

Preface

Quite simply, it is extremely difficult for a teacher to synthesize and implement all the existing research-based initiatives. Teachers are constantly asked to develop challenging lessons that maintain the students' interest, address the children's individual learning styles and special needs, make connections among the disciplines, incorporate a variety of modalities and strategies, all while teaching in a heterogeneous/mixed-ability setting, with minimal planning time and limited resources. There hardly seems enough time in a day to accomplish these tasks while taking attendance, reading daily announcements, maintaining classroom control, and, by the way, remaining conversant in educational research!

As former teachers and now staff developers, we have experienced the frustration of wanting to try a different approach but have had little time and few resources to try something new. Six years ago, we decided to change that. Embarking on a long-range plan with the help of school administration and a teacher-led professional development committee, we were able to influence teachers from four school districts to reflect on their teaching. Our collective hope was that teachers would differentiate their lessons according to student needs and learning styles, map their curriculum, and develop interdisciplinary units. To our surprise, we achieved much more than that.

How did this all start? We became intrigued by the wealth of information coming from brain-based and curriculum and instruction research. By drawing on the works of several prominent researchers, such as Armstrong (2000); Arter (2001); Bloom (1956); Carroll (1971); Cooper (2001); Danielson (1996); Gardner (1983, 1999); Jacobs (1997, 2005); Kallick (2005); Marzano (2003); McTighe (1997); Strong, Silver, & Perini (2000, 2001); Stronge (2002); Tomlinson (1999, 2000, 2001); Wiggins (1998); Wolfe (2001); Zull (2002); and others, we were able to create an integrated, teacher-friendly model that makes "common sense" connections.

It is the aim of this book to provide our audience of classroom teachers in grades K–8 with an easy-to-read book based on research, blended approaches, and real-life strategies that work.

Our essential question for this book is "*How can research influence your instructional practices?*" To help you answer that question, we intend to provide a refresher on the history of the standards movement and two recent pieces of legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act. These two major developments have prompted significant changes in instructional practices as well as licensure requirements for teacher certification.

We will review several key factors that assist teachers in creating a student-centered classroom that is focused on achievement. While we

realize that there are many factors that must be considered in creating a student-centered environment, we intend to cover only six, namely: creating an environment of respect and rapport, establishing a culture for learning by using metacognition, using Bloom's taxonomy, implementing student self-assessment, organizing physical space, and giving technology a place in your classroom.

We will examine curriculum mapping and its benefits in providing teachers with a clear understanding of a standards-based curriculum and its revitalized relationship to instruction. In addition, we will illustrate how good assessment tools are needed to provide accountability. We will examine rubrics and the parts they play in assisting students to meet higher achievement goals.

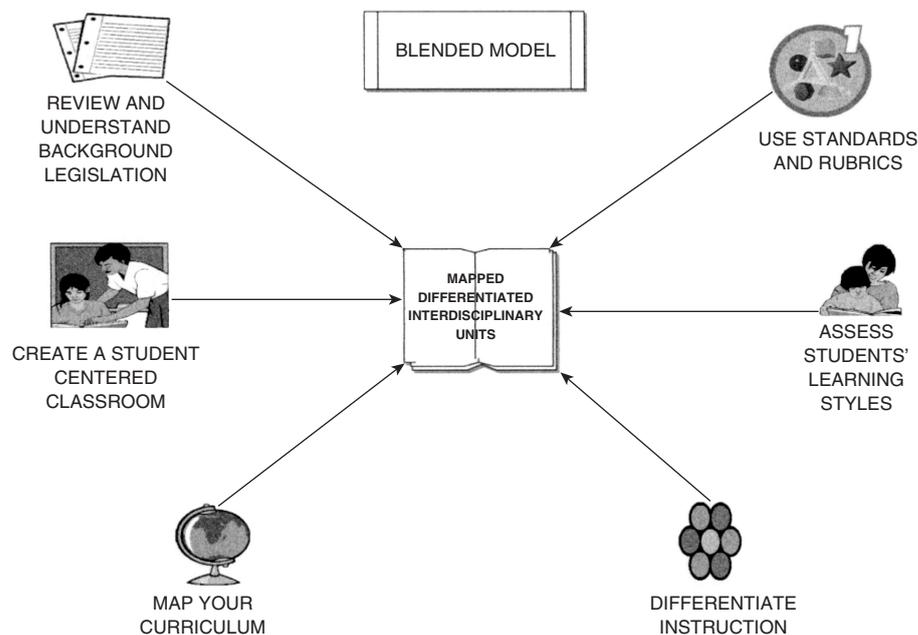
Although they are older and well-reviewed theories, we intend to revisit Gardner's multiple intelligences and Strong, Silver, and Perini's learning styles. We believe that, in this new era of accountability, these theories must be incorporated into lesson planning. We will show teachers how to accomplish this in just a few hours with every new unit they plan.

We have also composed a comparison of the major teaching models to support teachers in choosing aspects of each approach that will stretch their instructional repertoire. As lifelong learners, we must continue to grow to prevent becoming entrenched in teaching the same way we have always taught.

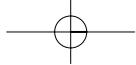
Finally, we will demonstrate the central tenet of this book, namely, how combining and applying a student-centered climate, curriculum mapping, using standards and rubrics, assessing learning styles, differentiating instruction, and creating interdisciplinary units can improve student achievement.

Our model, which blends all of these factors, is illustrated in Figure 0.1.

Figure 0.1 Blended Models



SOURCE: Diagram created in Inspiration® by Inspiration Software®, Inc.



It is important to note: This book is *not* a research tome. We present research-based practices but do not intend to delve into theory at any great length. Our interest is assisting teachers to make changes in their everyday instructional strategies by showing them how small changes made over time can have improved outcomes for students. We also have included examples that are composites of teachers' experiences and quotes from real people in the field. We hope that by reading this book you will find your own unique answer to our essential question and blend research-based practices that work for you.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his recent book *The Tipping Point* (2002), ascribes that name to a phenomenon that has three characteristics: contagiousness, the fact that little changes can have big effects, and one dramatic moment when everything changes all at once. We hope that this book can become your "tipping point" where theories and practices are linked and made easy to use.

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