

Preface

As is true of many of my colleagues, I did not enter the field of special education through the “front door.” My love of reading and writing led me to become an English major in college, with a second major in education. I wanted to be able to share my fascination with language (reading and writing) to inspire the students I would teach in my English classes. It wasn’t long before I realized teaching English was not going to be as easy as providing popular background music while I taught Beowulf and Chaucer; unfortunately, to my surprise, I had students in my class who could not read. Thus, the “back door” to special education opened and I eagerly entered.

As a secondary English teacher, I wanted to help every student in my class to be successful; however, since I was only one person and I had large classes, the task was daunting. Hours spent writing corrections on tests, homework assignments, and papers did not produce the outcomes I hoped for, and did not seem to change the performance of students who were struggling. Those students who were doing well would continue to do so; I wanted to help the students who lacked the skills, strategies, and organization needed to succeed in school. I realized many of my students did not know how to develop solid study strategies on their own, even if motivated to do so, and the traditional study skills I knew were not working for them. I needed to find out how I could teach these students more efficient ways to master content material, work with their teachers more effectively, and perform better on tests. I began to develop strategies that would provide explicit structures, guides, and templates that were not dependent on the student’s prior knowledge, organizational skills, or ability to “know” what to do.

These students needed strategies that did not rely heavily on their judgment, that provided “concrete” guides, and that were as “user-friendly” as possible. Students with learning disabilities and/or attention disorders had to have instruction that was more intense, explicit, and recursive than other students to “learn how to learn.” Over the years, the strategies I developed while helping students to be more successful evolved into the program titled *Independent Strategies for Efficient Study*. To make sure the program was rigorous enough for students with learning disabilities and attention disorders, three studies were conducted, and the results demonstrated significant improvement in classroom grades when the strategies were implemented (Rooney, 1998). The strategies in this book are taken from that program, which has been taught to students with learning disabilities/attention disorders in clinical, private, and public settings since 1984.

At the secondary level, students need help at the skill level to improve reading, writing, spelling, and math, but they also need strategies that organize their learning to meet the demands of a variety of content areas/disciplines. The strategies in this book have been honed to create systems that are explicit, intense, and reiterative to improve performance, enable students to access the general education curriculum, and manage content across subject areas. The strategies may initially be implemented with assistance, but the goal is to develop independent use at some level as soon as possible. Even if adult assistance is needed initially, the strategies produce models that can transfer to independent use to increase self-esteem and confidence. Since the strategies teach students “how to learn,” “how to organize,” and “how to process information,” lifelong learning is supported because the basic strategies remain the same even though the content may become more complex.

My hope is that the strategies in this book will help you empower your students, whether in the general education curriculum, in inclusive, co-taught or collaborative classes, in homeschooling situations, in private schools, or in special education settings. Additional resources at the ends of the chapters provide references for information and research related to the general principles underlying the strategies presented in this book.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rooney, K. (1998). *Independent strategies for efficient study*. Richmond, VA: Educational Enterprises. (Web site: www.krooney.com)

This is the original manual that was used as a reference tool for students and teachers after completing instruction in the *Independent Strategies for Efficient Study* program.

Swanson, L., Hoskyn, M., & Lee, C. (1999). *Interventions for students with learning disabilities: A meta-analysis of treatment outcomes*. New York: Guilford Press.

This book reviews the treatment outcomes for interventions with learning-disability students and also establishes the improvement in performance when strategy instruction is included in the intervention.