated that kids could improve dramatically if their teachers were told they would do extremely well in a given year.*

No one knows for certain how many students in our past have been labeled "slow" or "remedial" whose learning outcomes might have been improved by choosing a teaching strategy that was more brain-compatible. For example, some kids face remediation due to their lack of fluency with multiplication facts year after year. However, when they are taught finger multiplication (described on page 162), many can learn the facts in just a few days.

One of the most helpful features of this book is that the strategies may be used with *any* students who are frustrated in their attempts to learn *any* academic content. Keep trying strategies until you find the right match for that particular student. Really! The strategies are generic and are presented as a menu of options for you to use as you empower *all* kids to become successful in your classroom. They are just as effective with students in poverty and with English language learners (ELLs) as they are with kids who have been diagnosed with learning difficulties.

The Common Core State Standards bring many of the guidelines formerly associated with gifted education to regular classrooms, at various levels of complexity, thus setting higher expectations for all students. Of course, differentiation will still be necessary, but as the curriculum for all students increases in rigor, students and parents will no longer complain that only the kids at the top get to do the "good stuff." With Common Core, *all* students will be engaged in learning activities they feel are stimulating and respectful ways to spend their learning time.

You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by trying some of the methods described in this book. You know that your struggling students will continue to struggle if they don't get the help they need. When you find and use strategies that work, teaching and learning become mutually successful experiences.

We promise these methods will work for you and your students. They have been used by us and by many other classroom teachers with delightful success. After all, this is the third edition of this book. It has been in constant print and has been read widely since 1996. We have received feedback from many educators telling us that they have used multiple strategies from this book with great success with many types of students. Often, teachers have told us they wish they had known about some of these strategies throughout their entire teaching careers.

This book will help you become an even better teacher than you already are. All you have to remember is this: *If students are not learning the way you are teaching them, find and use a more appropriate method, so you can teach them the way they learn.*

What's New in This Edition

If you are familiar with earlier editions of this book, you may have noticed that the title has changed slightly. The previous edition was titled *Teaching Kids with Learning Difficulties in the Regular Classroom.* The new title reflects this edition's emphasis on current teaching and learning philosophies and practice. *Teaching Kids with Learning Difficulties in Today's Classroom* is your guide to specific strategies you may use to be sure your teaching and learning practices are compatible with current thought and newly emerging curricula. Specifically, this book is updated in the following areas:

1. Learning difficulties: Learning difficulties are described as "disabilities" by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5).* This manual is considered the universal authority for psychiatric diagnoses. *DSM-5* describes specific categories of mental health disorders and descriptions of each. It has long been used to help professionals in the fields of education and mental health recognize the many different categories of behaviors that identify persons who need specific interventions to put them on the road to emotional or academic recovery.

One of the most significant changes in *DSM-5* is that Asperger's syndrome no longer exists as a separate condition. It is included as part of the autism spectrum

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*Rosenthal, Robert, and Lenore Jacobson. *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development*. Norwalk, CT: Crown House Publishing, 2003.

disorder (ASD) category. As you probably know, the number of kids who qualify in the category of ASD has exploded. In 2014, experts estimated that 1 child in 68 births would have ASD. To address the rapid growth in ASD diagnoses and the expectation of some parents for full inclusion in regular education programs, we have included sidebars throughout called "Unlocking Autism." They are devoted to students with ASD. They describe how teaching and learning strategies impact students who are on the autism spectrum, and some other students as well. Additional in-depth information about this disorder is in Chapter 2.

2. Common Core: At this book's writing, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are the emerging national initiative. They represent the first time in U.S. history that most of the states have agreed on the essential standards that students in preK through 12th grade must learn in order to be prepared for the workplace of today and the near future. These standards have moved away from the skill-based focus of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Although NCLB's expectation that all students make "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) produced measurable benefits, many in education were frustrated that NCLB left little room for higher-level thinking or problem-based learning experiences. In contrast, CCSS focuses on teaching skills through the study of much more rigorous content and more meaningful, exciting learning experiences. Our recommendations for ways to make that happen for your students with learning difficulties are found throughout this new edition, especially in Chapters 3 through 8.

Although the CCSS are being implemented in many states, some readers will not be experiencing them as soon as others. We want to reassure you that the strategies and information in this book are timeless and will be useful regardless of the content you are teaching. You will always need differentiation for some students for various reasons. This book provides dozens of user-friendly interventions you can use with little preparation. These interventions will be highly effective with any of your students who experience frustration in keeping up with the adopted curriculum.

3. Response to intervention: Response to intervention (RTI) is a program that was created to help educators achieve successful learning outcomes with all students. The goal of RTI is to increase rigor in both teaching and learning and to provide the structure through which differentiation can occur. Three tiers of instruction are geared to meet all levels of students' academic needs. Whether a student has learning difficulties or is proficient at grade level, high-achieving, or gifted, RTI helps you collaborate with your colleagues to be certain all students can eventually demonstrate mastery of any required curriculum. More RTI information may be found in Chapters 2 through 8.

4. Professional learning communities (PLCs): You may have heard the saying *There is nothing new under the sun.* Many years ago, Susan taught in a graduate program in Illinois that prepared candidates for their master's degrees in ways that were highly interactive and relied a great deal on candidates coaching each other throughout the process. Back then, the process was called action research. Susan watched it transform her graduate students into much more professional practitioners with their students. That experience caused Susan to always integrate a peer coaching component into all the professional development work she does.

> Although the CCSS are being implemented in many states, some readers will not be experiencing them as soon as others. We want to reassure you that the strategies and information in this book are timeless and will be useful regardless of the content you are teaching.

In PLCs, members use group meetings to discuss and refine their interventions with their students. That ongoing flow of ideas and suggestions between the PLCs and the classroom events greatly increases the sense of professionalism in the participants. This book is structured for ease of use in PLCs, and the digital content includes a PDF presentation to facilitate that process. In addition, we have written a PLC/Book Study Guide which can be downloaded at www.freespirit.com.

5. Technology: For years, most of students' interaction with computers took place outside the regular classroom, usually in a library media room or a computer lab. Current best practice requires students to use technology as an integral part of the learning process. So the Common Core has come at the exact right time, since its expectations are greatly enhanced by students' abilities to get right to the primary sources in their learning of all subjects and topics. Technology information is included in most chapters of this book, with a special in-depth section in Chapter 4. Sidebars titled "Tech Tips" appear throughout the book. These describe technologies that are very helpful for kids with learning difficulties.

6. Behaviors of students with special needs: In the years since the first two editions of this book were published, the emphasis on behavior has moved on to school-wide positive behavior management models. In

this edition, we focus on behavior adjustment strategies linked to RTI in a model called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). According to the national PBIS website (www.pbis.org), PBIS is an implementation framework designed to enhance academic and social behavior outcomes for all students by emphasizing the use of data for informing decisions about the selection, implementation, and progress monitoring of evidence-based behavioral practices. Attention is focused on creating and sustaining positive behaviors school-wide in ways that are mutually rewarding for everyone in the school community, including on school buses and playgrounds and in halls and the classrooms themselves. All the information in Chapter 10 about behavior is compatible with the PBIS Guidelines and IEP Positive Behavior Support Plans.

Here's a glimpse of the valuable information you'll find in this book:

- **Chapter 1: Creating Active Learning for All Students** contains tips for helping all students feel welcome in your classroom, since kids who feel like outsiders are candidates for misbehavior and underachievement. It presents tried-and-true ways to get all students involved in all learning activities.

- **Chapter 2: Understanding Learning Difficulties and Intervening Effectively** describes various types of learning difficulties and offers suggestions for responding to students' special learning needs.

- **Chapter 3: Using Students' Learning Styles (Modalities) to Facilitate Learning Success** helps you enhance the learning success of your struggling students by matching your teaching to their learning modalities.

- **Chapter 4: Ensuring That All Students Make At Least One Year's Academic Growth During Each School Year** presents state-of-the-art ideas on how learning happens and how teachers can create learning success for all students.

- **Chapter 5: Teaching Integrated Language Arts, Including Literature, Sounds, and Writing** provides numerous concrete strategies to use with students whose reading fluency and comprehension need improvement in an integrated language arts approach.

- **Chapter 6: Reading and Learning with Informational Text** offers strategies for students who face many challenges in figuring out the important information and the meaning of content in informational texts such as in science, social studies, and so on.

- **Chapter 7: All Students Can Be Successful in Math** is full of easy-to-learn strategies for students who are working behind their grade-level peers in math.

- **Chapter 8: Using Assessments to Support Student Learning** contains strategies for both formative and summative assessments.

- **Chapter 9: Improving Students' Executive Functioning Skills** contains many practical strategies to help students become better organized and use effective study skills.

- **Chapter 10: Helping Students Choose Appropriate Behaviors** offers ideas for successful behavior management by involving students in monitoring their own behavior.

- **Chapter 11: Helping Parents Become Partners in Their Children's Learning** offers suggestions for involving parents as part of the learning team. It describes several ways to reach out to parents—including those who don't seem interested—and make them welcome at school.

Each chapter also includes a "Questions and Answers" section with responses to the questions we hear most often from educators. The book concludes with a "References and Resources" section that points you toward additional sources of information and materials. These are the best books, articles, videos, organizations, associations, programs, and resources we have found, and we encourage you to seek them out.

Finally, all the reproducible forms in the book are provided as digital content available to you online; you may customize many of the forms for your classroom and students. Also included in the digital file are additional content organization charts from our work in the field and a PDF presentation useful for introducing and exploring the book in study groups, PLCs, and other professional development settings. You may download the content and print the documents when you need them. See page xii for information on how to access the digital content.

Teacher Effectiveness Leads to Student Success

Evidence shows that certain programs and practices have been successful in the last decade in significantly improving achievement scores for students who were previously unsuccessful in school. Dr. Martin Haberman, author of the book *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty*, has documented the importance of teachers

having the ability to consistently use highly effective teaching methods. He believes that "for children in poverty, success in school is a matter of life and death, and they need teachers who are mature people who have a great deal of knowledge about their subject matter, but who can also relate to them as persons." Haberman also documents how essential it is for struggling students to have highly effective teachers. He is convinced that if struggling students have ineffective teachers two years in a row, the students can never recover from the deficits they have experienced.

Finally, research findings from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) database demonstrate that the effectiveness of the teacher is the major determinant of student academic progress. In a 1996 study, William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers tracked thousands of elementary students' test scores year to year and used them to rate teachers as "effective" or "ineffective." They found a 50 percent difference over three years in the average test score changes of the two groups. The kids who had the effective teachers scored significantly better.*

The negative consequences of an ineffective teacher to a student's learning progress cannot be underestimated. The quality of classroom teachers is the most important factor that a school district can influence. It's more important than class size or school facilities.

What does this mean to you, the reader? Since you are reading this book, you are demonstrating that you are a person who always seeks to be as effective as possible. You understand that it is useless to continue to use strategies that are not working, and you are willing to try another strategy when you have reasonable hope for better learning outcomes. In our opinion, that is the definition of an effective teacher.

The strategies described in this book will help students with learning difficulties be more successful with the adopted curriculum of all states, whether or not your state is using CCSS content and suggested practices.

We believe this book can make teaching more pleasant and effective for you, and it can make learning more enjoyable and successful for your students with learning difficulties. We'd love to receive any feedback that you care to share with us. If you have feedback to offer or questions that are not addressed in this book, write to us c/o Free Spirit Publishing, 217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299. Send us email at help4kids@freespirit.com.

Let's get started.

Susan Winebrenner and Lisa Kiss

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*Sanders, William L., and June C. Rivers. "Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement." TVAAS, November 1996.

CHAPTER 1
Creating Active Learning for All Students

Do you remember how you felt on the first day of a new school year when you were a student? Can you recall the questions that were spinning through your brain? "Will the teacher be nice to me? Will the other kids like me? Will anyone want to sit with me at lunch? What if the work is too hard?" If you can relate to those concerns, you can easily understand how most of your students feel as they enter your class.

Students with learning difficulties have the same worries, greatly magnified. Purposefully creating experiences that help students feel welcome and cared about in your classroom will go a long way toward providing a supportive learning environment for all kids.

Welcoming Activities

Say Hello to Someone Who . . .*

On the first day of class, students should participate in activities that help them learn about one another. "Say Hello to Someone Who . . ." is an enjoyable way to share and discover interesting information. Afterward, all students will know the names of several other students. Recognition in the halls, in other classes, in the cafeteria, and on the playground helps make each student feel like part of a group, which may prevent alienation.

Give each student a copy of the "Say Hello to Someone Who . . ." handout (page 19). Allow 15

minutes for students to circulate around the room and collect signatures from people who match descriptions on their handouts. (*Examples:* If Emilio stayed in town all summer, he's a match for the first box on the handout and signs his name in that box. If Sarah went on a trip, she signs her name in that box.) Explain that each student can sign another student's handout only once, and no students can sign their own handouts. All students should try to collect as many signatures as they can. After one student has signed another student's handout, both say, "Hello, [NAME], glad to meet you!"

Getting to Know You

Whenever you ask students to work in groups, give them time to get to know one another. Here's one good way to do this.

Distribute stick-on nametags. Have students write their names in the center. Then have them write answers to the following questions in each of the four corners (or substitute your own questions):

- In the top left corner: "Where were you born?"

- In the top right corner: "What is your favorite food?"

- In the bottom left corner: "What is your favorite thing to do?"

- In the bottom right corner: "What is something you are very proud of?"

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*This activity and the handout on page 19 are adapted from *Patterns for Thinking, Patterns for Transfer* by Robin Fogarty and James Bellanca. © 1991 IRI Skylight Publishing, Inc., Palatine, IL. Used with permission.

After students complete their nametags and put them on, have them pair up, interview their partners, then introduce their partners to four to six other students.

The Name Game

Have students sit in a circle. Explain that one student will say his first name, then briefly describe one thing he enjoys doing. (*Example:* "Bobby. Shooting hoops.") Going around the circle, the next student will repeat what was just said, then add her first name and something she enjoys doing. (*Example:* "Bobby. Shooting hoops. Maria. Going for bike rides.") The third student will repeat what the first two students said, then add his own information, and so on around the circle.

Make sure the students understand that they must repeat everything that has been said before adding their information. **Tips:** If you know that some kids have memory problems, arrange for them to take their turn early in the game. If you think smaller circles are better, divide the group in two.

Interest Survey

During the first week of school, send home copies of the "Interest Survey" handout (pages 20–21) as a homework assignment. Tell students they can ask family members for help in completing their surveys.

Read the returned surveys carefully and refer to them often throughout the year. You will find many ways you can use the information from the surveys. (*Examples:* Suggest school projects based on the surveys. For kids who seem *unmotivated* to learn, take a few seconds each day to speak to them about their interests outside of school. This shows that you like and respect them even when they are not being successful in their schoolwork.)

Picture This: A Gallery of Ideas

If possible, obtain students' school pictures from last year and make photocopies to use with some of these suggested activities. Or take your own photos.

- Give all students space on a wall or bulletin board to display anything they want—photographs of themselves, their families, or their friends; work they feel proud of; or other categories. This eliminates the anguish struggling students experience when their work never makes it to the "Our Best Work" display.

- Have students make personalized bookmarks with their photos at the top, then decorate their bookmarks however they choose.

- With permission from the students' families, make copies of students' photos, add addresses and phone numbers, and create a classroom directory for kids to keep at home.

- Take and display photos of the class engaged in various activities. Make sure that all kids are included.

Unlocking Autism 🔒

Autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, affects both verbal and nonverbal communication as well as social skills development. The most common communication and social problems include difficulty in making friends, verbal misunderstandings in conversation, difficulty in reading body language and understanding emotions, limited or repetitive speech, and unusual responses to the environment. Consult page 32 for details.

Throughout this book, you will see "Unlocking Autism" sidebars specifically devoted to strategies for students with autism. We've included this information to help our readers, who are dealing with the rapid growth of ASD diagnoses and some families' expectations for full inclusion in regular education programs.

People Packages*

The "People Packages" activity has been used successfully in primary grades to help kids learn to respect and appreciate individual differences. Many adults may remember this activity as part of the Developing Understanding of Self and Others (DUSO) program they experienced in school as kids. Its goal is to help kids understand the crucial importance of teamwork by considering that all people on a team have important contributions to make to the team effort.

1. Collect a variety of nice items (*examples:* book, toy, costume jewelry, game) and ordinary objects (*examples:* spoon, paper napkin, sock). Wrap some of the ordinary objects in beautiful packages and the nice presents in plain brown paper or newspaper and string. The wrapped packages should be different sizes and shapes. Put them in a large carton and bring them to class.

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*Marlene A. Cummings, Fitchburg, Wisconsin, author of *Individual Differences*, published by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1989. Used with permission. Demonstration by Doug Peterson available on YouTube.

2. Have the students sit in a circle. Spread out the packages in front of them. Ask, "Can you guess which packages have the nicest presents inside?" Most students will guess the beautifully wrapped packages.

3. Have students open the packages. Discuss with them how we can't tell what's inside a package by looking at the outside.

4. Call on several students, one at a time, to stand beside you while the other students describe them—in a nice way—as if they were packages. The other students should mention hair color, eyes, height, clothing, skin color, and so on. Then have the students standing beside you share with the class something interesting about themselves that doesn't show in their outer "packaging." These might be thoughts, feelings, experiences, pet peeves, personal likes or dislikes, hobbies, interests, or talents.

5. Draw this analogy for the students: "Just as we can't tell what's inside a wrapped package by looking at the outside, we can't tell what's inside a person, such as thoughts, feelings, or personality, from appearance alone."

Repeat the "People Packages" experience intermittently throughout the year, especially if students engage in name-calling.

Ready, Set, Go

Sometime during the first week of school, take your students into the gym. Have them form a line facing a wall 20 or 30 feet away. They should all be the same distance from the wall. Tell them that when you say "go," they should all run as fast as they can to the wall. Say that as soon as someone reaches the wall, you'll blow a whistle as a signal for everyone to freeze where they are.

Give the "go" signal. As soon as the first person touches the wall, blow the whistle. Then say, "Now notice where you are standing and where you started. Walk until you get to the wall." When everyone is at the wall, say, "We all started in the same place, and we all ended up in the same place, but we got there at our own pace. We'll do the same with our schoolwork this year. So don't be concerned about anyone's pace but your own."

Walk in Your Own Shoes*

Exchange shoes with one of the students. The more extreme the exchange, the better (*examples:* high heels for high-tops, large loafers for small sneakers). With the rest of the class as your audience, try to walk around the room in each other's shoes. Feel free to be silly. Discuss why people should wear their own shoes.

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*Linda Reynolds, teacher; Elgin, Illinois.

Tell the students that their job is to make sure that the "shoes" they are asked to wear (the learning tasks you provide for them) "fit" them. Explain that your job as their teacher is to see that they are always wearing the correct shoes—that is, that students are doing learning tasks that provide the most comfort and that best enable them to move forward. Students should be concerned only about the shoes they themselves are wearing. They are not to worry about anybody else's shoes. If their shoes don't feel right for a particular learning activity, they should talk to you.

More Ways to Create a Welcoming Environment

1. Every day, greet your students by name at the door to your classroom. For students who are very shy or who are not working up to grade-level standards, use information from the "Interest Survey" on pages 20–21 to speak to them about something in which they are personally interested. This communicates that you like and respect them even if they are not doing well academically.

2. Students of all ages love to put personal touches on their classroom to make it their home away from home. (*Example:* One teacher writes her room number in outlined block letters on a large sheet of tagboard, cuts out the numbers, then cuts each number into a jigsaw pattern. Each student gets one piece of the jigsaw puzzle. The students illustrate their pieces in ways that describe them. The teacher reassembles the pieces and displays them.)

3. Use your students' names in scenarios and examples you give to illustrate different subject areas.

4. Avoid using labels to describe your students, especially those with learning difficulties. (*Example:* Instead of saying, "Will the kids who need help with their reading come to this table?" simply say, "Harold, Jessie, and Sam, we need you to work with Miss Armstrong at this table for a while.")

5. Work with the school to make sure that the student handbook meets the needs of all students, including new students and those with physical or cognitive difficulties. (*Examples:* Include maps to the cafeteria, office, school counselor, library, and so on. Indicate elevators, ramps, and doors that are wheelchair accessible. If your school doesn't publish a student handbook, perhaps this could be a class project.

6. Contact families early in the school year with good news—something positive you have noticed about their child. For students with low academic skills, you might

comment on personality traits or behaviors that have made a positive contribution to the class. It's much easier to get family assistance with school-related problems after they have heard something positive from you. All students will feel more welcome in your class when they realize you are looking hard to find their positive qualities.

7. Consistently model and teach respect for individual differences and needs. (*Example:* When you consistently offer differentiated learning tasks, you model respect for individual differences and demonstrate that you expect all students to follow your lead.)

8. Identify and honor individual learning modalities and personality strengths. (See Chapter 3 for specific strategies and suggestions.) Once you understand your students' learning modalities, and once you allow them to demonstrate what they are learning in a manner compatible with their strengths, it's easier to notice what they do well.

9. Avoid emphasizing competition and individual grades. Encourage students to help one another as they learn together on all phases except certain assessments.

10. Take every opportunity to show that mistakes are valuable for the learning opportunities they present. (*Example:* When you notice that someone seems confused, say, "You're confused? Good for you! How exciting. Since confusion comes before learning, we know that learning will happen soon."*)

11. Help students maintain their dignity and sense of worth at all times. (*Example:* When you see someone doing something wrong, ask, "What are you getting ready to do?" instead of "What are you doing?" Most kids will stop their inappropriate behavior or switch to a more appropriate task, but the way you ask allows them to maintain their dignity.*)

12. Avoid words or situations that could be interpreted as put-downs. Some of the things we say in jest are not funny to kids. (*Example:* Something as innocent as "Let's look around and see who we are waiting for now" sends a message that it's okay to tease a poky student. It's much better to say, "I'm happy to see so many of you ready to move on to the next subject," and hope that poky kids will get the message. It's also helpful to put your hand on a student's shoulder and say, "We're moving on to math now. Please get ready." Private verbal transactions are always better than public reminders.

13. At the end of the school year, have your students write letters to kids who will be coming into your classroom next year. Explain that the letters should help the new students understand you, the rules of your classroom, and the special things that make your classroom exciting and wonderful. Collect and read the letters. Note any ideas that you might want to incorporate into your teaching. Make plans to distribute them to your new students at the start of the next school year.

Welcoming English Language Learners into the Classroom

English language learners or ELL students—also known as students with limited English proficiency (LEP), students learning English as a second language (ESL), and students in language minorities—are a rapidly growing population in many schools. Who would have imagined that one day we'd hear nearly 400 different languages in our classrooms, including Spanish, Hmong, Cantonese, Arabic, Tagalog, Farsi, Lakota, and Urdu? Here are several ways you can welcome ELL students into your classroom:

1. Pronounce the student's name; check pronunciation with the student or family.

2. Introduce the student to several classmates, one at a time. Seat the newcomer beside an introduced classmate. Seat the pair near your desk for a while. Make sure that the ELL student has company during recess and lunch.

3. Allow new students some time for silent observation of the class and its routines. Take time daily to talk to new students, even if you need to enlist language help from another person.

4. Within a week, expect new students to participate orally in class with the help of their partners, using the Name Card Method. (See "The Name Card Method," page 12.) It doesn't even matter if the partners actually understand each other. The new students will feel more like group members if you expect them to participate right away than if you wait until their language is more fluent.

5. Keep a routine to your instruction, and be consistent in how you give directions. Review routines often.

6. If two or more students who speak the same language work together on their learning tasks, they may feel more comfortable and be more productive.

7. Label everything in the classroom in English.

8. Use picture dictionaries.

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*Rita McNeeley, teacher, Port Huron, Michigan.

9. Present new ideas by starting with the concrete and moving to the abstract.

10. Use slower speech, occasional pauses, and controlled vocabulary, but do not talk louder or sound condescending. Avoid idioms and figures of speech. Allow extra time for students to process language.

11. Avoid yes-or-no questions. Always have students show you what they know or understand. Demonstrate a variety of methods students can use to show their understanding of a given topic.

12. Let students know when you do not understand them. Suggest that students draw pictures or symbols to communicate with you until they have better writing or speaking skills in English. When there is a communication issue, use printed letters rather than cursive to clarify. Use colors to draw attention to word or phrase features to which students should pay special attention.

13. Structure lessons so that students can demonstrate understanding using various language arts skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening).

14. Give assignments one at a time, using short steps.

15. Reteach, repeat, and review frequently, making adjustments as needed. If a teaching strategy does not work for a specific student, always choose a different approach for reteaching.

16. Be aware of and modify approaches you use in assignment and test directions. ELL students often don't understand terms such as *match*, *identify*, *discuss*, and *compare* until the task is demonstrated.

17. Maintain high expectations. Expect students to do high-quality work and grade them on forward progress. Provide specific praise for things students do correctly, as well as for not giving up easily and for being willing to work hard.

18. Teach, model, and expect all students to accept their peers' mistakes without laughing or teasing. Karen Brown, a teacher from Phoenix, always tells her whole class, "It's not about the grades; it's about the learning." She has her students chant the second part of that phrase in unison. Students quickly understand this important message.

19. Provide adaptations for all assignments regarding the number of examples students must do, the amount of time they should work on a specific task, and the amount of help they can receive while working. ELL students often respond positively to the same strategies we use successfully with visual, tactile, or kinesthetic learners.

20. Whenever possible, use graphic organizers with consistent topics. See "The Content Organization Chart" (page 144).

21. Provide hands-on materials and manipulatives.

22. Structure activities so students can apply their newly acquired understanding.

23. Hold the same behavioral expectations for ELL students as you do for other class members.

24. Create opportunities for students to share their native languages and customs with the class.

25. Encourage families to speak or read in their native language at home. For school events you want families to attend, send notices home in the family's native language, and indicate whether translators or childcare will be available.

26. Provide different types of assessments at different levels of literacy development to measure growth in understanding.

27. Find and use any available technology that will speed up the student's English acquisition.

Many of these suggestions are also helpful for making new English-speaking students feel welcome in your classroom.

Getting Everyone Involved in Learning

Because all students are capable learners, you as a teacher must demonstrate that all students are expected to fully participate in all activities. Sometimes you will want to offer options for students to choose from, but everyone should be involved in learning. Students who are allowed to disengage from active participation in your class are less likely to be successful than those who are highly engaged.

> Because all students are capable learners, you as a teacher must demonstrate that all students are expected to fully participate in all activities.

Some of our teaching behaviors actually encourage *dis*engagement. When certain students we call on don't respond and we move on to other students, those we leave may assume that we don't see them as capable. They may not realize that our reason for moving on is to save them from embarrassment. Our good intentions send the wrong message.

The Name Card Method*

The Name Card Method communicates our expectation that *all* students will be active in class discussions. It gives kids a chance to develop friendships and fulfills the following expectations:

- No students will ever be able to hide from you again by being uninvolved.

- No students will ever be able to dominate class discussions.

- Blurting or calling out answers will dramatically decrease.

- Listening behaviors will dramatically improve.

- You will have nearly 100 percent participation in all discussions.

- You will not unconsciously engage in ethnic, cultural, or gender bias as you lead discussions.

- Students of all ages and abilities will find this method preferable to traditional hand raising and will even remind you to use the name cards if you forget. Most students recognize how fair this method is to all.

Well-meaning teachers often unintentionally communicate low expectations for some students by always asking them the easier questions or by letting them off the hook during class discussions. Unfortunately, the message students get when we do not hold them completely accountable is that we do not really believe they can handle the material. The Name Card Method makes certain that we communicate only the highest expectations—that all students will be able to participate successfully in discussions.

Getting Ready

1. Tell your students that there will be no more hand raising during class discussions unless you specifically ask them to raise their hands.

2. Write each student's name on a three-by-five-inch card and gather the cards into a deck. **Tips:** Some teachers have kids make their own name cards and decorate them, but you may prefer to have some space on each card for jotting down information about the student. Some junior and senior high school teachers use color-coded cards with a specific color for each class period. Some special education teachers with very small groups

make double and triple decks, with each student's name appearing several times in the deck. And some primary teachers use craft sticks rather than cards. Please avoid using playing cards. It is uncomfortable for some students to spend a class period as the king of hearts or the two of spades. Using their actual names will also help you learn them.

3. Group students in pairs and seat them together. Tell your students that the pairs will change every few weeks so they will not have to work with the same partner indefinitely.

Allow *some* disparity in ability but not large gaps. Research on role modeling by educational psychologist Dale Schunk indicates that a great disparity between partners inhibits the struggling student and robs the gifted student of opportunities to experience new learning.** You might place your most capable students with each other; place high achievers with more average students; or place kids who love to help others with students who struggle the most. If you have some highly capable students who want to work with kids who have learning difficulties, allow them to do so on a limited basis.

If your students are in rows, seat the pairs across the aisle from each other. During discussions, they move their chairs together; at other times, they sit in their regular rows. If kids come to a rug or other gathering place for discussions, have them sit beside their partners. If your students are already in groups, designate pairs within the groups. Students whose partners are absent should join another pair until their partners return.

Using the Name Card Method

Explain to your students why you are using the cards. Feel free to adapt and use one or more of the reasons listed previously or come up with your own. Students who are reluctant to use the cards will be more likely to cooperate when they know the reasons.

To get the best results with the Name Card Method, start with a discussion that uses open-ended questions, such as a discussion of a book students are reading, a current events discussion, or some challenging questions from any subject matter.

1. Tell the class that you are going to ask a series of questions. Explain that you will call on several students for the answer to each question, so no one should talk or blurt anything out of turn.

2. Ask a question. Give the students 10 to 15 seconds to THINK about their answers. Do not acknowledge any blurting. Remind students who start to talk prematurely that thinking time is not up yet.

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*Adapted from "Think-Pair-Share, ThinkTrix, Thinklinks, and Weird Facts" by Frank T. Lyman Jr. in *Enhancing Thinking Through Cooperative Learning*, edited by Neil Davidson and Toni Worsham. NY: Teachers College Press, 1992. Used with permission.

**Schunk, Dale H. "Peer Models and Children's Behavioral Change." *Review of Educational Research* 52:2 (1987), pp. 149–174.

3. At your signal—such as saying "Pair up!"—have the students PAIR up with their designated partners to discuss possible answers to the question you have posed. The first time you do this, describe the signal you will use to call them back to your voice. You may have to practice this with the students until it becomes a habit for them. (*Examples:* You might say, "Time's up!" or clap your hands.) As soon as you give the signal, they should stop talking—even in the middle of a sentence or a word—and return their attention to you.

Have the pairs discuss possible answers to the question for 30 to 45 seconds. Tell them to use soft voices. If they want, they can write down their answers. Explain that these notes are for their own use and will not be collected.

While the students are talking, walk around to monitor that they are all on task. If some students get off task, consider the possibility that you've given them too much time. It's always better if they feel a little concern about needing to finish their discussion before you give the signal.

You might also use this time to coach reluctant students to prepare answers in case their cards are drawn (an event you already know will happen, but the students don't). When the time is up, use the signal you practiced to bring them back to attention.

4. It is now time to SHARE. Call on the student whose name is on the top card in the deck. Don't show the cards to the students, because sometimes (as in the scenario on page 14) you may want to manipulate the cards for a specific reason. **Tip:** Don't look at the cards before asking the question. In this way, you avoid the possibility of trying to match a question's difficulty with your perception of a student's intelligence. When we ask difficult questions of students we consider capable and easy questions of those we think are less capable, we communicate low expectations for struggling students. Struggling students can usually answer challenging questions after conferring with their discussion buddies during pair time.

5. Once you call on someone, follow these guidelines to show students they are capable of answering after adequate support has been provided. Avoid asking the student to call on others for help or asking the class to help the student, because these actions send a message that you have low expectations. Instead, if no response is forthcoming *within 10 seconds*, invite the student to confer again with his or her partner and say that you will return in a few moments for an answer. Meanwhile, hold the student's name card prominently, so it's obvious that you will remember to come back to the student. It's imperative that you *do* return within the next minute or so. This shows that you absolutely believe the student is capable of responding. If the student still cannot respond, you may offer a choice between two options or give a hint. (*Example:* "See if you can visualize how the main character solved the problem about the dog in the film we saw yesterday.")

6. You might also allow the student to say, "I need a little more time. Please come back to me." By using these strategies, other students do not have to wait too long for any student's response, and you can avoid any expression of annoyance toward the students who need this type of scaffolding. **Tip:** When you are in the habit of repeating students' answers aloud, kids soon discover that they don't have to listen very carefully.

7. Receive three or more unique responses to the same question without indicating whether the responses are correct. It doesn't matter whether a response is the speaker's or the partner's idea. What really matters is that all students are thinking about their answers to every question you ask.

After each response has been given, say, "thank you" or "okay" or "mm-hm," but give no judgments or praise of any kind, then call on another student with the same question. When students see that you will request multiple responses to the same question, they keep thinking about the question even after someone else has answered it. They know their name cards might be next, and they'll have to come up with reasonable responses as well.

Throughout the discussion, shuffle the name cards often. If students never know when their cards might come up, they'll pay more attention. If you place the used cards on the bottom of the deck (or the craft sticks into a different container from which they were pulled), kids will learn that they can mentally go to sleep when their turns end.

8. Before moving on to the next question, and for the benefit of students who enjoy sharing their deep wealth of knowledge, ask, "Does anyone have anything to add that has not already been said?" Students with something to add should raise their hands.

Explain that the ticket to being allowed to add to the discussion is to listen well to everyone else's contribution. If students repeat something said earlier, you will simply say, "That's already been said." You will not call on repeaters again during this discussion unless their cards come up. Tell the class that you don't need any help noting repeated information. In other words, you don't want to hear a loud chorus of "That's a repeat!" each time it happens.

9. Remember to use the Name Card Method when reviewing for assessments. You will be amazed at how much more students remember for those situations because they have been paying much closer attention to the lessons and discussions.

Only very rarely do teachers report that their students resist the Name Card Method. If that happens with your students, try these ideas:

- Be sure that you have taken the time to assign partners and to let the partners work together during discussions as we have described on page 12. If you use the method without the partners, students' anxiety levels rise dramatically. Not much clear thinking goes on when anxiety is high.

- Be sure to explain the reasons you're using the cards. When students understand your goals, they are more likely to comply. You can use the list of reasons on page 12.

- If all else fails, tell your students you are taking a graduate class and must do this for an assignment. Ask them to please try it out with you for two weeks so you can complete your assignment and get your grade. At the end of the two weeks, have a discussion with them about the reasons for use and their experience with the experiment. Most students, by virtue of their positive experience with the method, will agree that it's okay for you to keep using it.

Variations on Think-Pair-Share

As you lead your students through the THINK and PAIR steps of the Name Card Method, you can also help them practice the following thinking categories of the ThinkTrix model developed by teacher educator Dr. Frank Lyman. Chapter 4 describes this model in more detail.*

- *Recall:* Students simply remember what they have learned.

- *Similarity:* Students find ways in which ideas, people, or events are similar.

- *Difference:* Students find ways in which ideas, people, or events are different.

- *Cause-effect:* Students demonstrate that they understand the relationships between causes and effects of events, behaviors, ideas, and so on.

- *Idea to example:* Students give specific examples of ideas being discussed.

- *Example to idea:* Students draw conclusions, make summaries, explore themes, explain rules, and so on to show that they get the big ideas.

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*Adapted from "Think-Pair-Share, ThinkTrix, Thinklinks, and Weird Facts" by Frank T. Lyman Jr. in *Enhancing Thinking Through Cooperative Learning,* edited by Neil Davidson and Toni Worsham. NY: Teachers College Press, 1992. Used with permission of Frank T. Lyman Jr., teacher educator and originator of the Think, Pair, Share method as well as ThinkTrix, Principle-Based Coaching Wheels, and the Problem-Solving Flow Chart.

- *Evaluation:* Students give their opinions concerning the value of something: good or bad, right or wrong, significant or insignificant. This usually involves analyzing for cause and effect.

Students can vary the time that they spend as they PAIR by:

- taking turns teaching each other what the teacher has just taught

- explaining to their partners their own thinking about the concepts being learned

- identifying the type of thinking being called for by the questions

- writing about what they have learned as a pair

- reading aloud certain passages to each other to gather information or answer questions

- reviewing information for upcoming assessments

Finally, students can vary the ways in which they SHARE by:

- speaking

- reading

- acting out their ideas

- finding connections between old and new ideas

- indicating their judgments of material they are learning

Scenario: Jamar

Jamar was a very pleasant young man but a reluctant learner. Whenever he was put on the spot, he blushed noticeably. He was extremely nervous the first time Susan used the Name Card Method to review the state capitals, which all fifth graders in the district were required to know. When Susan called his name, he just sat there silently, daring her to do something about it. She asked if she could speak to him after class.

"Jamar," she said, once everyone else had left the room, "I don't think you like this Name Card Method."

Jamar replied sarcastically, "What was your first clue?"

"Well," Susan said, "I can see that you're upset, and I want to reassure you that my goal in using the cards is not to make anyone uncomfortable. Perhaps you are worried about too many things, like when your card is coming up and what state I will ask you about."

"Yeah," he replied. "Isn't everybody worried about the same things?"

"Well," Susan said, "they may be worried, but it certainly isn't affecting them the way it's affecting you.

So let's try to make this less stressful for you. Tomorrow, when your card comes up, I'll ask you to name the capital of South Dakota."

Jamar paused for a few seconds, looked at Susan suspiciously, and asked, "How do you know you'll ask me that?"

"Trust me," she replied. "I just know. But there's one rule that goes with this arrangement. You can't tell anyone else at school about it."

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because this is a special arrangement between you and me, and no one else needs to know," Susan stated simply.

For nine consecutive days, on his way out to recess, Jamar made it his business to toss something into the trash can near Susan's desk. As he walked by, she softly said the name of his state for the following day. On the tenth day, he looked as if he was going to leave without getting the prompt.

"Jamar," Susan called from the desk, "didn't you forget something here?"

"Oh," he said, smiling sheepishly, "I don't need that anymore."

And he didn't!

Imagine the outcome if Susan had thought, "Oh, poor Jamar, he blushes and he's embarrassed, so I guess I'll leave him alone." Excusing him from participation would have indicated her agreement with him that he was unable to participate. Insisting on his participation, with the appropriate support system, sent him a clear message: "You *can* participate. You *will* participate. This is something you can do."

Cooperative Learning/ Problem-Based Learning

The principles of cooperative learning can dramatically improve learning outcomes in group work for students who are struggling to learn. Students with learning difficulties do much better in classrooms where carefully defined group roles are used regularly, because it becomes acceptable for kids to help each other learn.

How to Integrate Students with Learning Difficulties into Cooperative Learning and Problem-Solving Groups

In classrooms where competition is expected, there is little or no incentive for students to help struggling students learn. In classrooms where cooperative learning is valued, every student's chances for success are enhanced. But if other students perceive that struggling students will lower the outcomes for everyone, resistance and resentment are predictable. We must create conditions that prevent these problems. Following are suggestions for integrating students with learning difficulties into cooperative learning or problem-solving groups.

Group Gifted Students Together

Group your three or four most capable students together and give them an extension of the regular grade-level task. When gifted students are in mixed-abilities cooperative learning groups with struggling students, the gifted kids tend to take over and get bossy. They fear that if they don't take charge, the group product or outcome will not meet their high standards. When gifted students are not in the mixed-ability groups, other kids have a chance to show off their talents.

Avoid Group Grades

Instead of giving group grades, set up the assessment so that all students earn credit for their own contributions, as well as a bonus for the group product. When everyone in the group achieves a certain level of learning, everyone gets a bonus. (*Example:* Add up to five points to each person's individual score.)

It is perfectly acceptable to make special agreements with struggling students so their presence does not create a hardship for other students in their groups. At the beginning of a group learning project, ask those students to set their own goals regarding what they expect to achieve. If they reach their goals—even if they are less than what you expect from the rest of the group—they can still contribute to the group's bonus. (See the "Goal Setting" section on page 61.)

Assign Group Roles

Give students with special learning needs jobs or roles that allow them to demonstrate their learning strengths. (*Example:* Some students may be highly creative or good at assembling things. Try putting them in the leadership role in a group activity that relies on spatial, visual, or mechanical thinking, such as working with tangram puzzles. Traditionally, linguistically gifted kids do poorly at tangram-type tasks, while students who may struggle with typical learning tasks are often highly skilled at tasks that require visual-spatial ability.)

Create and Use Home Groups*

Home groups give all kids an anchor group to belong to. A home group is the group in which the student sits for a few minutes each day at the beginning of class. Students move from their home groups to their work

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*Adapted from *Cooperation in the Classroom* (7th edition) by David Johnson, Roger Johnson, and Edythe Holubec. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company, 1998. Used with permission. The eighth edition was published in 2008.

groups for cooperative learning activities and tasks or for more independent learning activities. They return to their home groups at the end of class to make sure that each group member understands the homework and remembers to take it home.

A home group might be made up of students who live in the same neighborhood, so group members can take homework to absent students. If attendance is a problem at your school, you might offer a group incentive, such as points toward a prize each day that all group members come to school. If group members have each other's telephone numbers (with permission from families), they might actually call one another and provide encouragement to come to school so the group can earn its points.

Other ways for home group members to support each other include:*

1. encouraging perfect attendance except when sick

2. helping all group members gather the school supplies needed for the day

3. coaching one another on basic information that must be learned (math facts, spelling, and so on)

4. preparing for an assessment

5. brainstorming and listing what is already known about a topic (See "KWPL" on page 101 for more information.)

6. brainstorming solutions to class problems in preparation for class meetings

7. doing show-and-tell in small groups rather than for the whole class

8. collecting homework for absent students and delivering it to them

9. checking homework together by comparing answers and reaching consensus, then making corrections in a different-colored pencil or pen

10. turning in completed homework (*Example:* Students receive their own grades plus bonus points if all group members turn in completed homework, and they earn more bonus points if all homework meets specific grade or rubric criteria.)

Note: Be sure to read the section in Chapter 11 on homework for more information about this important issue (see page 229).

Use Pair Practice**

Use this technique when you are lecturing or teaching something to the whole class. It's especially effective when kids are working on projects for an integrated learning unit, and you want to find out how much they know about the entire topic, rather than just their small portion of it.

Designate the students in each pair as Partner A and Partner B. After you have taught a small portion of information, ask Partner A to reteach it to Partner B using any method that seems comfortable. Use the Name Card Method to check how many students understand the concept. If most students understand it, teach another small portion, then have Partner B reteach it to Partner A.

More Ways to Get Everyone Involved in Learning

1. In one school, each student was required to set one academic goal and one social-behavioral goal at a time and focus on these goals until they were achieved. The school purchased a button-making machine and made "Yes I Can" buttons for everyone. Kids set goals, talked about their goals, and learned how to congratulate one another when goals were accomplished. The program was most successful when kids set short-term goals for each week or grading period. You might start a yearlong campaign to focus on students' growth through goal setting. As part of your campaign, emphasize positive self-talk. Whenever kids speak negatively about themselves by saying, "I can't do this," other kids (and the teacher) chant, "Yes you can!" Then the students answer, "Yes I can!" Talking about this with family members at conferences provides a positive note for every conference.

2. Teach your students that meaningful success comes from the ability to set and accomplish realistic short-term goals. Remember that kids who perceive themselves as incapable are unlikely to reach lofty goals of getting high grades unless they learn how to reach those goals in small, doable steps. See "Goal Setting" on page 61.

3. Create an atmosphere in which making mistakes is always expected, always encouraged as an opportunity for learning, and never the object of ridicule. Regularly tell your students that if work is always correct, no learning is happening. Share stories from your own

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