

# Preface

**F**our letters prompted the writing of this second edition: N-C-L-B.

Since the launching of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, federally mandated high-stakes testing has changed classroom environments across the nation, unfortunately, not for the better. District leaders, rightfully worried about the federal sanctions and stigmatizing achievement labels associated with high-stakes testing results, continue to make decisions based on raising test scores—no matter the consequences—and dismiss student-centered, brain-centered classrooms as pre-NCLB luxuries. One leader, while discussing a book on the *collateral damage* (Berliner & Nichols, 2007) brought about by the federal legislation, quipped: “That’s all well and good, but what does it have to do with student achievement?”

Several years researching teacher dissatisfaction and the cognitively debilitating syndrome of teacher burnout have helped me realize teachers needed a book that would help them *defend* student-centered, brain-friendly practices against intrusive, prepackaged promises. To be taken seriously, I knew that book would need to connect brain-compatible dots with student achievement dots.

This second edition connects the dots.

The book features an original *brain-compatible framework for student achievement* that illustrates the harmony between the first edition’s brain-compatible classroom principles related to safety, respect, novelty, and memory and research-based propositions and features related to student achievement, achievement that occurred in diverse settings, from rural to suburban and from middle class to below the poverty line. By connecting the dots to student achievement, the framework provides teachers evidence they need to defend their brain-centered practices against the test-centered practices being forced upon them.

## WHAT'S NEW IN THE SECOND EDITION

- The brain-compatible framework for student achievement and its research-based support base
  1. *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*: five core propositions related to standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do
  2. *National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement*: six features of effective instruction
- A section on the learning brain, which provides information intended to help teachers share with their students how the amazing brain learns
- Chapters organized around six research-based features of effective instruction that fostered student achievement
  1. Teachers make connections across instruction, curriculum, and life.
  2. Students learn skills in multiple lesson types.
  3. Teachers integrate test preparation into instruction.
  4. Students learn strategies for doing the work.
  5. Students are expected to be generative thinkers.
  6. Classrooms foster cognitive collaboration.

Each of these chapters

- describes characteristics of one of the six research-based features of effective instruction and provides examples of what the feature looks like in classrooms;
- demonstrates the compatibility of the feature to brain-compatible principles from the first edition as well as to core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards;
- presents lessons, ideas, and activities exemplifying the specific feature of the brain-compatible framework in action;
- concludes with questions related to the chapter's content.

A concluding chapter summarizes key points about the brain-compatible framework for student achievement and reflects on the vision of high-stakes testing environments with every child a lifelong learner.

## OTHER VALUABLE ADDITIONS

I am grateful to the reviewers whose insights and suggestions led to other valuable additions:

- More stories from the classroom;
- More cross-curricular writing activities;
- More activities for each grade span, that is, elementary, middle, and high school easily identified in boxes titled *Calling All Teachers!*;
- More discussion of brain-compatible classroom practices in relation to diverse student populations, for example, English language learners.

## WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

Besides language arts teachers, I believe the second edition will be of particular use to teachers who

- believe in cross-curricular writing;
- want reputable and reliable research findings to support their brain-friendly instructional practices against teach-to-the-test practices;
- want to learn more about the research-based features of instruction that foster student achievement.

Effective instruction that advances the achievement of literacy requires safe and engaging learning environments that are more likely to occur when teachers have the support necessary to create, sustain, and defend those environments. As teacher-researchers, we must not read research and interpret it hastily. Notwithstanding, in the age of high-stakes testing where teachers are forced to replace best practice with test practice, I believe we must seize research on student achievement that suggests harmony with brain-compatible principles and run with it! We can take comfort knowing that even while we rely on research related to higher test scores, we know we are really defending what we truly believe in: brain-friendly teaching.

I hope teachers and administrators who believe in brain-compatible learning, who believe that children cannot and must not be standardized, will find support inside these pages.