

## Book Review

# Students at Risk, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

Cheryll Duquette

Markham, Ontario, Canada: Pembroke Publishers, 2013

Reviewed by: Shelina Bhamani  
Women & Child Division, Aga Khan University

*Students at Risk* provides essential support for teachers and caregivers with interests in students' learning styles and learning psychology. The author, Cheryll Duquette researches special education and works closely with teacher education programmes. She develops concrete and "hands on" classroom programmes for teachers that support them. The 159-page book is presented in a readable font, includes a navigation-friendly table of contents at the front, and index at the back. Its cover page encapsulates the content by depicting a 12-year-old child that is looking depressed sitting alone on the bench with books by his side in the hallway. Right after the picture, the title *Students at Risk* appears in a manner that (combined with the picture) attracts the attention of educators and parents who are looking for answers to their questions regarding students at risk in educational settings. In addition to these merits, *Students at Risk* also provides practical examples and ideas on how to mindfully handle and provide responsive care for students at risk. Duquette speaks in detail about the concepts and relevance of diversity, inclusion, and individual learning to assess the effectiveness of inclusion of all types of students in any learning environment. She makes a case for inclusion of different kinds of learners in classrooms, focusing specifically on problems that adolescents encounter.

Diversity and inclusion, as Cushner (1992) mentions, is a changing paradigm of education. Duquette explores diversity and inclusion with the goal of supporting students with special needs. She wants to help teachers understand, accept, and practice appreciation of such students in their classrooms. Moreover, she wants teachers to address students' needs by planning and executing lessons in a manner that is engaging and constructive for such learners. She suggests that teachers "feel frustrated at their perceived inability to teach all their students, let alone meet individual needs" (p. 7). She elucidates practical guidelines for teaching and supporting students with exceptions through differentiated learning methodologies. The core objective of the book is to value inclusion in a class that has different types of learners with differing needs.

Duquette uses plain language and expressions to disseminate ideas and concepts to readers. Therefore, this book can easily be used as a handy tool by teachers, parents, or caregivers. Almost all of the chapters use case studies and describe hands-on activities to illustrate concepts. The content is clear. To make it more reader friendly, the definitions of all major concepts are provided briefly on the left side of the main text on most pages.

The first three chapters of the book depict the whole process of working with students at risk, stage by stage, starting from observation of children to formulation of goals to development of strategies and, finally, to implementation and review of the action plan. These chapters

revolve around case studies of students in grades five, seven, and nine. DuQuette identifies students' problems and the strategies that were applied to facilitate their learning.

Chapter 1, "Observing Students," discusses how to observe students and carry out a needs analysis to develop individualized lesson plans for them. In this chapter, the author explains that every teacher requires a framework for planning for students with differentiated needs and problems, and elaborates on understanding the strengths and areas of improvement for every student. DuQuette places a lot of emphasis on observations to explore the various traits of students, explaining that "you might be surprised by what you discover" (p. 9). Further in the chapter, a sample of screening checklists is provided for teachers to explore the various milestones of the students who appear to be slow learners in language, math, motor development, and other related skills. Additionally, behavioural problems such as disruption, hyperactivity, chaos, and anger that a few students demonstrate are also explained with examples and case studies. The author enlists hands-on strategies to describe various methods to manage different aspects of children's personality and proposes "cautionary notes" to help teachers who observe student behaviour "keep the right balance between objectivity and involvement" (p. 17) when observing students.

In chapter 2, "Formulating Goals, and Developing Strategies," the author discusses her experiences handling students at risk in elementary school classrooms. She explains how she sets goals to cater to students with behavioural problems and emotional challenges and how her experiences and interventions with these students have resulted in positive changes in their behaviours and learning patterns. Techniques for translation of goals into actions, management of the coping problems that students face, and ways to address disruptive behaviours of such students are also provided. DuQuette explains the role of teachers and identifies "how caring and committed teachers can help their students improve and extend their performance" (p. 29).

Chapter 3, "Implementing and Reviewing the Action Plan," details the final stage of the process of working with students at risk. Again, she draws on her experience as a facilitator of such students in her professional life. She suggests that catering to all types of students is of key significance for all teachers. The whole chapter discusses how data can be recorded throughout the implementation phase to see if the students are making progress or if the strategies to help them are working in a way that is benefiting their quality of life. Practical examples are given within the text to support the ideas, including how the recorded data on the students can help parents and caregivers explore concepts of progress. DuQuette has also placed emphasis on involvement of parents and special education teachers in the planning and implementation stages. She provides a few sample planning sheets and a summary checklist that provides educators with practical ideas and tools on how to plan for and support students in these stages.

In chapter 4, "Differentiated Instruction," the author focuses on raising awareness of how to make learning accessible for all. She acknowledges the concept of universal design of learning that entails how educational systems work for all kinds of students with various learning characteristics. Such approaches, according to DuQuette, equip teachers with a wide range of practices for the classroom, enabling educators to cater to the needs of all students. They "reduce the barriers that limit students to access to materials and learning" (p. 44). Later in the chapter, the author comprehensively presents various strategies to support this type of instruction. At the end, the whole process of initiation of differentiated learning is demonstrated, followed by an observational checklist to plan differentiated learning in the elementary school classrooms.

Chapter 5, "Learning Disabilities," asks teachers to reflect on learning disabilities, which,

according to the author, are different from person to person and context to context. The later part of the chapter identifies the causes of learning disabilities, their effects on academic performance, characteristics of students with learning disabilities in elementary school settings, and ways through which these students can be supported in their learning in class and at school. Here, the author excels, unfolding practical ideas about catering to needs and supporting the learning of such students.

In chapter 6, “Behaviour Disorders,” DuQuette discusses and identifies various kinds of behavioural problems and disabilities. Attention is given to providing explanations about students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and ways in which such students can be helped. DuQuette has also underlined critical role of teachers in handling these students and suggests that teachers should consistently reflect upon, and improvise their skills of handling students with various learning characteristics.

In chapter 7, “Giftedness,” traditional and modern concepts of determining giftedness in students are discussed. Furthermore, strategies for preparation of the learning environment and experiences for gifted students are depicted. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive characteristics checklist for teachers to explore and identify gifted students in the elementary school grades.

Chapter 8 focuses on “Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.” According to the author, “a developmental disability is not a temporary development lag. It is a mental and physical impairment that manifests itself before the age of 18” (p. 96). The chapter goes on to describe the characteristics of such children and strategies for their support.

Chapter 9 talks about mental illness and has a primary focus on anxiety disorders and depression in adolescent students. Here, the author describes briefly the kinds of social anxiety that students in this age range encounter. She touches upon obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well. DuQuette emphasizes the role of environment, society, and academia in addressing these issues.

Chapter 10 is about “Sensory Impairments” and entitled as such. It features mainly information about visual and hearing impairments and the strategies that teachers could use to support students with such impairments. In the middle of the chapter, a very comprehensive checklist for “symptoms for hearing loss” (p. 112) is presented in which indicators for observations are provided to detect hearing problems. This checklist is made so easy to understand and mark that parents can also identify hearing impairment in their child/children.

Chapters 11 and 12 are focused specifically on disorders and disabilities like autism, mental retardation, Tourette syndrome, epilepsy, brain injuries, seizures, and physical disabilities like hearing impairment, difficulties in walking, motor skill coordination challenges, and eye-hand coordination issues. These chapters have the same structure. They start with a description of the diseases and their symptoms and proceed to identify strategies to work with students affected by one or more of them. These chapters are well written and provide concise information for the teachers to manage such children in their classrooms.

Chapter 14, “Working with Parents,” details concepts and effective strategies for working with parents of students at risk and students with special needs. In this chapter, the author also mentions the need for being correctly informed about the recent trend where “most parents want to be involved with their child’s education, and researches have persistently shown that their involvement is linked to positive school outcomes” (p. 133). Additionally, this chapter focuses on giving short descriptions of various forms of parent-teacher partnerships and strategies for parent-teacher conferences that concentrate on the holistic development of

children. The focus is not only on traditionally used strategies of parent teacher communication but also on the inclusion of social media networking and emailing.

Chapter 15, titled “Smooth Transition Planning,” is the last chapter and discusses transition and its sensitivity in the whole process of management of students with special needs and their complexities. It focuses particularly on ensuring that transitions are well planned by the teachers and the caregivers to avoid problematic situations for both students and other learners in the classroom. The author has comprehensively indicated the significance of transition planning for the future of the child and community.

The final section of the book includes appendices that have various hands-on and easy-to-use templates and checklists. The last few pages have references and indexes. In the entire book, Duquette focuses on catering to the needs of various kinds of learners in classrooms. She attempts to show the significant and positive impact of the teacher in this whole process. *Students at Risk* is one of the better contributions in the field of special education, inclusion, and education for all. It is a very useful resource for teachers and parents as it provides basic and practical understanding centred on catering to students with various learning and behavioural problems, or students who are at risk.

### Reference

Cushner, K. (1992). *Human diversity in education: An integrative approach*. Hightstown, NJ: McGraw-Hill.

---

*Shelina Bhamani, Ph.D.* is an Assistant Professor, Research in the Women and Child Health Division at the Aga Khan University. Her research interests include early childhood development, parenting education, and program evaluation.