

Preface

My path to authoring this textbook evolved from a fundamental love of working with children and young adults, combined with a respect and passion for science. In addition, I believe I have a unique perspective on education and psychology that I could not find in other textbooks currently on the market: I wanted to provide a resource for others interested in how this point of view furthers the educational mission of our country and informs educational best practice. My journey into educational psychology, however, did not begin with a typical graduate program in that field. Like many of us, my education and professional career seemed to take on a life of its own, moving in many directions. In this preface, I would like to detail some of that history to help you understand my perspective.

I began my doctoral education in the Brain Research and Neuropsychology Laboratory at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. This position was a natural fit, building on my long-standing strengths in the sciences. Additionally, I pursued work in this lab because the primary focus of the work was on children with disabilities and how they compared to more typically developing peers. I found this fascinating and wanted to learn more. Specifically, my laboratory work centered on understanding the electroencephalographic differences between children with and those without a primary diagnosis of AD/HD. Through this work, I began to develop a more general interest in learning and how it is realized through formal education. Because of this interest, I completed a pre-doctoral internship at the Southeastern Biofeedback and Neurobehavioral Institute. There, I helped children with a variety of developmental disabilities learn to gain control over their attentional resources through EEG biofeedback. In a supplemental role, I also became involved in cognitive remediation, helping children directly address academic issues through remedial techniques grounded in cognitive psychological theory. This compilation of work moved my professional focus toward the field of educational psychology. In short, building upon my neuroscience background, I broadened my focus to the general intersection of psychology and education.

After I received my doctorate, I was accepted as a clinical post-doctoral fellow at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Kennedy Krieger Institute. I was told it was my unique background in neuroscience and education that was pivotal in securing this highly competitive position. Once on the job, I found that I was able to use my skills to bring a fresh perspective to the assessment of children with learning differences. I assessed hundreds of children with difficulties spanning all of the DSM classifications applied to children. With each case, I learned more about the breadth of individual differences and how to help children and young adults learn and grow in a formal educational setting.

It was also in this role that I was introduced to phenomenal power of interdisciplinary collaboration. At the Kennedy Krieger Institute, a team of specialists trained in the child's unique presenting needs sees each child. Disciplines can include speech language pathology, behavioral psychology, education, clinical psychology, medicine, nursing, and occasionally other disciplines unique to the case. Each week, the entire team meets to review their findings for a particular child. Interdisciplinary conferences begin with professionals from each discipline formally presenting their findings and recommendations, followed by an in-depth dialogue on the child's needs, and culminate in summary recommendations evolving from the exchange. This experience had a significant and lasting impact on my views of professional applied work and how it can be dramatically enhanced through the shared perspectives of different disciplines. It changed, forever, my views on education and how to generate best practices for positive learning outcomes.

After my post-doctoral experience, I accepted an academic position at the State University of New York, Cortland that was primarily focused on educational psychology. It was here that I developed a passion for teaching pre-service teachers and other emerging professionals. Over the years, I used several educational psychology textbooks. However, I found that, as a group, they lacked what I believe to be the most current and forward thinking ideas in the field. Namely, they were written without an eye toward how traditional educational psychology topics can be presented through the lens of strong interdisciplinary collaboration. Additionally, I found that existing textbooks were weak in their coverage of learning differences.

Now, a few years later, I have finally produced a textbook addressing these issues. I have maintained much of the traditional layout of educational psychology textbooks, but with updated content to better mirror current best practices and interdisciplinary perspectives. I have also significantly strengthened the coverage on learning differences. I felt this was particularly important since many pre-service regular education teachers receive limited exposure to this material. Throughout the book, I tried to maintain a straightforward, easy to read writing style. I hope you will be able to use this book in your college course and keep it as a resource in your professional life.

My sincere best wishes in all your learning endeavors.

Jeffery N. Swartwood, PhD
Associate Professor of Psychology
State University of New York, Cortland
Jeff.Swartwood@cortland.edu