Strategram™

STRATEGIC INSTRUCTION MODEL

VOLUME 10 The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning NUMBER 4

July 1998

# Focusing on what's best for students

## *Speaker shares concerns about educational trends*

*This summer, the Center for Research on Learning marks its 20th anniversary. The Center celebrated the occasion in July during its annual update conference for members of the International SIM Trainers' Network. The conference featured two keynote speakers: Richard Lavoie, headmaster of Riverview School, a residential school in East Sandwich, Massachusetts, for 150 students with learning disabilities, and Floyd Hudson, professor of special education at the University of Kansas Medical Center. In this issue of* Strategram*, read about Lavoie's keynote address and his special workshop on motivation. Look for an account of Hudson's keynote address and workshop on his Class-within-a-Class instructional model in a future issue of* Strategram.

***Julie Tollefson***
Managing Editor
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At the age of 10, Rick Lavoie knew he wanted to be a special education teacher.

Now headmaster of a residential school for 150 students with learning disabilities, Lavoie could look back at a distinguished career in the field, but it's the future of special education and the students it affects that has his attention.

In an address to members of the International SIM Trainers' Network in July, Lavoie shared his concerns about the field of education and some of the trends it seems to be following.

"Too many people think progress is replacing what's old because it's old and accepting what's new because it's new," he said. Unfortunately, what's new may not be what's best for the students. He praised the work done at the Center for Research on Learning during the last 20 years, saying its magic is the quality and consistency of the message it has promoted over the years. The quality of its work, he said, is an example of the types of interventions that should not be replaced by the latest educational trend.

**When someone talks to me about the latest trends or issues, I**

Peppering his message with tales of students he's known over the years, Lavoie continually brought the focus of his talk back to the students with disabilities who are most affected by trends and decisions made by educators.

After working as a teacher and administrator, Lavoie took his knowledge and experience on the road, presenting workshops around the world. Lavoie is the developer of, among other things, the F.A.T. City Workshop, in which parents, educators, psychologists, and social workers participate in a series of classroom activities that cause ***f***rustration, ***a***nxiety, and ***t***ension. The workshop allows participants to look at the world through the eyes of a child with learning disabilities.

During the five years he spent presenting his workshops around the world, Lavoie also spent long hours and late nights talking with *people*. As a result, he said, "When someone talks to me about the latest trends or issues, I automatically think 'how's it going to impact on individuals?'"

Unfortunately for students, that's not the approach of all members of the educational community.

# Lavoie's slogan

## Learning Disabilities: The Real Challenge is Educating Those Who Don't Have One.

Too many decisions are made for monetary or political reasons, he said, and the decision-makers don't think about how they are affecting real people.

Compounding the problem, he said, is that people are always looking for simple solutions for students with learning disabilities. Lavoie's response to that is adamant: There are no simple solutions.

### Work ethic and the self-fulfilling prophecy

"I think the largest problem we face in education, the largest problem we face in special education, is the lack of a work ethic," Lavoie said.

In 1975 when schools first began to mainstream special education students into general education classrooms, the great fear among special educators was that general education teachers would not understand the students and would work them too hard, Lavoie said. Actually, the converse has proved to be the problem. No one expects students with special needs to do anything today, he said.

In some districts, he said, there is a near total lack of work ethic in special education today. This lack of work ethic manifests itself in four ways:

### 1. Lack of unasked expectations

No one expects the students to work. Teachers look for excuses not to teach and for excuses for students not to learn. "It is a cancer growing in our field," Lavoie said.

### 2. Strengths versus weaknesses

When Lavoie entered the field, the special education teacher's job was to work on the student's weaknesses. The teacher recognized the student's strengths and used those strengths to improve the areas in which the student was weak. Now, he said, special educators seem to be working only on strengths and ignoring the weaknesses.

To illustrate his point, Lavoie described a classroom he visited in which all of the students but one received a math lesson packet and a spelling lesson packet to work on that day. The remaining student received two math packets. When Lavoie asked why the student didn't receive a spelling packet, the teacher replied that the student wasn't very good at spelling.

"When did we get the idea that if a kid can't do something, we shouldn't work on it?" Lavoie asked conference participants.

### 3. Compensatory versus remedial education

Another trend in special education is toward compensatory education, bringing content down to a student's instructional level. Compensatory education has its place, Lavoie said, but he doesn't believe it's in special education or the resource room. Too many teachers are so involved in compensatory education now that no one is doing any remediation. A special educator's job is to remediate, or help improve a student's skills, Lavoie said. Compensatory education may make it seem that the problem has gone away, but in reality it's still there under the surface. Remediation attacks the problem at its root.

### 4. Use of support personnel with special needs kids

Lavoie expressed concern that every field except education recognizes that specialists should handle the toughest cases. A hospital admissions clerk, for example, does not treat heart attack victims. A summer

## www.ku-crl.org

Look for more information about the presentations and workshops offered during the 1998 National SIM Trainers' Conference on the Center for Research on Learning Web site. Information will be posted in coming months.

intern does not represent a law firm's most important client. Yet too often in education, the really tough students are entrusted to the least experienced workers. Lavoie cited a case in which a student with learning disabilities whose difficulties had confounded an experienced staff was placed with a "volunteer grandmother" for several hours a day. Lavoie's position is that the student should have been working with the teacher, the specialist, while the volunteer grandmother circulated throughout the rest of the classroom to provide assistance that did not require professional expertise.

## On the topic of inclusion...

Richard Lavoie, one of the keynote speakers during the National SIM Trainers' Conference in July, believes very strongly in *responsible* inclusion, but thinks *total* inclusion is the biggest mistake educators can make. He calls *total* inclusion a civil rights issue, not an educational issue.

Lavoie uses the school at which he is headmaster as an example of an institution that focuses on what's best for the student. Riverview School is a residential school in East Sandwich, Massachusetts, for 150 students with learning disabilities. Riverview's mission is to provide state-of-the-art educational services to adolescents with special educational needs.

"There are some times in the lives of some kids that they need to spend time with other kids who are fighting the same dragon they are," Lavoie said.

Simply placing a student with learning difficulties in a class with general education students doesn't guarantee that student will learn, he said. "Students don't catch language skills like they catch the flu."

### Multidisciplinary education

According to Lavoie, the second biggest problem facing both general and special education today is multidisciplinary education.

This concept, which brings educators from different specialties together to solve problems, has gone awry. The way it is implemented in many cases makes decision making almost impossible. Educators may come together to discuss a situation, but each comes with blinders limiting their vision to their own area of specialization. Discussions can become territorial, with each educator afraid someone else will infringe on his or her area of expertise. Each educator represents a special interest, but no one represents the whole child.

At Riverview School, Lavoie's staff practices *transdisciplinary* education. All participants attend meetings as equals, not as specialists affiliated with specific niches. Every person's contribution is valued. When staff members walk into Riverview's conference room, each one is there to be an advocate for the student, not for a special interest.

To remind staff of their primary purpose during these discussions, the only decoration on the conference room wall is an African proverb: When elephants fight, it's the grass that gets trampled.

"When adults fight," Lavoie said, "it's the kids who get hurt."

## African proverb

**When elephants fight, it's the grass that gets trampled.**

# Motivation misconceptions

Richard Lavoie is very clear about the teacher's role in student motivation.

Students don't come to a classroom with ready-made motivation, he said. It is the teacher's job to help them find the motivation to do well in the class.

Lavoie, headmaster of Riverview School, a residential school in East Sandwich, Massachusetts, for 150 students with learning disabilities, recently elaborated on this topic and presented several myths and misconceptions surrounding motivation.

### Myth #1: "Nothing motivates that kid!"

A teacher who says nothing motivates a student indicates that he or she does not understand motivation, Lavoie said. Every behavior is motivated. In fact, it may take a tremendous amount of motivation to *not* comply with a teacher's requests and expectations.

"It's your job to get the kid to be motivated to do what you want him to do," he said.

### Myth #2: "That kid—one day he's motivated, the next day he's not!"

Motivation is a constant, Lavoie said. Behavior and performance may be different from day to day, but motivation remains the same. If the student is motivated to learn one day, he or she is motivated to learn the next day.

## Myths about motivation

- **"Nothing motivates that kid!"**
- **"That kid—one day he's motivated, the next day he's not!"**
- **"Give him something that'll motivate him!"**
- **"Competition—the great motivator!"**
- **"He won't even try…he's so lazy."**
- **"I don't care if he is LD, at least he could try!"**
- **"The more you put into it, the more you get out of it!"**

### Myth #3: "Give him something that'll motivate him!"

This ill-conceived method of motivating students involves giving the student something he loves, such as the opportunity to play soccer, when the student is good and withholding that privilege when the student is bad. Lavoie calls this a faulty technique that is not effective in the long run. The constant need to prove himself or herself worthy of the reward eventually wears down the student, who decides the reward is not worth the effort.

### Myth #4: "Competition—the great motivator!"

Lavoie spent much of his session debunking this motivation myth. He cited studies indicating

that 85 percent of the time spent in elementary classrooms is time spent on competitive activities, such as spelling bees. The reasons most teachers give for setting up classroom competition are that competition is motivating and that the real world is competitive and schools need to prepare students for that reality.

Both of those reasons, Lavoie said, are false. He explored four myths about competition in expanding on his point.

### 1. Most people do their best work when in head-to-head competition with others.

Lavoie said 40 years of research indicates that the only person motivated by competition is the person who thinks he has a chance at winning. So a spelling bee designed to motivate students to learn spelling words will motivate the good speller, who doesn't need to be motivated.

Instead, Lavoie said, most people do their best work when they're competing against themselves, not against others. That's why 45,000 people enter the Boston Marathon every year when only a few world-class runners actually have a chance to win.

### 2. In the classroom, a teacher has no options. The classroom is, by its very nature, competitive.

Classrooms don't have to be competitive, Lavoie said. Many teachers simply don't understand the negative dynamics of setting up competitive education situations.

He explained that every activity undertaken in the classroom falls into one of the following categories: individualized, cooperative, and competitive.

In individualized activities, students work separately to complete an assignment or reach a goal. One student's success or failure does not affect another student's success or failure. Each stands alone.

In cooperative activities, students work together toward a common goal. The success of one student depends on the success of other members of his team.

In competitive activities, the success of one student depends on the failure of another.

### 3. Our American society is highly competitive, and schools should prepare children for this competitive environment.

"This is the greatest myth of the 20th century," Lavoie said. "We have the most cooperative society in the history of mankind."

For example, he said, when we go for a drive, we expect other

*(continued on page 7)*

## Myths about competition

1. Most people do their best work when in head-to-head competition with others.
2. In the classroom, a teacher has no options. The classroom is, by its very nature, competitive.
3. Our American society is highly competitive, and schools should prepare children for this competitive environment.
4. Kids are naturally competitive.

# The way to a teenager's heart

**Elizabeth Catarius**, a Strategic Instruction Model Trainer from Wethersfield, Connecticut, recently shared this activity she uses with the *Sentence Writing Strategy*.

It isn't often that you can access more than two or three of the senses in a classroom lesson. However, a tip that works extremely well in a classroom involves creamy peanut butter, marshmallow fluff, chunky peanut butter, and crackers. Before you think that you have wandered into the Pillsbury Bake-Off, take a minute to think of the *Sentence Writing Strategy* and compound sentences.

During a half day with no scheduled lunch, some of my students were complaining of hunger. I brought out peanut butter, crackers, and marshmallow fluff. Voila! A teachable moment occurred.

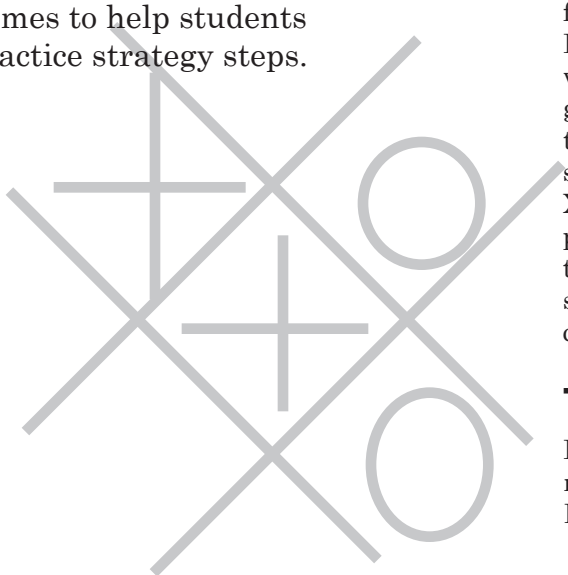
As I made crackers and peanut butter, I likened the first cracker to the first independent clause, the creamy peanut butter to the comma, the fluff (F for FANBOYS) to the coordinating conjunction, and the top cracker to the final independent clause (I, c I). I held the snack aloft and declared it a compound sentence.

Because there is no end to a teenager's appetite, I made more peanut butter and crackers. This time, I used a cracker for the first independent clause, chunky peanut butter for the semicolon, and a second cracker for the final independent clause (I; I).

This activity can be used as a way to introduce compound sentences in the classroom. In my particular situation, everyone was happy. The students were fed and taught at the same time. Talk about killing two birds with one stone...

# Rapid-fire verbal rehearsal games

**Karen Koskovich**, a SIM Trainer from Maquoketa, Iowa, shares a couple of games to help students practice strategy steps.



## Whole Group Tic-Tac-Toe

Mark a new shower curtain off into nine equal sections using colored masking tape. Using two paint sticks, form an "X" and wrap it with colored masking tape. Decorate the lids from five-quart ice cream pails with wrapping paper to form the "O"s. Separate a small group or class into two teams. Using the mnemonic of the strategy you are teaching, call out a letter. The first student in line must say the step and throw the team's X or O onto a spot on the game board. Continue this procedure back and forth just as fast as possible until a team wins or runs out of spaces to place its marker. To start a new game, simply pick up one end of the shower curtain and slide all the markers off.

## Two Student Tic-Tac-Toe

If you have just two students, try using a compact magnetic Tic-Tac-Toe game, such as the one made by Excalibur.

(continued from page 5)

drivers to stay on the right side of the road, just as they expect us to stay on the right side. If we all cooperate, and most drivers do, our traffic moves smoothly. In business, the most valuable employees bring consensus and cooperation to challenging situations.

More examples of cooperation among members of our society can be found every day, yet many students still must engage in competitive classroom activities because of the myth that such activities prepare children for the real world.

Even in cases of competition in the real world, Lavoie said, the competition does not even remotely resemble competition in schools.

First, he said, in the real world adults only compete when they want to compete. No one forces an adult to apply for a job if he or she doesn't want to. The choice to compete for the job is up to the individual. In schools, students do not have input into whether they want to compete. They are forced to take part in competitive classroom activities.

Second, in the real world, adults compete only against their peers. An administrator's skills are judged against those of other administrators. In contrast, the skill range in a typical classroom is drastic. Students participating in a spelling bee are not competing against their peers. They're competing against other students whose spelling skills cover a wide range.

### 4. Kids are naturally competitive.

Competition is a learned behavior, Lavoie said. Students actually are naturally cooperative.

## Myth #5: "He won't even try...he's so lazy."

Many times when a student appears to be lazy, Lavoie said, he or she is actually suffering from Learned Helplessness. Learned Helplessness and laziness look exactly the same.

Lavoie said that when any member of the animal kingdom, including humans, believes it is helpless, it stops trying. This is an instantaneous response. Everyone has an area of Learned Helplessness in his or her life that becomes part of his or her self-concept. An individual who hasn't attempted to play tennis since she was 12, when she quit because she didn't believe she could ever be any good, will still at 30 say she's a terrible tennis player without even trying again. Lavoie's area of Learned Helplessness is car repair, he said. If his car won't start, he'll call a garage rather than lift the hood and look for a problem. He knows he won't be able to identify or fix the problem, so he doesn't try. This is not a result of being lazy, but rather of Learned Helplessness.

"Before you accuse a kid of being lazy, make sure it's not Learned Helplessness," Lavoie said.

If the student is suffering from Learned Helplessness, it may be possible to convince him or her to try again by helping the student understand that he or she is a different person from the one who failed in the past.

## Myth #6: "The more you put into it, the more you get out of it!"

Lavoie calls this misconception the most troubling and most damaging misconception.

"It's not only wrong, it's totally wrong," Lavoie said. "The truth actually is if he only did better, he'd try harder."

Forty years of research shows that only one thing motivates people long term, he said, and that is success. Coaches and professionals in the business world understand this. Sometimes, teachers don't.

Students need to experience success, and teachers need to invent opportunities for students to succeed, he said.

"Those of us who care for and advocate for these kids, we've got to find opportunities for them to be successful," Lavoie said. "Once they taste that success, then and only then will they continue to work toward it."



**Strategram**
Vol. 10: Issue number 4. Published six times per year by The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, Dole Human Development Center-Room 3061, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045-2342. Subscription rate: $13 per year. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher, unless otherwise stated.

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