Strategram™

STRATEGIC INSTRUCTION MODEL

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A supportive learning environment

Creating the invitational classroom with SIM

In this article, authors Vlacia Z. Campbell and John Jacobs share their experiences blending a Strategic Instruction Model component, specifically instruction in the SCORE Skills, with an educational theory called Invitational Education. John first describes the situation he faced in his classroom; then, the authors describe the results they achieved when they joined forces.

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SIM gave us the practical tools that created the classroom environment of caring. It offered the means to empower students to realize their potential.

This issue of *Strategram* focuses on the social skills component of the Strategic Instruction Model. On page 5, "Group Think," by Jean Schumaker and Sue Vernon, describes the newly completed Cooperative Thinking Strategies Series. The series includes five instructor's manuals to help students think and work in caring, positive, and productive ways:

- *The SCORE Skills*
- *The THINK Strategy*
- *The LEARN Strategy*
- *The BUILD Strategy*
- *The Teamwork Strategy*

Before SCORE

Among the biggest challenges I have faced over the past 20 years in teaching children with emotional support needs was creating a classroom environment in which all students were motivated to invest in the learning opportunities they encountered. For 18 years in self-contained classrooms, I tried multiple approaches: behavior modification, assertive discipline, cooperative learning. Nothing worked with lasting effect. Then in 1996, my school district mandated total inclusion for all students with special needs, and I was no longer teaching alone. Instead, I was teaching science along with a general education teacher. I was among the lucky special education teachers; my general education teaching partner wanted to make the classroom work so that all students would succeed. My co-teacher and I knew that for all students to invest in their learning, the classroom needed to be an inviting and productive place. We believed that the social atmosphere is critical in effective classrooms. We agreed that along with teaching the content of science, we needed to teach students how to interact with us and with each other. We knew what we wanted the classroom to become, and we embarked on our journey of discovery.

The adventure began several years ago, shortly after meeting Dr. William Purkey, a founder of an educational theory called "Invitational Education." Invitational Education is a theory of educational practice that addresses the total school environment. It is based on communicating caring and appropriate messages that enable students to realize their human potential. After studying this theory, my co-teacher and I were inspired and convinced that achieving the principles of Invitational Learning would create the learning and classroom environment that would

empower all students in our inclusive 10th grade science class to be successful.

The transformation has not been easy nor without its setbacks. Our beliefs were strong, but the tools were not clear. The process of creating our ideal environment has taken time, experimentation, and persistence. It involved a tentative start down an educational side road, a lucky detour in the form of outside involvement, and, finally, signs of success.

Educational Side Road

We began by trying cooperative learning. Students worked in groups using team-building and class-building exercises; however, students were having difficulty in their groups. They were not respectful to one another or to the teachers. In a brainstorming activity with students, we asked them to list all the difficulties in working together. Students shared with us that student interactions and behaviors were the primary roadblocks in establishing an atmosphere that was conducive to real learning. We realized that just because students sit together during an activity, it doesn't mean that they know how to work together.

Clearly, we needed to address the area of social skills. But, we asked, shouldn't students at this age already know how to behave, to cooperate, and to be considerate? Teaching social skills at the secondary level was uncharted territory for us, but we knew we had to try—reluctantly and cautiously at first.

Thus, we started down the road to creating an invitational environment by addressing the issue of social skills without addressing the issue directly. My co-teacher and I were timid about entering into the world of peer interactions with secondary students, so we began in a very indirect way. We modeled appropriate interactions without speaking of appropriate behavior explicitly. When students were "caught" using appropriate behaviors, we acknowledged this with verbal praise. Despite our best efforts, nothing changed. Social interactions were not improving enough to have a noticeable effect on learning.

SCORE Skills

- **S**hare ideas
- **C**ompliment others
- **O**ffer help or encouragement
- **R**ecommend changes nicely
- **E**xercise self-control

Figure 1

Lucky Detour

In the midst of our struggle, a colleague and Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) Trainer from the local intermediate unit, Vlacia Campbell, asked whether she could co-teach with us to practice using a new social skills instructional program. This program, known as the SCORE Skills, is one of many developed and researched at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning. The SCORE Skills, which are easy to use, are social skills that are foundational to building an effective learning community. The acronym, SCORE, is used to help students remember and use the five skills (see Figure 1).

As we—a SIM trainer, a special education teacher, and a science teacher—worked with the SCORE Skills instructional program, we realized that we had found a match. The instructional process complemented the principles of Invitational Education. We began to explore other instructional programs associated with SIM, and we became convinced that this model would help us meet our goals.

As stated earlier, Invitational Education is a theory of educational practice that addresses the total school environment. It is based on communicating caring and appropriate messages that will enable students to realize their human potential. The four principles of Invitational Education are respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. Although we agreed that these four principles should be important components in our classroom, we struggled to find the means to integrate them in our daily work with students. That's where the SIM instructional model provided the road map to an invitational classroom. SIM gave us the practical tools that created the classroom environment of caring. SIM also offered the means to empower students to realize their own potential.

SIM offers comprehensive learning strategy instruction and Content Enhancement Routines that empower students to meet the com-

plex learning demands encountered in typical secondary schools. The model is based on a set of instructional procedures that, when implemented, dramatically increase academic success. A closer look at each of the four principles of Invitational Education shows how they can be woven together with the Strategic Instruction Model instructional procedures to create a nurturing classroom environment. Below, we describe the links we made between the principles of Invitational Education and the SIM instructional procedures common to all strategy instruction. We also describe how Invitational Learning and SIM can work in tandem to foster a classroom environment conducive to student success.

Respect

The quality of respect, as described by Invitational Education, refers to the principle that people are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly. Likewise, the Strategic Instruction Model holds the basic premise that for students to be empowered, they must think of themselves as able, valuable, and responsible learners. These beliefs can be developed within students through the process of engaging them actively in working with the information they are to learn and by giving them choices as to what and how they want to learn. Because students have a voice in their learning, they develop an ownership in the outcomes of the learning. The SIM teacher facilitates this by encouraging students to choose the strategies they want to learn and to decide how fast they will learn them.

The first sign of respect came about when students expressed their surprise and delight when they were asked whether they wanted to learn the SCORE Skills. This was the first time students had been asked their opinion about what they wanted to learn and had the opportunity to develop a reason for learning the skills. As we expressed our commitment to effectively teach the SCORE Skills, students realized that the dynamics of the classroom were going to be different. Asking for and obtaining the students' commitment to learn the SCORE Skills was the beginning of the process of developing mutual respect between teachers and students, as well as between students and their classmates.

Trust

Trust is an Invitational Education quality that conveys that education should be a cooperative, collaborative activity in which process is as important as product. Similarly, the instructional phases of SIM focus on both process and product by giving continual attention to exploring the learning process with students. The process of "learning how to learn" helps students discover how using strategies will enable them to have a better product—success in school. Students develop trust in the teacher, who provides meaningful feedback that facilitates the students' success. The process of providing feedback leads to students trusting themselves to assess their own progress. The SIM teacher deliberately facilitates independent and successful functioning by the student. The collaboration and trust between the teacher and students become the basis for students first believing and then confirming their ability to be successful learners.

For example, through the process of providing guided practice and feedback when learning the SCORE Skills, students began to trust teachers more and to trust their peers. Students responded well to the nonjudgmental feedback, which explicitly taught them what they needed to do to succeed. This new way of collaboratively interacting with teachers and peers gave students the confidence to take risks with the content of science. Students asked questions in class versus sitting passively in their seats. When we asked students questions, students risked

Invitational Education

An educational theory based on communicating caring and appropriate messages that will enable students to realize their potential. Invitational Education embodies four principles:

- *Respect*
- *Trust*
- *Optimism*
- *Intentionality*

sharing their ideas rather than sitting with their eyes staring down at their desks.

Optimism

The Invitational Education quality of optimism focuses on the notion that people possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor. Likewise, SIM instruction continually reminds students of their potential as learners. High expectations for students are a foundation of the model. Communicating high expectations to students elevates their awareness of their own potential, which gives them the confidence and tools to achieve at a higher level. Success with strategies empowers students with the realization that "Okay, I can do this now. Before, I just didn't have a tool, a strategy to get it done."

A critical unit of the science curriculum was DNA, a topic students often found especially intimidating. We were delighted when this group of students who had been through the process of learning the SCORE Skills expressed eagerness to take on the topic. Students knew we expected them to learn the subject well and trusted that we would provide the support needed to ensure their success. The trust that was established in learning the SCORE Skills generalized to an optimism for learning science.

Intentionality

Intentionality is a quality of Invitational Education that addresses human potential. It is the idea that human potential can best be realized by creating and maintaining places, policies, processes, and programs specifically designed to invite development. It is realized by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally. Similarly, SIM is based on the belief that all students should develop their potential as independent and strategic learners across learning, social, and motivational domains. To do this, SIM's philosophical principles stress that administrators and teachers must work together to establish the policies, processes, and programs needed to build strategic environments that promote growth. The implementation of SIM depends on cooperative planning between teachers with strong support from administration, ancillary staff, family, and community agencies. The cooperation allows the establishment of schoolwide systems that enable SIM programs to flourish. This cooperation enables teachers to create the invitational classroom that empowers students to reach their potential.

The SIM instructional principles and process provided the tools to create and maintain an environment specifically designed to invite the development of the students in our classroom.

Signs of Success

Within the classroom, the SIM instructional principles and process provided the tools to create and maintain an environment specifically designed to invite the development of the students in our classroom. The instructional steps of obtaining a commitment, describing, modeling, practice, and feedback provided the road map. The principles of providing choices, emphasizing the rationale, and empowering students to realize socially significant gains in achievement and status provided what was needed for a successful journey.

Garnering the collective expertise of colleagues in and around the school to develop the places, policies, processes, and programs on a schoolwide basis is imperative to continue to invite the development of all the students we serve. Inviting our colleagues to intentionally join us in our efforts to use Invitational Education theory and the SIM instructional process and principles is a task we have yet to undertake.

There is no doubt that the classroom moved closer to the principles of Invitational Education when students learned the SCORE Skills through application of the SIM instructional principles. The signs of respect for other teachers, other students, and themselves first became noticeable when students responded positively when asked whether they wanted to learn the SCORE Skills. As both teachers and students verbalized and wrote commitments to teach and learn SCORE Skills, students responded with respect for a new way of interacting. Ensuring learning through practice and feedback resulted in observable trust. With trust came success, which led to

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Group Think

Jean Schumaker, Associate Director,
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Two of the biggest challenges facing today's educators are building safe, caring learning communities with students and teaching students how to treat each other such that everyone feels connected to and a part of the learning community. Recent events, such as those at Columbine High School in Colorado and other schools across the country, have underscored the fact that many students feel isolated and devalued by others in their schools.

A new instructional program from the Center for Research on Learning addresses these challenges. The Cooperative Thinking Strategies Series, for teaching students skills to participate in group situations and for building learning communities, is now complete. The series includes five instructor's manuals specially designed to help students think and work together in caring, positive, and productive ways.

The first manual in the series focuses on the SCORE Skills, five basic social skills that students need to work in cooperative groups. These skills are

- **S**hare Ideas
- **C**ompliment Others
- **O**ffer Help and Encouragement
- **R**ecommend Changes Nicely
- **E**xercise Self-Control

Once the SCORE Skills have been taught, the teacher can choose one of four cooperative thinking strategies for the next set of lessons. The *THINK Strategy* is a strategy students use to solve problems together. The *LEARN Strategy* is used by students to master information together. The *BUILD Strategy* is designed for analyzing and resolving controversial issues within a group. Finally, the Teamwork Strategy is used by students to work together on a project.

The whole series has been designed to enable teachers to teach students the skills associated with higher-order thinking, teamwork, and community building and to help students meet district and state standards in these areas. Such skills often are difficult to teach because very few structured curricula are available in these areas. They also are difficult to teach because of the abstract nature of higher-order thinking processes and the complexity inherent in getting groups of children with a variety of skills and backgrounds to productively work together.

Therefore, this series has been built upon tried and true instructional principles. Each Cooperative Thinking Strategy is a special sequence of cognitive behaviors, and students learn to use this sequence within a very structured set of lessons. Across a series of six lessons in each instructor's manual, students gradually learn and practice each step in a strategy until they are performing all of the steps in the final lesson together. From that point on, they are ready to practice applying the strategy to subject-area information.

To make them maximally useful, the strategies were designed to be generic; that is, they can be applied to any subject-area content. Thus, they can be taught in conjunction with content in general education classes such as social studies, history, science, and literature classes. They also can be applied to current local or national events or to personal problems or issues the students are encountering in their own lives.

Teachers can choose to emphasize the SCORE Skills and one Cooperative Thinking Strategy during a school year, or they can teach several or all of the strategies across the whole year. A team of teachers can each teach one of the strategies and then reinforce use of all of the strategies across the school year. Regardless of the number of strategies taught, students need to practice each of the strategies in a wide variety of situations.

The Cooperative Thinking Strategies Series has been created for heterogeneous classes of students, including students with disabilities. The original development of the strategies was conceived after researchers at the Center for Research on Learning formally observed cooperative group work in many classrooms as part of a large, federally funded project on social skills instruction in classrooms. What they found was disappointing and worrisome. Students with

The THINK, LEARN, and BUILD strategy manuals are available from Edge Enterprises, PO Box 1304, Lawrence, KS 66044, (785) 749-1473.

	LEARN		BUILD		THINK	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Exp. Group	18%	70%	21.4%	80.1%	34%	84%
Control Group	27%	35%	15.1%	19.6%	34%	39%

Figure 1

disabilities who had been enrolled in inclusive classrooms were being put down, verbally abused, ignored, shamed, and left out of discussions during cooperative group activities. Moreover, few of the students appeared to know how to work with each other in positive, productive ways. They lacked the basic skills needed to complete fundamental cooperative tasks, and when they were asked to do high-order thinking tasks together, very little was accomplished.

Each lesson in the series incorporates a sequence of instruction that will be very familiar to SIM teachers and easy to follow by neophytes to strategy instruction. The lesson begins with an advance organizer and the definition of new vocabulary words pertinent to the lesson. Then, one step of the new cooperative thinking strategy is described and modeled by the teacher. Next, students practice using the skills involved in the step during a whole-class guided practice activity. They then independently practice the strategy step within their cooperative group and receive feedback from the teacher, who circulates throughout the classroom during the activity. Finally, they are given an assignment to complete that is related to the lesson.

The instructional program for teaching each Cooperative Thinking Strategy has been validated through extensive research in general education classrooms in which heterogeneous groups of students were enrolled. At least one research study has been conducted on each Cooperative Thinking Strategy, and each study has involved at least 20 teachers and their students (at least 400 students per study) in urban and suburban schools. The results are consistent across all the studies.

Before instruction, students perform an average of 18 percent to 34 percent of the behaviors associated with the strategy. After instruction, students who receive the instruction perform an average of 70 percent to 84 percent of the behaviors associated with the strategy when they are given a task that they have never seen before. Their performance is significantly higher than the performance of students who did not receive the instruction (see Figure 1).

Teachers and students have been satisfied with the instruction and the strategies and recommend them to others. Teachers have commented that student use of the SCORE Skills and the Cooperative Thinking Strategies results in reduced bickering, arguing, and other negative behaviors and increases in productive group work and many positive social behaviors. They say that students who receive the instruction interact in caring ways and help and support each other. Students who have received the instruction state that they enjoy working in cooperative groups and that other students are nicer to them.

CEC seeks success stories

The Council for Exceptional Children's annual "Federal Outlook for Exceptional Children" (Budget Book) is an education tool members use with their members of Congress and staff from a variety of federal agencies. The book, which provides information about IDEA, includes a section that features success stories and photos of students who participate in special education programs across the country. The CEC wants stories that show the benefits these students have received under IDEA or the Javits Gifted and Talented Students Act. Stories should be relatively short and should include the student's full name, age, city and state in which they live, and school/district. CEC is now collectng stories for the 2001 Budget Book. If you have success stories to share with CEC, e-mail them to jackib@cec.sped.org or mail them to Jacki Bootel, Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191.

Invitational Education

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optimism for more success.

The SIM instructional procedures and principles that directed our instruction freed us to begin the process of learning. Students and teachers began to relate better and to cooperate and respect each other more. Likewise, students' relationships with each other improved as well. Our classroom became a more productive, interesting, and successful place. SIM instruction complemented the principles of Invitational Education. Together, Invitational Education and the Strategic Instruction Model have the potential to live up to Dr. Purkey's view that "Schools can be the most inviting place in town."

About the authors

• ***Vlacia Z. Campbell*** is a Learning Resource Consultant at the Berks County Intermediate Unit in Pennsylvania. She is a Certified Strategic Instruction Model Trainer and has been teaching strategies for six years. Vlacia has served children as a speech/language pathologist and educational consultant for 18 years.

• ***John Jacobs*** is a Transition Teacher Consultant for the Berks County Intermediate Unit. He taught for more than 20 years as a high school teacher of children with Emotional Support needs. Over the last five years, John has developed and expanded upon the principles of Invitational Education in his classroom.

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On the CRL Web site

Frequently Asked Questions:

- What kinds of results can students expect to achieve when taught SIM strategies?
- What effect has the use of SIM had on teachers?
- How can strategic instruction be used in our school to help students meet important academic standards?

Find the answers to these questions and more on the CRL Web site.

www.ku-crl.org

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