**BOOK REVIEW**

**Kaufman and wandberg’s powerful practices for high-performing special educators**

***Fiona S. Baker***

*Powerful Practice for High-Performing Special Educators* explores the challenges that English Language learners (ELL) bring to special education programming. The changing nature of demographics today, brings with it diversity in home languages and culture and an overrepresentation of Individualized education plans in many schools. An inherent strength of this text is its focus on the ELL population, as this population is rarely mentioned in Special Education despite its impact on teaching and learning. The text consists of an introduction, 9 chapters which outline the practical considerations in working with ELL learners, and a conclusion which serves to sum up the text.

The major benefit of this text is its focus is on how to prepare confident and competent educators for the growing population of diverse students – ELL (English Language Learners) with special educational needs. In this text, the authors, Dr. Kaufman and Dr. Wandberg provide us with a truly informative and hands-on tool - complete with usable templates - for anyone involved in maximizing learning for ELL learners. The principles and strategies mentioned throughout the text can also be applied to all other special needs populations, although these are rarely mentioned.

It is the ELL dimension that makes this text unique and worthy of our notice. The authors successfully unravel what is a challenging target for any book, into an accessible piece of reading with immediate and direct application to teaching and learning. This is an essential, up-to-date, research and practice driven, ‘how to do it’ book for faculty at colleges and universities, school teachers, and all others involved in working in and studying Special Education.

In the introduction to the text, the authors suggest that many special educators are not fully qualified in the field, and/or leave the profession as they do not have the academic training and level of support necessary. This book aims to successfully address this gap by providing knowledge and skills to qualify confident, competent and connected special education teachers who can apply knowledge and use secure skills in meeting the challenges of ELL learners. In the introduction, the authors list the numerous ways in which the text can be used. As a member of Special Education faculty teaching at undergraduate level, I found this text to be an extremely useful addition to my library, for its focus on ELL and for its contemporary research, fresh skills update and references, which are fully integrated into the text. I can equally envisage the text being of value for schools and for in-service professional development with theory and research informing practice.

Powerful Practices for High-Performing Special Educators, draws on the contributions of research and explores, in some fresh and some tried and tested ways, how research can offer fresh insights into solving common special education teacher everyday issues that lead to teacher burn out, stress, and risk to the profession. The authors advance a process of applying research to situations they have observed in P-12 classrooms today, to identify gaps in the practice of special education to improve learner achievement. The authors, Dr. Kaufman and Wandberg, skillfully intertwine research and practice throughout the book to underpin what is a highly readable, informative and interactive hands-on tool.

While useful for teachers in practice and for all others involved in special needs provision, this book is invaluable for all those engaged in the education of special education teachers. It is a straightforward and a worthwhile read. Each chapter concludes with a summary which restates the main points, followed by a self-evaluation of progress and questions for reflective practice. This consistent checking of our understanding and application serves to guide the reader in consistently relating content to practice. In this respect the text would be useful if read and applied during practicum experience, or that practical teaching assignments were organized according to the chapter’s aims in developing teacher competencies. It is impossible to eschew the text as it offers immediate implementable tips for classroom use which teachers always value. What makes this text credible is the professional research and case study practice orientation that underpin the tips supported by the contribution of professionals working in the field who are acknowledged in the book.

Topics in the text are timely and relevant as they were identified by newly qualified special educators and best-practice research, as today’s most necessary practices in becoming special education teachers. Contemporary research and focused observation of novice special educators confirms the need for specific skills and knowledge to survive and thrive in the early years of their career with the book targeting these needs. There are chapters, such as those on lesson planning for engagement and assessment which have extremely useful content for all teachers – generalists and specialists alike.

To achieve the book’s purpose, all chapters begin with the Chapter’s Objectives which are clearly itemized as bullet points; next, the Chapter Introduction briefly provides the reader with the focus and essence of the chapter. The Wisdom of Practice section gives an example of real-life educational practices and research that substantiates the chapter content. The Chapter summaries provide a brief review of the chapter’s content. The Self-assessment and Reflection, at the end of each chapter, allows the reader to reflect and self-test on the chapter’s content. Finally the reference list provides a list of the many useful references found throughout each chapter which are pertinent to Special Education. There are also embedded activities for readers to interact with as they read the contents of the book. In this way, the content becomes more meaningful and engaging.

Throughout *Powerful Practices for High-Performing Special Educators,* Kaufman and Wandberg provide clear advice and strategies for educators to meet the needs of students to better their achievement. The book successfully meets this goal by giving many example tools which teachers can instantly apply in the classroom. The authors demonstrate new and tried and tested insights into how to make content accessible and how to engage learners. For the novice special education teacher or student teacher, the advice given is easily followed, as it is clear and straightforward. It offers a robust approach to solving problems of planning, assessment and classroom management and opens avenues to explore and research. It consists largely of advice and tips which is a valuable tool box for anyone involved in teaching ELL students and others with special educational needs. The tips are also applicable to the general population.

The first chapter addresses the population of ELL students and describes the impact of diverse populations in the complexity of special needs programming, their effective assessment and accommodation. The authors report that four million students in the US (United States Department of Education, 2006) are English Language Learners (ELLs) with approximately 357325 (Pendzick, et. al., 2004) receiving Special Education services - a disproportionate representation amongst the whole student population. Kaufman and Wandberg suggest that this requires a change in thinking and a more inclusive perspective which fails to be addressed in many Special Education programs at colleges and universities. Both Dr. Kaufman and Dr. Wandberg have worked extensively with diverse, low-literacy populations in US school districts and with Special Education teachers, so are well-qualified to author a text about effective, best-practice strategies for working with English Language learners, Special Education and low literacy learners. Each chapter is placed in its socio-political context and cites central organizations and bodies regulating Special Education provisions and services in the US. Website references are given, such as the What Works Clearing House (WWC) which highlights up-to-date, helpful resources and techniques. This opens up further avenues to discuss familiar techniques and to introduce others. There is also reference to legal considerations laced throughout the chapters with reference to pertinent law and regulations.

The second chapter is about organizing time, space and resources to minimize stress and suggests ways for Special Education teachers to minimize stress outside work. The chapter is highly informative as it discusses how to draw up teaching schedules. It gives sample weekly organizational charts and suggests ways to document information and how to communicate expediently with professionals involved in Special Education services. There is also a month by month planner of job responsibilities involved in the role. These planners and schedules act as a buffer to stress inducing documentation, reporting and in-school legal processes that need time management and organizational skills.

Chapter 3 tackles managing student behavior on three levels – Prevention, Intervention and Maintenance - and appropriate practices by upholding the Code of Ethics of the Education profession (NEA). The chapter includes an ecological inventory for an inclusive classroom and observation and narrative recording forms for identification, analysis and assessment of behaviors.

Chapter 4 is about designing effective instruction and instructional strategies that work. It focuses on CRC and INTASC standards which should be recognized in lesson planning. What follows is six distinct parts which combine content standards and objectives and language objectives. A significant component is part 3 of the lesson plan which focuses on student diversity with the language domain tracked over time to ensure that all four language domains are adequately addressed. There is also a sample instructional materials checklist which includes both non-print and print materials. The incorporation of the ABC tool to assess and evaluate a lesson is helpful (Rohwer & Wandberg, 2001) as a method used to assess and evaluate a lesson which has 9 elements. These elements are applicable to making lesson planning effective and socio-constructivist in nature.

Chapter 5 has nine pages of examples of active learning techniques. For teachers unaccustomed to using active learning strategies, the authors have graded them by low-risk activities which are of relatively short in duration as a start to gradually progress to more involved ones. This chapter is about increasing student engagement which is intrinsically required to meet National Special Education standards. CEC standards promote fostering cultural understanding, safety, emotional well-being, positive social interactions and active engagement.

The content of Chapter 6, graphic organizers has nothing new. Chapter 7, however, is important as it aims to gives ideas for prioritizing and identifying AT and technology and discusses its place according to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and IDEIA of 2004 which requires that assistive technology is part of the IEP planning process. I have a sense that chapter 6 could have been subsumed into Chapter 7 as more detail is required. The chapter identifies design for learning – CAST – and organizing UDL classrooms which incorporate the concept of differentiation. Podcasting, cell phone use, digital storytelling and video-casting are among other IT tools mentioned briefly which simply wets the appetite as to the array of tools that can be used to benefit learning. There is specific mention of English Language Acquisition Technology which has been found to be a promising practice for improving language acquisition and academic success for ELL learners with learning disabilities.

Chapter 8 is about the complexities involved in evaluation and assessment with the need for on-going monitoring. A number of useful templates are provided which can be immediately applied to assessment processes.

Chapter 9 is about the need to collaborate in teams on all aspects of the process. While not new in content, it is worth having reiterated and serves to neatly conclude the text. The number of collaborations though, is daunting and may be overly stated.

The final chapter of the book called Wrapping Up, Reflecting and Celebrating! This conclusion reviews the contents of the book and discusses the rewards of applying the principles in the book.

The text is clear, although there is a lot of coverage. The book could be easier to engage with if the layout on the page and typeface were clearer and more attractive in its presentation. It has great potential in its outreach and as a springboard for further reading and self-development. It would certainly be a valuable addition for all university and college libraries and would take an important place in teacher preparation courses, Special Education Method and Materials courses, and practicum experiences.

To sum up, this book holds an important position on my shelf and is worthy of its place. It will certainly appeal to many educational professionals and student embarking or just embarked on a special educational career. Kaufman and Wandberg’s book is intended for educators and staff responsible for directly or indirectly involved in learning. Students would also benefit greatly from the ideas and steps this book provides. As a member of Education Studies faculty, with a Special Needs background, I found *Powerful Practices for High-Performing Special Educators* to be invaluable. By working through the book and applying the strategies and tips gradually during the semester to my Special Education Methods and Materials course, I recognized the benefits.

Roberta Kaufman and Robert Wandberg (2010). *Powerful Practices for High-performing Special Educators*. Corwin: US. ISBN: 978-1-4129-6807-2.