Foreword

Reflecting back over my career in the field of Education, and Special Education in particular, I find myself in awe of the amount of change that has occurred over the past 45 years. Various trends and corresponding issues have posed challenges for even the best in the field. In some areas of the United States, the demographics have shifted dramatically, reflecting major changes in ethnic composition in various communities and in our schools. Parallel to these changes in ethnic composition in some regions have been the sweeping changes in special education laws and policies at national and state levels that seem to be culminating in an “instructional revolution” by those who are deeply committed to providing quality instruction for children and youth across another dimension of diversity; i. e., those who manifest special needs and a variety of disabilities. Although we have come a long way, the implications for our school leaders and teachers have frequently been daunting, and sometimes confusing, as these individuals have been charged with navigating successfully through numerous change processes during this span of time. All of these changes have been given impetus first and foremost by teacher and school leader attitudes, beliefs and personal dispositions. In spite of the many realities associated with deep educational system change processes, we are clearly in a much better position to provide meaningful relevant educational programs for those with diverse and special needs than we were forty plus years ago. In some ways, the rate of change impacting those with disabilities has been staggering.

The authors of this book have brought into clearer focus the importance of preparing pre-service teacher candidates for the reality that awaits them in today’s classrooms. The magnitude of these challenges is boldly evident to so many candidates the first day they enter an early field experience, begin student teaching, or perhaps assume a teaching internship while concurrently pursuing their teacher preparation coursework for licensure or certification in a given state. These teacher candidates are fully challenged daily by needing to craft best ways of reaching and teaching children and youth across ethnicities and who also span a range of abilities and disabilities. They are expected to do so in a manner that results in positive student outcomes across many dimensions and areas of development and performance, including student achievement. Contributors to this publication have shed light on a very important educational topic of significance to all educators in contemporary schools. Insights and strategies for preparing future teachers to be proficient in their employment of inclusive practices in ways that glean positive results for all school-aged children and youth while considering the whole child are vital.

Notably, the authors of this book have explored some very important dimensions of inclusive practices that give pre-service candidates and teacher educators alike substantial focus areas to explore, discuss, and consider, including desired attitudes and proficiencies for evolving exceptional teacher candidates.. Their approach to this topic is highly relevant for today’s classrooms and offers practical strategies that can be mastered by pre-service teachers for application across the PK-12 spectrum. Organized according to four major sections, the authors delve into methods and strategies for helping the candidate with the following:
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1. Designing instruction,
2. Teaching the individual and providing solutions for challenges,
3. Meeting content demands, including specific pedagogical content knowledge to address needs of exceptional students, and
4. Creating a community of support.

A balance between theory, practice and shared inquiry is stressed. Grounded in the best practices and applications of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), strategies for supporting all learners is emphasized and is offered as a powerful strategic tool available to pre-service teachers. Subject matter content relative to pedagogical content knowledge and how to address the needs of exceptional learners is adeptly addressed. Teaching the individual is the focus of the final section of the book where fundamentals of classroom management in inclusive settings, addressing the needs of gifts in students with disabilities, educating the whole child and implementing effective student study teams are presented in insightful ways with accompanying strategies to be considered by teachers in inclusive settings. If one is to be truly effective as a 21st Century pre-service teacher, it is recommended that they be grounded in sound practices relative to the integration of UDL, Response to Intervention (RTI), differentiated instruction and research-based strategies and best practices for integrating special education curriculum with Common Core state standards. Fortunately, this book will serve as a great resource for initiating and/or evolving this very important knowledge base.

It is particularly gratifying to be part of an ongoing movement that stands for something bigger than any of us individually and that demonstrates to us individually and collectively every day that we do not yet know the full capacity of those challenged with special needs. I feel privileged to be part of an inclusive practices movement that truly stands for something great and calls all of us together—in both General and Special Education—to a higher purpose for our collaborative work in the important quest to better prepare teacher candidates. By expanding their understanding of exceptional students and various tools for teaching them, pre-service teachers will learn critical skills and be able to confidently employ effective inclusive practices for all PK-12 diverse learners, including those who perpetually face difficult and seemingly insurmountable academic challenges I am convinced that by attaining deeper knowledge of these practices that together we will undoubtedly prepare even more effective results-oriented teacher practitioners committed to inclusive practices. The vision is that our future teachers can evolve into more compassionate and influential citizens in a global society, and in turn, have the capacity to powerfully influence inclusive practices for generations to come. I salute all of the authors of this noteworthy book for shedding light on such an important topic!

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