

---

# Preface

**F**rom the time the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, through the publication in 1983 of the *A Nation at Risk* report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, and since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, we've been told—and shown statistics to prove—that our public schools are failing to teach our children to read, write, and do basic mathematics, let alone keep up with the education successes of other industrialized countries. At least since the 1980s, the focus of criticism has been on inner-city or urban schools where student standardized test scores have most consistently been low. These are schools that serve a high number of students who come from poverty- or near-poverty-level homes, a high percentage of whom are also from minority or recent immigrant cultures. The unfortunate, but almost inevitable, conclusion that our nation's print and broadcast media have drawn from this situation is that children of poverty are somehow unable to learn as effectively as their middle- and upper-class peers. While the authors of this book can't argue with the reported standardized test scores, we adamantly disagree with the conclusion. We don't believe that poverty makes children unable, or even unwilling, to learn.

The statistics that compelled us to take a stand on the education of children of poverty are those that report the incredibly high percentage of children of poverty, which we define as children from low socioeconomic environments, who are annually referred for special education identification as learning disabled (LD)—a symptom, we believe, of a perception in the minds of educators that poverty is a learning disability. Our years of experience in the field of education led us to believe that the problems low socioeconomic status (low SES) students experience in school are not based on identifiable learning disabilities but rather on the lack of readiness skills needed to be successful in schools that assume all students come to school equally prepared to learn and educators' inability to recognize and mitigate this lack.

This book is based on the findings of a 2006 study (Howard, 2007) of teachers and principals of low SES students who have successfully, and over

an extended period of time, provided equal education opportunities to low SES children and brought them into the successful mainstream of students, without resorting to special education identification. In it, we present strategies and techniques the exemplary teachers and principals we observed use to humanize the school and classroom environments and make it possible for their low SES, minority, and multicultural students to overcome the challenges of poverty, cultural differences, and school readiness and succeed academically on a par with their more economically advantaged peers. In addition to identifying the successful pedagogical and school leadership strategies and techniques we observed, we offer proven management strategies to facilitate implementation of the changes we recommend in the way schools that serve low SES children operate.

As the authors of this book, we combined our more than 75 years of experience in the field of education, as teachers, principals, central office administrators, and university professors, with many years of experience in the fields of human resources and organizational management to present a comprehensive look at the problem and its solutions. Although the focus of this book is the overwhelming misidentification of low SES children as LD, we believe that the education and management strategies and techniques we present are applicable to the education enterprise as a whole and will be valuable to educators everywhere.