

Preface

CREATING THIS BOOK

As education consultants, we have been delivering professional development for many, many years, and after every presentation, training, or instructional coaching session, someone will approach us and ask, “Is there a book where I can find all the instructional strategies you used?” Our answer is always vague: “Well, we get our ideas from lots of different places . . .” The response was nearly always, “You two should write a book so that we could find them all in one place. That would help so much.”

It is also common for teachers we work with to call us or e-mail us asking for ideas for strategies to make lessons more engaging. One middle school teacher, who is also a dear friend, would call about once a month asking for specific strategies to make her lessons more student-centered. Each time, she would remind us that she would not call us so much if we had a book to give her. Wendy was very specific in what she wanted: “It needs to be easy to use. I want to be able to turn to a strategy and have it explained step by step. I also want it to have a chart listing all the strategies and what they are good for.” Great ideas! Someone should write a book like that!

Alisa wanted it to be us, and kept pushing for us to get to work on a book. Denise was resistant, however, wondering how we could possibly fit one more thing into our busy lives. Then, one night at dinner with her family at a Chinese restaurant, Denise broke open a fortune cookie and read the message inside: “You are a lover of words. You should write a book.” Who could argue with that? So we carved out some time the next month, dove in, and started writing. Anytime we felt like giving up, we would remind each other of all the teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches who have asked us for this book. And we kept writing. For them.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Teachers

There is no right or wrong way to use this book. It is meant to be a handbook and a toolkit for you to use as you plan for student learning, not a text to be read from cover to cover. There are reflection questions at the end of each chapter to challenge your thinking and push you to take action. The strategies in each chapter can be used to design lessons from scratch or to enhance even the most scripted program.

There are lots of places to start. You may want to read through the vignettes first. All the scenarios have been taken from either our own classroom experiences or from the teachers and students we have worked with across the country. If you see yourself or one of your students in one of them, check out the strategies that worked for that teacher. Maybe they will work for you, too.

Another starting point is the matrix. If you know there are elements you want to add to your lessons, such as academic conversation and movement, trace those elements through the matrix and find the strategies that include them. These strategies can be put into any lesson, any grade level, any content. You could also dig into the chapters that address those elements to discover what they include and why they are effective.

You could also start with the strategies themselves. Glance through the Contents and find a strategy that sounds interesting. Check out the time needed and the preparation required. The procedures are right there for you to put onto a slide or write on the board to guide your students through the process.

Administrators

You can use this book as a resource as you work with your teachers. If you want a teacher to let her students work together more often, you can give her a specific strategy from the collaboration chapter to try. If this teacher tells you that she has tried group work but it just doesn't work with these kids, you can give her the sections that describe what collaboration is and why it works.

You could also use this for a book study during staff meetings or professional learning communities (PLCs). The reflection questions at the end of each chapter lend themselves to rich and meaningful discussions during PLCs. You could also divide the chapters up between grade levels or departments or among the members of a PLC and let them take the lead in modeling the strategies and explaining the research behind them.

Instructional Coaches

You can use these strategies as you plan presentations for teachers. Allow participants to process the content you are teaching through an instructional strategy that they can also take away and add to their toolkits.

When you coach teachers, you can use the research to help them understand why adding a certain element like reflection and closure to their lessons addresses the way the human brain learns. You can then offer specific strategies that they can try the next day.

You can also use this book as a coaching tool. Allow teachers to select an area they would like to focus on (anticipatory sets, movement, questioning, etc.) and use that chapter as a guide to talk about it, plan for it, and practice it. Use the reflection questions at the end of each chapter as springboards for discussion and ways to take action.

Suggestions

However you choose to use this book, here are some suggestions to optimize its effectiveness:

1. **Try a strategy more than once.** The first time is a new experience for both you and the students. It is an opportunity to analyze what went well and what didn't and to adjust the procedures for the next attempt.
2. **Try "hard" strategies in the safest environment.** If you are reticent to try a strategy because you don't know how it will go, try it first with your least challenging class or in your favorite content area. This will give you the best opportunity to experience the strategy and "work out the kinks" before implementing it with more challenging students or content.
3. **Collaborate with your colleagues.** Everyone brings a unique perspective to the table. If several of you try the same strategy, you can debrief it afterward and compare and contrast your experiences. You could also divide up several strategies and each of you be responsible for trying one and reporting back to the group how it went and what changes you would recommend.
4. **Mark up your book.** Remember, this is a handbook and a toolkit. Make it yours. Jot notes about what worked and what didn't. Note any adaptations you made or want to consider in the future.