

# **Strategram**<sup>TM</sup>

## **Strategic Instruction Model**

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# One school's journey toward improved literacy

**Peggy Graving-Reyes**  
*SIM Professional Developer and Lodi Unified Literacy Coach*

**Kim Nottingham**  
*Teacher, Delta Sierra Middle School, Stockton, Calif.*

*Delta Sierra Middle School in Stockton, Calif., was the 2003 winner of KU-CRL's SIM Innovation Award, which recognizes schools, programs, or individuals who have demonstrated highly innovative and effective applications of the Strategic Instruction Model. These applications have included the collection of data showing successful outcomes.*



What can you do when you are told that 70 percent of your students are reading below grade level—and that more than 30 percent read significantly below grade level? Our staff—finding our school facing that predicament—responded by creating a comprehensive three-level reading program consisting of daily classes required for *all* seventh- and eighth-grade students and taught by *all* content teachers, regardless of their subject-area specialties. Two of the three levels of classes were built on Strategic Instruction Model interventions.

This article describes our school, the reading classes we developed, the resulting growth we documented in students' reading skills, and implications for the future. Throughout, we discuss some of the problems we confronted along the way.

### **Our school**

Our school, Delta Sierra Middle School, is in a metropolitan area in San Joaquin County, California. At the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, we were selected to participate in the Immediate Intervention for Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP), part of the California Educational Code Section 52050, otherwise known as the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999.

Schools selected to participate in this program were those that did not meet their annual Academic Performance Index (API) growth targets and that were ranked

among the lowest of the previous year's statewide API ranking.

II/USP is a three-year program supported with state funding and monitoring. During the first year, external evaluators visit the site and identify the school's strengths and weaknesses, specifically noting the main areas that the school must address. With the help of school staff, the evaluators write an action plan that must be implemented within the next two years. The state provides money to help enact the plan, and the school has two years to raise its API or risk local interventions or even state sanctions.

The external evaluators found that Delta Sierra needed to develop a school-wide approach in providing research-based and differentiated instruction in literacy. The evaluators and school staff worked together to develop such a plan, which resulted in the reading classes described in the next section of this article.

During this time, the middle school ran on a year-round calendar called Concept 6. On this schedule, students and teachers were divided into three "tracks." Each track attended school for four months and then had a two-month break. Only two tracks attended school at any given time, while a third track was on break. The year-round schedule presented many instructional and programmatic challenges for administrators and teachers. The biggest difficulty was found with intra-site communication.

At any given time, one-third of the school's faculty was on vacation, thus presenting many challenges for making school-wide decisions.

### The classes

We established two criteria for the reading classes we developed for the II/USP literacy plan: Each class must be built on a foundation of methods and materials proven through research to be effective for improving students' reading skills, and each class must teach literacy to students at their *instructional* level rather than their *grade* level.

Under the leadership of principal Ken Geisick, we developed three levels of classes: *intensive*, for students who read two or more years below grade level; *strategic*, for students who read one to two years below grade level; and *benchmark/advanced* for students who read at or above grade level.

Our first step was to administer a series of tests to determine student placement. We administered the Corrective Reading test to all students who had received a total reading score of 0 to 30 percent on their 2000 Stanford-9 (SAT-9) statewide norm-referenced assessment test. All students took the Reading Predictors Test (a district reading assessment for middle schools) and the reading subtest of the Multilevel Academic Survey Test (MAST) (required by external evaluators to assess site achievement at three periodic intervals). Our district literacy coach placed students into one of the reading class levels based on the results of these tests.

Students whose primary skill deficits were in decoding and fluency were placed in the Corrective

Reading Program: Decoding B2.

Students who were decoding at the mid-fourth grade level but were having comprehension problems were placed in a strategic reading class built on the Strategic Instruction Model. These students were taught the *Word Identification Strategy* for decoding, the *Paraphrasing Strat-*

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*egy* for comprehension, the *Survey Routine* for previewing expository text, and the *Framing Routine* for summarizing.

Students who were reading at or above grade level also were taught SIM reading strategies in benchmark/advanced classes. This group was taught the *Paraphrasing Strategy*, the *Survey Routine*, and the *Framing Routine* in addition to participating in activities addressing higher-level critical reading skills.

The focus of the strategic level class and the grade level or above class was on learning to read expository text. Narrative text

structure was the primary focus of the English classes.

Because students' placement in each class was based on reading level, not language status, English Language learners (EL) who were designated by the Language Assessment Survey test as a level 3, 4, or 5 (25 percent of Delta Sierra's students) and English Only (EO) learners were integrated into classes together. Staff assumed that because the students would receive reading instruction targeted at their reading level, EL students at these higher levels could benefit from the SIM strategies without a sheltered component. Students with no English or very limited English (LAS levels 1 and 2) were assigned to a Corrective Reading class at their instructional level.

From September (or November) 2001 to April (or June) 2002 (different beginning and ending dates due to the Concept 6 calendar), all seventh- and eighth-grade students were placed in one of these reading classes. This schedule amounted to about five months of instructional time after exempting time used for vacations and state testing. To meet the extensive demand created by this new approach to literacy instruction, all content area teachers taught one of the 48-minute classes each day. Delta Sierra administrators arranged for a series of in-service and monthly professional development sessions for teachers to learn more about what they were expected to teach in these classes. For teachers of the strategic and benchmark/advanced reading classes, these sessions began with two days focused on learning the *Paraphrasing Strategy*. Two follow-up days allowed teachers to learn the *Survey* and *Framing*

routines. The follow-up days also focused on writing expository summaries. Monthly meetings also addressed implementation issues and practice on the skills of modeling and feedback.

Another important component of the professional development was coaching provided by a full-time literacy coach. The coach scheduled regular, biweekly visits with the teachers who were implementing SIM interventions, but because many teachers also requested demonstration lessons, the coach was present in SIM classrooms much more frequently.

**Student results**

Kim Nottingham, a teacher enrolled in a master’s program, chose to do her thesis on the effect of the strategic class intervention program on the academic growth of EL and EO learners. In addition to compiling results for her thesis topic, she also received time to compile results for the program as a whole.

Overall, the results of the reading classes were encouraging. We used

several tests to measure students’ achievement in reading skills. The groups of students that received strategy instruction (strategic and benchmark/advanced students) all made growth in their scores on at least one of the assessments.

Results of a district reading test administered to all students indicated average growth of 9 percent. On the reading subtest of MAST, all students’ scores showed significant growth—two months’ worth of growth for every month of instruction (see figure 1). On comprehension tests using the Jamestown Timed Reading Series, students’ growth averaged 35 percent, from 4.3 correct answers to 9.5 correct answers.

Using the 2000 SAT-9 scores as a pretest and the 2001 scores as a posttest, we performed a related t-test, which indicated statistically significant growth in scores for students in the strategic classes for the instructional period of five months (not including holidays and non-instructional time due to various activities such as testing). The benchmark/advanced

students’ scores were not raised a significant amount, possibly because less growth is possible for these scores (see figure 2).

In addition, the school raised its Academic Performance Index (API) 22 points overall during the 2001-2002 school year, well beyond the 9-point growth required by the state. Within that measure, subgroups’ growth varied: African-American, 60-point increase; Asian, 50-point increase; and low-socio-economic status, 49-point increase. Delta Sierra met all of its growth requirements for all subgroups, except for the Hispanic subgroup. Further examination of the data would need to be conducted to explain this outcome.

Because of the large number of EL students at Delta Sierra, it also was important to find out whether strategic instruction benefited them. Consequently, we performed two statistical tests to address this issue. First, we performed a related t-test to assess whether there was a significant growth in scores from one year

Figure 1

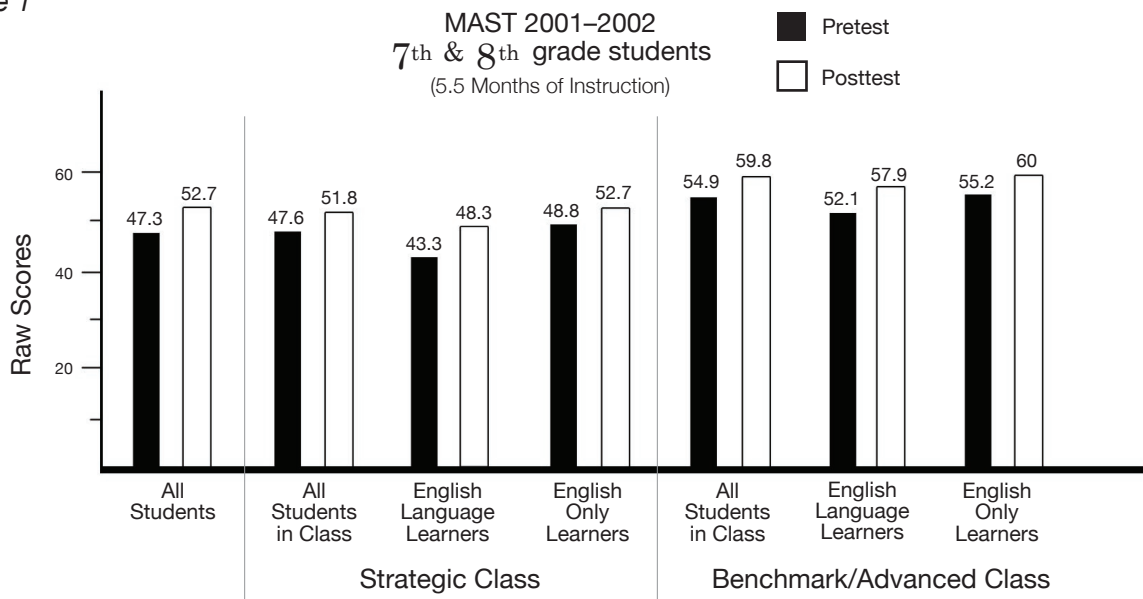
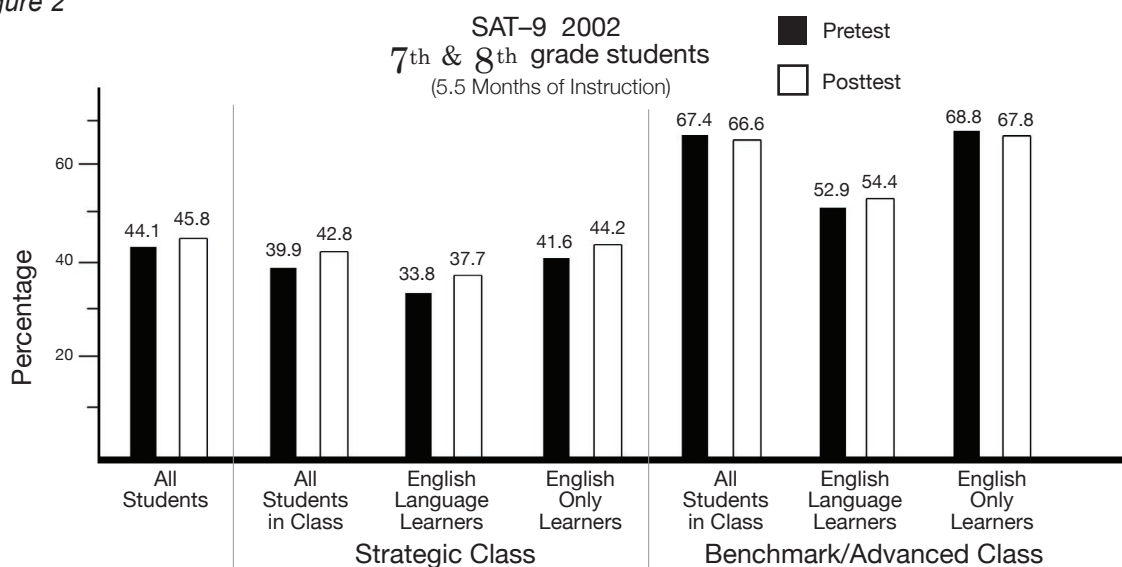


Figure 2



to the next. Then, we used a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) to analyze whether there was a significant difference between the reading scores of EO and EL students. In other words, did the strategies have the same effect on EO and EL students? The results for both assessments, the SAT-9 and the MAST, were the same. The program had the same effect on the EO and EL students. The t-test revealed that on the SAT-9, the strategic EL students' scores grew significantly, yet the benchmark/advanced scores did not. On the MAST, a test which measures student achievement in reading comprehension rather than the program growth measured by the SAT-9, all groups showed significant growth.

### Conclusion

Our journey toward improved student literacy at Delta Sierra Middle School has resulted in some interesting implications.

First, school-wide programs, although very challenging for faculty and staff, are manifestly

effective, as evidenced by our MAST scores showing improvements in reading comprehension for all groups of students. After analyzing data the previous year, faculty and staff became very aware of the pressing needs for literacy instruction for a large majority of their students. They took a very large step out of their comfort range of teaching to meet students' needs—some enthusiastically, some very nervously, and some reluctantly. A wide range of differences in teachers were apparent in both their learning of the strategies and implementing with fidelity. However, as a team working collaboratively on the goal of literacy for all students, they did a remarkable job; students benefited greatly from the targeted instruction and the multiple opportunities to practice the strategies.

Not only did students have the intensive instruction provided in the reading classes, but they also were able to apply the strategies they learned in their content-area classes. Having learned the strategies for the reading class, teachers

began to use them in their content-area classes. The value of the strategies became evident not only to teachers but to the students as they began to apply them in their regular course work.

Second, strategic instruction is very teacher intensive and requires strong administrative support to ensure that the professional development, planning time, coaching support, and other conditions are in place to foster success. Despite the many challenges, our experience at Delta Sierra indicates that strategic instruction is worth the effort. It seems to produce universally positive results for the students and therefore should not be abandoned. From December 2002 through June 2003, Delta Sierra focused on ensuring that all teachers knew how to use four SIM strategies and routines: *Paraphrasing*, *Word Identification*, *Survey*, and *Framing*. Each academic department shouldered the responsibility to make sure its teachers knew and used these interventions, and departments took this responsibility seriously.

As a result, all teachers on campus were working to embed these strategies and routines into every class every day. However, with a change in administration in July 2003, school-wide collaboration in reading instruction was no longer a priority, nor did it receive continued support in time, coordination, or funding; individual teachers and teams either chose to continue teaching strategies or not to their students. One unexpected indicator of success occurred when teachers who left Delta Sierra chose to carry on their use of strategies at their new schools.

Third, English Language learners benefit from these programs as well as English Only students.

Fourth, strategic literacy instruction works with different student populations because it teaches students how to think about what they are reading. During their monthly meetings and in coaching conferences, teachers shared many success stories about students who were underperforming, nonparticipators, RSP (Resource Specialist Program for Learning Handicapped), or EL learners who were starting to succeed and contribute to class discussions with confidence. Teachers reported that with a step-by-step strategy, these students who struggled with comprehension were now able to perform more independently and understand more of what they were asked to read. The data underscored the accuracy of teachers' perceptions.

Fifth, the importance of administrative leadership should not be underestimated. Principal Ken Geisick's desire for this

literacy program to succeed was a driving force in making so many changes in such a short time. Irene Outlaw, who took the position of principal the following year, continued to provide professional development and support in the *Unit Organizer*

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*Routine* for her staff. Unfortunately, Delta Sierra's long-range plans to provide professional development in more SIM interventions fell through when Ken departed for a position at another school.

Ken underscored the need for working in partnership with a site

literacy leadership team as a key element for sustainability.

"Because of leadership turnover, full implementation of strategies and routines did not become part of the faculty's practice," he said. "The establishment of a Site Literacy Committee occurred during the development of the reading classes, but the role and function of a site literacy committee was not clearly outlined, and the faculty's participation on this committee was inconsistent.

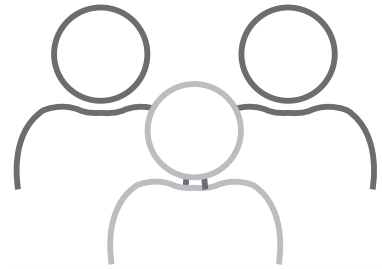
"In retrospect, during the initial implementation stages of the reading class, the site literacy team could have served as a decision-making body and advisors for the administration team to troubleshoot challenges teachers faced with administering assessments, generating materials, sharing new ideas, and making recommendations about upcoming teacher training.

"While frequent administrative turnover is becoming commonplace at secondary sites, the Site Literacy team can provide stability and build capacity among the teaching staff during the planning and implementation stages."

Our success at Delta Sierra Middle School in raising students' reading scores is an example of the way schools must respond to the challenges of educating today's students. We must adapt and be open to innovative and unusual ideas, while grounding our instruction in practices and programs that clearly have been shown to be effective—or to use today's terminology, research-validated. Strategic instruction using the Strategic Instruction Model is one such program.

The University of Kansas  
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Instructional Coaching  
Progress through Partnership



Across the country, many school districts are hiring instructional coaches or onsite professional developers to lead school reform efforts. Consequently, hundreds of educational professionals are finding themselves in high-stakes, critically important roles in their schools, with little or no professional development to prepare them for successfully performing their tasks.

The lack of professional learning for coaches places schools at risk. Decision makers in districts need to learn how to set up coaching programs so that they can save time and implement change efficiently. Districts also need to

know what good coaching looks like so that they can create programs that really do improve the quality of students' lives.

KU-CRL has developed a web site ([www.instructionalcoach.org](http://www.instructionalcoach.org)) to provide instructional coaching information, and we are planning several more opportunities for educators to participate in our popular Instructional Coaching Institute. The institute provides a foundation upon which a solid, effective instructional coaching program can be built. The content of the institute is based on more than eight years of research on instructional coaching conducted here at KU-CRL.

**Instructional Coaching Institute content**

The Instructional Coaching Institute will provide a definition of what coaches do, distinguish between effective and ineffective coaching practices, and provide an overview of the current state of research on coaching. The institute addresses the following questions:

- *What is instructional coaching and how does it differ from other forms of coaching?*
- *What can a coach do to foster internal commitment in others?*
- *What is the theoretical foundation for instructional coaching?*
- *What specific communication strategies can a person use to build healthy relationships with other professionals?*

- *What are the various activities instructional coaches do and what are the effective ways in which they should be conducted?*
- *What does research say about when it is appropriate and inappropriate for coaches to model in the classroom?*
- *How can coaches build coherence and disseminate ideas across schools?*
- *Which leadership skills enable coaches to lead reform efforts in their schools?*

The institute will address *how* to coach (methods that coaches can use to enable instructional improvements) not *what* to coach (instructional practices).

**Scheduled  
Instructional  
Coaching Institutes**  
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August 3-5, 2006  
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June 30, 2006)

October 12-14, 2006  
(Registration deadline is  
September 11, 2006)

Registration forms and additional information are available on the web site, [www.instructionalcoach.org](http://www.instructionalcoach.org).

**More information**

Contact: Mona Katz  
[crl@ku.edu](mailto:crl@ku.edu)  
785.864.0626

Our instructional coaching web site includes much more information about the theory of and research on instructional coaching and links to related articles.  
[www.instructionalcoach.org](http://www.instructionalcoach.org)

# What instructional coaches do

Instructional coaches are on-site professional developers who teach educators how to use proven instructional methods. To be successful in this role, coaches must be skilled in a variety of roles, including public relations guru, communicator extraordinaire, master organizer and, of course, expert educator.

## **Marketing their services**

Instructional coaches hold brief meetings with teams of teachers to explain their goals, philosophy, kinds of interventions available, and the support they can provide. They allow time for questions and provide a means for teachers to indicate they are interested in working with the coach.

## **Analyzing teachers' needs**

Instructional coaches meet with teachers individually at a convenient time for the teacher to identify the teacher's most pressing needs and to discuss possible research-validated interventions that might help the teacher address those needs.

## **Observing classes**

Instructional coaches sit in on classes to observe their overall progress as well as behaviors related to specific issues raised during the individual coach-teacher conferences.

## **Collaborating on interventions**

Instructional coaches and teachers identify interventions that best address the teacher's most pressing need. An instructional coach and teacher might determine that a graphic device could help the teacher clearly organize and communicate the standards and content that will be taught in a unit. When necessary, instructional coaches and teachers collaborate to develop a plan for using the chosen instructional method.

## **Preparing materials**

The instructional coach's goal is to make it as easy as possible for a teacher to successfully use a new instructional method. Thus, they try to alleviate the burden on teachers by preparing all handouts, assessments, overheads, and other materials.

## **Modeling**

As teachers observe, instructional coaches teach their classes and demonstrate how the new instructional method or intervention should be taught. In some cases, instructional coaches provide checklists or another tool so teachers know to watch for specific teaching behaviors.

## **Observing**

Instructional coaches observe teachers as they use the new intervention in class. Sometimes, the instructional coach uses a checklist or other observation tool to provide specific feedback.

## **Feedback-modeling-observing-feedback**

The instructional coaching process allows for continuous communication between instructional coaches and teachers. After the first observation, instructional coaches meet with teachers to discuss how teachers used the intervention. Coaches provide plenty of validation along with suggestions for improvement. The communication then continues, with instructional coaches modeling, observing classes, and providing more feedback.

## **Building networks for change**

Instructional coaches work with groups of teachers to establish teams or professional learning communities that pave the way for interventions to be taught consistently across classrooms and subject matter.

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### **Editor**

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### **Consulting Editors**

*Keith Lenz*

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### **Graphic Designer**

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on the World Wide Web**