

Introduction

The Supreme Court's 1954 decision in Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, made equal access to public education the law of the land. With each decade we have increased the proportion of the U.S. population in school, including children from more diverse socioculture and economic backgrounds, and diversified the kinds of educational programs offered. But these accomplishments have fallen far short of the vision of a universal school system that provides all children with equal access to success in school.

—M. C. Wang and J. A. Kovach

Since the first edition of this book in 2004, so much has happened in this country in regard to understanding culture and poverty. This book contains about 60% new information about what we must do in this century to lift children out of poverty and build a strong middle class. I know of no country in the world without a middle class that is a strong democracy. As the faces of the children rapidly change to reflect the exponential changes in our demographics, education struggles to understand the learning differences and the changes that must be put into place.

As the economy, resources, and affluence of the city have moved to the suburbs, we have been left with many large cities whose inner-city area is a myriad of crumbling buildings, graffiti, and the poor who cannot afford to leave. In the

mountains, along our borders, and in the towns and counties that make up our country we find children who are poor and who often are hungry. Add to that a struggling economy and the lack of resources available, and we have an educational system that, despite its best efforts, cannot provide equal access to success. Teachers are leaving the field in droves either to enter a different field or to follow the resources to the newer suburbs of the city. Why not? Our society measures the success of schools and its personnel on test scores—often single test scores. Even when the measurement includes other factors, such as dropout rates, attendance rates, and the percentage of students taking advanced courses, the complex problems of teaching a diverse population of students from ethnic and language minority backgrounds remain a factor usually not considered. Studies by Education Trust show that working in high poverty areas will often gain teachers less money, poorer conditions, and instability (2008). Why, then, would educators choose to teach in these areas?

Throughout this book, we will examine how we got to this place and look at some of the best research available for helping to narrow and eventually close the achievement gap for minority students. While many of the solutions for schools are a matter of combining resources from state and local communities, including health and dental care, family assistance, and the collaboration of community leaders in the decision making process, this book focuses on what the classroom teacher can do to help ensure that these students learn—and learn at a high level. I have also focused on how to empower teachers so that they have the information and resources to be able to make a difference.

Brain research has afforded us insights into new ways to reach these students. We now know, for instance, that students from poverty tend to learn better when visual and kinesthetic approaches are used than they do when a traditional curriculum based on verbal teaching is employed (Payne, 2001). English language learners may not have the language acquisition skills necessary for processing a great deal of data in a verbal format.

By incorporating visual tools into the curriculum and by providing a variety of teaching strategies, we can reach these students at a level never before possible.

The Vocabulary Summary of this book contains terms often used in conjunction with working with urban learners. Form 0.1 provides a list of the vocabulary words for this book. In the space provided, write your definition of the word at this time. After you have read this book, go back to your original answers to see if you have changed your mind about your definitions.

In addition, I am providing a pretest to help you identify your own knowledge of the vocabulary that will be used in this volume. At the end of the book are a posttest and the answers to the test for your self-assessment.