Chapter-By-Chapter Study Guide for
How the Special Needs Brain Learns, Second Edition
by David A. Sousa

Introduction

Summary

- Educators are searching for new strategies and techniques to meet the needs of an ethnically, culturally, and socially diverse student population. Some tried-and-true strategies are not as successful as they were in the past, and more students seem to be having difficulty acquiring just the basic skills of reading, writing, and computation.

- For the purposes of this book, the term “special needs” refers to students who are (1) diagnosed and classified as having specific learning problems, including speech, reading, writing, mathematics, and emotional and behavioral disorders; (2) enrolled in supplemental instruction programs for basic skills, such as those receiving federal funding under Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and (3) not classified for special education nor assigned to Title I programs, but still struggling with problems affecting their learning.
This book discusses brain research that relates to teaching and learning, especially as it applies to students with learning difficulties. Some of these research findings are challenging long-held beliefs about the cause, progress, and treatment of specific learning disorders. Educators in both general and special education should be aware of this research so that they can decide what implications the findings have for their practice.

Some students designated as “learning disabled” may be merely “schooling disabled.” Sometimes, these students are struggling to learn in an environment that is designed inadvertently to frustrate their efforts. Just changing our instructional approach may be enough to move these students to the ranks of successful learners.

Several chapters contain lists of symptoms that are used to help identify specific disorders. The symptoms are included only for informational purposes and they should not be used as a basis for diagnosis. Any individual who exhibits persistent learning problems should be referred to qualified clinical personnel for assessment.

Discussion Questions

1. How does this book define students with special needs?
2. In what ways can general and special education teachers collaborate to help students with special needs?
3. What does the author mean by stating that some students who are labeled “learning disabled” may just be “schooling disabled”?

Activity

>Video/DVD: Introduction
Time: 2-3 minutes

Show the first section of the video/DVD, “Introduction.”