Preface

Making the Case for Using Evidence and Collaborative Inquiry in Inclusive Classrooms

This is a book about becoming an accomplished teacher in order to help students with high-incidence disabilities (i.e., those with specific learning disabilities, behavior disorders, mild mental retardation, and high-functioning autism) become more accomplished learners in the competitive and inclusive context of contemporary schools. In response to recent legislation and social preference, most students who struggle to learn are taught in general education classes for all or part of the school day, where they are expected to be successful in mastering challenging material alongside more proficient classmates. Struggling learners, including most students with high-incidence disabilities, are expected to engage in authentic problem-solving activities and to integrate thinking skills within subject areas such as history and science. Their teachers are expected to provide high-quality instruction that results in access to the general curriculum and mastery of state-level academic standards. For students with high-incidence disabilities to have opportunities to learn appropriately in inclusive classrooms, teachers must recognize their individual learning needs and respond quickly with practices that "work " for improving academic learning and social growth.

APPROACH

This book is intended to help both general and special educators become more adept at recognizing and responding to the needs of students with high-incidence disabilities by using powerful evidence-based practices in inclusive elementary instruction.

We encourage teachers to observe the skills and abilities of their more accomplished learners as they think about ways that learning and behavioral difficulties challenge the development of a struggling student's expertise. We have grounded our approach to this book in the concept of *accomplishment* and what would be required to help these students become more accomplished learners. We use the term *accomplishment* to mean the achievement of abilities or skills acquired through intensive instruction and practice, as well as accommodation of learning struggles. Throughout the book we address two questions that provide its central theme:

1. What kinds of learning opportunities help students with high-incidence disabilities become more accomplished learners?
2. What instructional approaches and technology supports help educators become more accomplished teachers of students with high-incidence disabilities?

We have structured the book to reflect the dual themes of *recognition* (identifying students' needs and monitoring progress) and *response* (using research-based instructional approaches and technology supports) (see Coleman, Buysee, & Neitzel, 2006). Our approach is also based on the principle that special and general education teachers must work together to analyze and interpret assessment data if instruction is to be both responsive and powerful. Recognizing and responding to students' needs with effective instructional practices depends on *collaborative inquiry*, which we define as the work of professionals reflecting collectively on student progress to design and evaluate instruction. In each chapter we use case studies to illustrate the work of special and general education teachers who are accomplished at problem solving collaboratively and implementing a hierarchy of increasingly intensive interventions to support struggling learners.

The theme of *recognition* frames Part I. Chapters 1–4 are designed to help you recognize your professional responsibilities as well as the varied needs of your students. Inclusive instruction requires teachers who keenly observe the ways in which each student with disabilities learns and who precisely describe those learning needs to other professionals. Spotting learning problems early and communicating effectively with colleagues depend on:

- Recognizing your responsibility for teaching students with high-incidence disabilities.
- Recognizing the learning needs of students with high-incidence disabilities.
- Recognizing the attributes of effective inclusive teachers.
- Recognizing the power of assessment data in guiding effective instruction.

The theme of *response* frames Part II. Chapters 5–10 are intended to provide you with strategies to respond effectively to the complex needs of students with high-incidence disabilities in the following ways:

- Planning effective classroom instruction.
- Fostering concept development across content areas.
- Creating strategic learners.
- Building fluent skills use.
- Managing inclusive classrooms.
- Establishing a culture of inquiry and evidence-based practice.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Chapter 1 introduces the ethical and legal commitments that special and general educators have to students with high-incidence disabilities and how these responsibilities require increasing sophistication in the type of instruction provided. In creating inclusive classroom ecologies special and general education teachers need to be aware of the general curriculum, evidence-based practices for teaching curricular content, techniques for making challenging content more accessible, and ways to facilitate positive interactions with students and colleagues. Engaging in sophisticated planning and instructional delivery requires intensive collaboration, and teachers need to have the skills to engage in such collaboration and the administrative support to do so.

Chapter 2 details the types of problems most students with high-incidence disabilities are likely to have when accessing the general education curriculum and how these issues may be addressed when designing instruction and classroom management plans. This chapter describes the typical literacy and numeracy needs of these students, as well as the behavioral and social problems they might display. The challenges that their diverse learning needs pose to standardized ways of delivering instruction are discussed, as well as the flexible type of instruction that is required for success.

Chapter 3 discusses the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of effective teachers of students with high-incidence disabilities. This chapter explains how effective inclusion teachers hold more interventionist beliefs about students with these disabilities. That is, these teachers believe they can engage in instruction that will facilitate the learning of students with high-incidence disabilities, even though they realize that these students are disadvantaged by their disabilities in certain ways. This chapter also illustrates the practices of effective general and special education teachers who work with these students and how a strong focus on professional development is essential to becoming an accomplished teacher.

Chapter 4 focuses on assessing the educational progress of special-needs learners in order to design instruction that is both tailored to those needs and sufficiently powerful to support them in becoming more proficient. This chapter articulates why the assessment process is so essential in planning for instruction and in determining if instruction is responsive to the needs of students who struggle the most in the general education classroom. Specific information about types of assessments

and the information they generate is provided. Additionally, special and general education teachers will acquire information about techniques for organizing assessment data and using technology to support the assessment process. Emphasis is also placed on how teachers can communicate with parents about their students' ongoing educational progress and how they can assist parents in becoming stronger advocates in the assessment process.

Chapter 5 focuses on planning a universally designed curriculum that meets the needs of all learners in inclusive classrooms and also addresses the needs of students with high-incidence disabilities. Specifically, the chapter is designed to help you articulate (1) what the big ideas of the curriculum are; (2) what types of concepts, skills, and strategies you expect all students to have; (3) what levels of acquisition you expect students with high-incidence disabilities to have for various skills, strategies, and concepts; (4) what aspects of the curriculum will present problems for students; and (5) how you will minimize these problems in the curriculum through remediation of skills deficits or circumvent them through teaching strategies and the use of technology. It also discusses how to balance providing remediation with providing access to higher-order skills and strategies in the curriculum, as well as the roles that special and general education teachers play in planning together.

Chapter 6 addresses the instructional principles and strategies needed to make curricular concepts accessible to students with high-incidence disabilities. The introduction emphasizes the acquisition of curricular concepts as the goal of school learning. The chapter identifies the types of curricular concepts that students need to acquire across content areas, the challenges that might be encountered in helping students learn these concepts, and research-based strategies for helping students with concept acquisition. Sample content-enhancement routines and graphic organizers for learning social studies and science concepts, as well as techniques for using concrete manipulative materials combined with direct instruction routines for teaching mathematics, are provided. Various technology applications that enable students to acquire content are interwoven throughout the chapter.

Chapter 7 focuses on ways to help students with high-incidence disabilities become strategic learners in acquiring content and achieving important outcomes more independently in both literacy and mathematics. Specifically, this chapter targets what it means to be a strategic learner, the problems students with these disabilities might encounter in becoming strategic learners, and the type of instructional routines and technologies that can support the development of students' strategic abilities in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Chapter 8 addresses fluent skills use in literacy and mathematics and why rapid, fluent decoding is important to reading, why spelling and handwriting fluency are important to writing, and why fluency in basic math facts is important to learning mathematics. The instructional procedures needed to develop students' fluency are described, along with technology for fostering fluent skills use in students who continue to struggle in these content areas.

Chapter 9 discusses structuring an inclusive classroom to maximize responsiveness to the learning and behavioral needs of your students. It describes strategies

for maximizing intervention, such as classwide peer tutoring and structuring small-group and individualized instruction. Strategies are also included for decreasing behavioral disruptions in the classroom and for increasing behavioral supports (e.g., behavioral contracts, cognitive-behavioral interventions) to help students who need more intensive assistance.

Chapter 10 offers strategies for effective collaboration that are essential for successfully crafting the type of instruction needed for students with high-incidence disabilities. This chapter addresses (1) the collaborative process and the role of a general and special education teacher in that process; (2) what struggles might be encountered in the collaborative process; (3) how ideas can be made more accessible to a teaching partner; (4) how language can be used to raise issues and communicate ideas effectively; and (5) how conflicts over ideas and instructional strategies can be negotiated. In conclusion, it identifies the workplace structures that should be in place to support successful collaboration, as well as how teachers might work with building administrators to secure such supports.

Written with the tenets of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in mind, this book should have broad appeal for university courses and for professional development with teachers in inclusive schools. We have attempted to explain and illustrate systematic instruction grounded in research evidence and in collaborative inquiry for teaching curricular concepts, strategies, and skills successfully to students with learning and behavior difficulties. Research-based applications of instructional technology that are effective in providing universal access to the general curriculum are embedded throughout this instructional framework. Given the conceptual guidance and practical strategies offered in each chapter, this book should be especially useful to teachers and to school-based professional learning communities, as well as to scholars who work with graduate students in both special and regular education. Table 1 provides a list of inclusive instructional practices adapted by accomplished educators and the chapters in which they are discussed throughout the book.

TABLE 1. Inclusive Instructional Practices of Accomplished Educators

Practices of accomplished inclusive educators	Importance	Chapter
Recognizing ethical, legal, and collaborative responsibilities to special-needs learners	Recognizing students' individual needs in order to design instruction that enables students to access challenging curricular content	Chapter 1
Identifying students' individual learning needs	Recognizing why some students struggle to become more accomplished learners	Chapter 2
Identifying the qualities of accomplished inclusive educators	Crafting instruction that is responsive to students' learning needs and helps them become more proficient	Chapter 3
Assessing and communicating student progress	Acquiring techniques for organizing assessment data and using technology in the assessment process	Chapter 4
Planning effective instruction	Planning a universally designed curriculum to meet the needs of learners in inclusive classrooms	Chapter 5
Teaching curricular concepts	Strengthening the concept development of struggling learners	Chapter 6
Developing strategic and independent learners	Helping students achieve outcomes more independently in literacy and mathematics	Chapter 7
Building students' fluency skills	Implementing effective routines that foster fluency in reading, writing, and mathematics	Chapter 8
Managing positive learning environments	Using evidence-based classroom management strategies that promote social and emotional learning	Chapter 9
Building a culture of evidence and collaborative inquiry	Solving problems successfully with colleagues, parents, and school administrators	Chapter 10