
Introduction

This book is called *What Really Works With Exceptional Learners*, but when you think about it, what students *aren't* exceptional, or special, learners at some point in their lives? Which one of us has not struggled with content or pedagogy or even just sitting, focusing, being organized, or listening . . . especially before our coffee in the morning? It would be lovely if we could have a book that addressed *all* our special needs and gave us the perfect answer to all questions. Unfortunately, there are simply too many needs to address them all and this book is not an encyclopedia. (For those of you who do not know what an encyclopedia is, it was a paper version of the Internet before the Internet was created.) So we have limited our focus in this book to special learners with identified disabilities, those who are English language learners, and those who are gifted or twice exceptional. That is plenty to tackle in one book, don't you agree?

It is amazing to us when we hear teachers say, "I wasn't taught how to deal with that type of student." We wish we knew who "*that type*" of kid was! Every student we have worked with has been unique, different, special. However, we do know that there are techniques that teachers can try to help improve the learning or behavior or social skills of students. We also know that labels have been created to help us categorize and make sense of the special needs that some students have. We definitely capitalize on those labels through the chapters of this book. But we implore you to read this text, not as a guide to specific categories of students, but as a reference manual for numerous strategies to try for *any* child.

As with our first two texts of this series, we selected authors we knew are not only content experts but who also are practitioners. We wanted people who knew the research base, but also who really knew kids and what works with students! We asked them to write *to* the reader (that's you!), not *at* the reader. We asked for practical strategies and bulleted lists, not ivory tower, theoretical, or esoteric information. The research provided for each chapter will help you recognize how important it is that the things you do in school are evidence-based, and will be given to you in a way that respects that you are a busy educator with a lot to process. We know that you will find this book accessible and helpful. We hope you will share the strategies you learn with your colleagues, as you hear them venting in the teachers' lounge or crying in the parking lot after school.

How will you use this book? That's up to you. You can read it from beginning to end or you can pick and choose. We organized it so that content areas are first, followed by instructional strategies and pedagogy. In the third section, we include information on working with students in specific disability areas. Finally, when working with exceptional learners, there is no way we could (or should) avoid addressing legal issues and school-home partnerships! While some chapters may be more or less relevant to you and your teaching, we hope you consider reading them all. You may be surprised what you pick up in a chapter on working with students who are twice-exceptional, for example, even if you don't think you have any of those students in your classes yet!

We'd also like to point out that we have interspersed quite a few "Making Connections" boxes throughout the chapters. This is so you can see how all our chapters interrelate and support one another. If you want, you can make this a "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure" book and follow the Making Connections boxes throughout the text! Want to keep learning? We certainly hope you do. If so, please look at the plethora of references and websites our authors have included and cited. We also provide an "Additional Recommended Reading" section, but be aware, if an item was cited in the References section, it is not in the Recommended Reading section as well. We hope you will know that the author recommends it by the fact that it was important enough to reference.

We must thank each and every one of our authors for their hard work on this book. When we approached them and said, "We want you to write this chapter on your topic of expertise and passion, but please keep it practical and short," we were so excited by the responses. Not only did they meet that challenge, but they also met our very quick deadlines and were positive every time we gave editing feedback. They, like us, felt this book was important and needed to be out there. They understood that educators are busy and looking for a reference that is based in research but is a quick read, chock-full of ideas and doable strategies. We thank each and every one of our authors for working with us and for adding their expertise to the field through their chapters.

We must also thank the Eisner Foundation for creating and supporting the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Their vision of ongoing professional development for urban education has enabled us to create this What Really Works series in the first place. Our Dean at the CSUN Michael D. Eisner College of Education, Dr. Michael Spagna, also continues to constantly encourage us to pursue cutting edge practices in education and to remain the professional development and research hub of the college. Our Provost, Dr. Yi Li, has also demonstrated his support—in words and funds—for our commitment to sharing What Really Works with the community. We would like to thank Steve Holle, the CTL Coordinator of Professional Development for keeping our PD going as we were in the weeds of this book. We would also like to

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Finally, we would like to encourage each of you to subscribe to our mailing list at ctl@csun.edu. We promise no spamming or selling; our goal is merely to keep you abreast of our publications, presentations, events, and research opportunities. We look forward to you becoming part of our larger CTL family as well.

All our best,

Sandy J. Mandell and Katherin Holt

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