

S

Strategram

Volume 20 • Number 6 • October 2008
The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning

Extraordinary teachers: Their attributes revisited

Don Deshler
University of
Kansas
Center for
Research on
Learning

Editor's note: In 1988, in the first issue of Strategram, Don Deshler wrote about characteristics of master teachers. As we look back on all we've learned since then, Don's early observations still hold true. Here, Don adds one more characteristic to the list he began 20 years ago. We also reprint that first article—a classic!

As I've continued to watch and learn from master teachers, I've discovered an additional factor that seems to define these extraordinary professionals. I overlooked this factor 20 years ago in part because the vast majority of the Center's research focused on the interactions between teachers and students and we were studying what instructional behaviors contributed to optimal gains in student outcomes. But when we were focusing so much of our attention on what these masters did in their instruction with students, we overlooked how they performed in their role as a member of an academic department, literacy team, or school faculty. When we shifted our attention from the classroom as our primary "laboratory" to the entire school or school district, we discovered a fifth factor that defines master teachers. Namely, *master teachers are consummate team players.*

Master teachers seem to have a clear

Continued on page 2

*From Strategram
Volume 1, Issue 1
1988*

WHAT MAKES A MASTER? A CLOSER LOOK AT MEDAL-WINNING TEACHERS

*By Don Deshler
Director*

As we watch the Olympic games, it is exciting to see the very best athletes in the world compete. I often find myself wondering how they perform so magnificently. The noted psychologist Abraham Maslow argued that if we want to really understand how to excel in a given endeavor, we should identify those who are the best and carefully study them. In the case of the Olympic athletes, then, we should study the medal winners: how they prepare themselves mentally, how they train physically, how they set goals, how they deal

Continued on page 2

EXTRAORDINARY (cont. from page 1)

understanding of the fact that the best educational environments for students are ones that are coordinated and aligned *both* within and across classes. Further, they understand that progress on seemingly intractable academic deficits is best made when teachers problem solve together about specific students and deliberately coordinate their work so there is a measure of seamlessness as students move from one teacher, class, or grade to another. This is especially critical in secondary schools where most students have a highly fragmented educational experience. The core notion that teachers have a responsibility

beyond their own classrooms is something that master teachers understand. They make investments of their time and energy to figure out ways to create a positive learning environment by working closely with their fellow teachers and school leaders. In short, they recognize the power of and work toward achieving a sense of collective efficacy (that is, a condition in which the faculty as a whole organizes and executes those actions that have a positive effect on students [Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006]).

In Susan Rosenholtz's oft-cited book, *Teacher's Workplace: The Social Organization of Schools*, she describes how the most effective schools (she called them

"moving schools") were ones in which a collaborative culture existed with respect to planning, sharing ideas and resources, and overall support for problem solving. In contrast, "stuck schools" were characterized by a highly individualized culture with a lack of certainty about policy and roles, low morale, and generally poor academic standards. In stuck schools, teachers rarely take risks and develop quite inflexible patterns of working.

One of the reasons that the Center has been doing so much work on the Content Literacy Continuum (Lenz, Ehren, & Deshler, 2005) in recent years

Continued on page 3

WHAT MAKES A MASTER? (cont. from page 1)

with setbacks, how they accommodate disruptions in their training schedule, how they plan and execute a strategy for the final competition, and so on. By following Maslow's principle of "carefully observing the best," we can learn a great deal about how to be successful in teaching learning strategies to LD students by carefully studying teachers who are "medal" winners.

In recent years, several SIM teachers have been honored as "outstanding teachers." For example, Mike Hock of Dubuque, Iowa, Sheryl Block of Louisville, Kentucky, and Marie Dillon of Shawnee Mission, Kansas, have all received "Outstanding Teacher of the Year" awards from the Council for Learning Disabilities, and Sue Gillman of Fayetteville, Arkansas, was honored as the Christa McAuliffe recipient in the state of Arkansas. At the same time, there are many others who haven't received similar awards but who, nonetheless, have demonstrated remarkable gains with their students through strategy instruction. To better understand why they're

so successful, we've spent a lot of time asking these teachers questions, studying their room organizations, noting how their philosophy of education is operationalized, and watching them in action. To date, we've learned a great deal about successful strategy instruction by studying and interacting with these masters! What follows is a brief description of some of the factors that seem central to their success.

Factor #1: They teach with the realities of tomorrow's world in mind.

The world that LD youths will face in the coming decades will demand a high level of skills from its workers. With the dramatic decrease in the number of manufacturing jobs available to workers (over 2 million relatively high-paying manufacturing jobs were lost from the economy since 1979), those who lack skill proficiency in reading, following directions, writing, and problem solving will be relegated to low-paying jobs in the service economy, jobs that often fail to provide health and retirement

Continued on page 3

EXTRAORDINARY (cont. from page 2)

is that it is a framework that deliberately attempts to coordinate the work of teachers to support them so “the left hand knows what the right hand is doing.” This framework clearly recognizes the need to create an instructional synergy within schools, across classes, and among teachers. Students are making the greatest strides in those schools that have teachers who are masters in their own classrooms also investing significant energy and time

in sharing their expertise and engaging with their fellow teachers in problem solving. In short, master teachers do outstanding work in their classrooms by engaging their students in high-quality learning experiences *and* in their schools by engaging their colleagues in high-quality professional learning and growth experiences.

References

Hoy, W.K., Tarter, C.J., & Hoy, A.W. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for

academic achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(3), 425-446.

Lenz, B.K., Ehren, B.J., & Deshler, D.D. (2005). The content literacy continuum: A school reform framework for improving adolescent literacy for all students. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(6), 60-63.

Rosenholtz, S. (1991). *Teachers' Workplace: The Social Organization of Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

WHAT MAKES A MASTER? (cont. from page 2)

benefits, for example. In short, their existence will be at or near the poverty level. In light of these realities, the instruction of many master teachers is characterized by a sense of urgency and intensity. They insist that students work very hard, and they constantly communicate their high expectations to them. The amount to be accomplished in the limited time available does not allow for loosely set or ill-defined goals.

Factor #2: They use “critical” teaching behaviors frequently.

Master teachers use a set of teaching behaviors and routines that help bring students to mastery quickly; the most common of these include helping students set and continuously focus on daily and long-term achievement goals, providing appropriately timed positive and corrective feedback to students, giving and eliciting from students rationales for why they are learning a given strategy as well as why each step or subroutine of a strategy is important, insisting that students meet the required mastery standards, insuring that students make commitments to learn a strategy and try their hardest to reach their goals. Finally, these teachers carefully differentiate when it is

important to emphasize teacher-mediation or student-mediation in the instructional process. The really noteworthy aspect of the masters is that they are very serious about their application of these behaviors in their teaching. They are open to feedback from outsiders as to how their teaching could be improved and often solicit such feedback. In short, they are always trying to hone their craft and become even better.

Factor #3: They “paint good pictures” for their students.

For low-achievers, the schooling experience can be overwhelming. For example, many students lose sight of why they do what they do or where they're headed, often resulting in low motivation. The masters have the ability to counter these feelings and reactions by “painting a good picture” about the “whys,” “wheres,” and “hows” of strategy instruction. “Painting a good picture” means communicating so convincingly that students readily understand and accept what is said. These teachers are very effective in helping students see *why* it is important to learn a strategy and *why* that strategy will help them. They also help students recognize that getting there is going to be exciting and worthwhile! Master teachers

Continued on page 4

WHAT MAKES A MASTER? (cont. from page 3)

clearly communicate the “hows” of strategy instruction to students by illustrating that a key formula for school and job success is Strategies + Personal Effort = Success. In other words, they communicate that students will be successful if they consistently use the appropriate strategy in a problem-solving situation in addition to great personal effort. Finally, master teachers help students see what they can become if they seriously invest themselves in strategy instruction. In short, they raise the sights and aims of their students.

Factor #4: They effectively manage instruction.

Because of the complexity of teaching and managing instruction in a strategy classroom, it is imperative that teachers be able to keep many balls in the air at one time! The flow of activities in a master teacher’s room during a typical class period is sufficient evidence that they are highly skilled at juggling! Specifically, these teachers are excellent at starting each class session quickly, having students make smooth

transitions from one activity to the next, and insuring that students are engaged in productive activities through effective use of both strategy and support materials. The physical arrangement of the room is very deliberately planned to facilitate the teacher’s access to various teaching stations, files, answer keys, and teaching aids such as overhead projectors. Even the posters and illustrations in the room serve either a management, instructional, or motivational purpose that is supportive of strategy instruction. In short, master teachers are very adept at orchestrating an effective instructional environment.

The medal winners in strategy instruction clearly demonstrate that many factors contribute to student success in addition to careful adherence to the procedures outlined in the strategy manuals. Given the great challenge of teaching students who are at risk in school, we must critically analyze our current practices and, where appropriate, enhance them with some of the elements that make the winning difference for the masters among us!

Knowledge sharing at its best

Patty Graner

Director of Professional Development

Imagine! The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning is celebrating its 30th anniversary, and *Strategram* is celebrating its 20th. I, for one, am grateful for the longevity of these two “institutions” in my professional life and eternally appreciative for each of the authors and contributors.

I received my first *Strategram* when I was a Learning Strategies teacher and potential professional developer in Palm Beach

County, Florida, in 1988. As I read the pages of Vol. 1, No. 1, I was thrilled to see the blending of the researcher voice—Don’s cover story (reprinted in this issue) and Jean’s Research Report—and the practitioner voice. I gobbled up Don’s charge to critically analyze my current practices and enhance them to make a winning difference, and, as my mother would say, “buckled down” to make sure that my students and I mastered our strategies. I took to heart, from Jean’s article, the value of the research and how understanding

the processes could inform my instruction. The work of these intrepid researchers forever changed my life and the lives of the students that I taught.

Over the years, both as a teacher and as a professional developer, I have tried to take full advantage of all that *Strategram* has offered: the tips, ideas, and the messages. As each new edition arrived, I placed the tips and ideas with the appropriate strategy or routine so that I could use it in my classroom or in professional development,

Continued on page 5

KNOWLEDGE (cont. from page 4)

always with the idea of sharing it to enhance my work and outcomes for students. The articles from the researchers helped me to feel more closely connected to the work of the Center and gave me the boost I needed to rethink how my class and I were learning together when the mountain seemed too high to scale.

Strategram is a knowledge sharing tool in the best sense. It has allowed the Center, the Network, and subscribers to create a truly collaborative environment in which ideas are valued, shared, and exchanged among the members of our community and beyond. Over the past 20 years, you, as contributors and subscribers, have proven that knowledge *is* power and that by revealing the often deep, tacit knowledge that you possess and by opening that practice to others, you help us all to achieve greater success.

Selfishly, I ask you to please continue to contribute to *Strategram* because your wisdom and contributions help me and others realize that we do not have to reinvent the wheel because you already did. Continue to contribute, understanding the power of what you have learned and how sharing that knowledge can trigger more creative thinking and innovations. Continue to contribute because the more we all know, the better we can serve the youth and families who are our focus.

At the Center, we recognize what a valuable asset *Strategram* is for sharing and creating information and new ideas and for encouraging expertise. I think it is also a tool that helps us to build trust in each other and belief in what we can accomplish collectively. Your voices and expertise are heard and appreciated; please continue to contribute and react.

From the editor:

I want to add my voice to Patty's: Please continue to contribute to *Strategram*. I joined the CRL family in 1996, knowing very little about the good work all of you do. My journalism background prepared me to take the reins of this publication but did not equip me with a deep knowledge of the education field. Through my correspondence and conversations with you, I have learned much. Although I now have a greater understanding of and respect for the issues, challenges, and triumphs of this field, I learn something new with each issue. You have made my job easier, and you have enriched my life. Please, keep up the good work! I look forward to hearing from each of you.

Julie (jtolfelson@ku.edu)

Snippets: 20 years of knowledge sharing

As we celebrate our 20th year of publication, here are some totally random excerpts from *Strategram* issues of the past.

**VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2
(December 1989)**

BITING THE BULLET:

INVESTING IN GOOD TRAINING

by Gail Cheever

"The worst thing that can happen when you go solo and learn on your own is that you can get easily discouraged, put the manuals on the shelf to collect chalk dust, and never realize the power of learning strategies or the impact they can have on the learning of your students."

**VOLUME 4, ISSUE 5
(JUNE 1992)**

THE NINETIES BUZZ WORD:

COLLABORATION

by Karen Beeler and Roe Lundquist

"Collaboration may be to the nineties what 'New Math' was to the sixties, but let's enjoy it while it's here."

**VOLUME 6, ISSUE 2
(DECEMBER 1993)**

TEAMWORK: A STRATEGY

FOR THE FUTURE

by Sue Vernon

"Structuring cooperative work involves teaching students specific interpersonal skills that will enable them to be contributing members of the group as well as to become benefactors of what other group members have to offer. Such instruction needs to be deliberately planned

Continued on page 6

SNIPPETS (cont. from page 5)

and incorporated into ongoing educational experiences, and the skills related to being an effective team member need to be explicitly modeled and taught.”

**VOLUME 8, ISSUE 2
(JANUARY 1996)**

SUPPORTED INCLUSION:
THE CHALLENGE FOR SECONDARY
SCHOOLS

by Rosemary Tralli

“Parental involvement in and support for the SIM program at Wethersfield has been a critical part of impacting student growth...They regularly prompt their children to use strategies they have learned to complete homework assignments, and they insist that the program emphasis be strategic instruction in each grade.”

**VOLUME 9, ISSUE 4
(JUNE 1997)**

STUDENT MOTIVATION AND
COMMITMENT: A CORNERSTONE
OF STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

by Mike Hock

“We know a great deal about academic motivation. We know that most students begin their formal school experience motivated to learn...When children are given an appropriate learning task, they have great confidence that they can do it.”

**VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1
(DECEMBER 1997)**

KEY FACTORS FOR READING
COMPREHENSION: COMBINING
ELEMENTS FOR POWERFUL
PROGRAMS

by Julie Tollefson

“[SIM Conference keynote speaker Michael] Pressley believes emphasizing decoding to the exclusion of other instructional elements stops short of the final goal. ‘For some,’ he said of decoding, ‘it’s the end of everything. I’m going to argue

that it’s just the beginning, that ultimately what we’re interested in is kids being able to understand.’”

**VOLUME 11, ISSUE 3
(APRIL 1999)**

“Using the *Paraphrasing Strategy* has made a significant difference in my reading skills...Last semester, I made the Dean’s Honor Roll. This was an accomplishment that I never expected. My school years were full of failure...After learning the *Paraphrasing* and *Test-Taking* strategies and using them, I took the ACT again and my reading score was a ‘24.’ It was my highest score, which brought up the composite score and made it possible for me to be admitted to the College of Education.”

—Kim Pickett

in a letter to Don Deshler

**VOLUME 12, ISSUE 4
(MARCH 2000)**

A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT: CREATING
THE INVITATIONAL CLASSROOM
WITH SIM

by Vlada Z. Campbell
and John Jacobs

“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.”

**VOLUME 14, ISSUE 4
(JUNE 2002)**

CONCEPT COMPARISON

by Janis Bulgren

“One of the challenges educators and students alike face more

frequently is found in the content standards many states have adopted. These standards emphasize higher-order thinking skills, such as making comparisons, in addition to the acquisition of factual information. The *Concept Comparison Routine*...has been developed to help teachers and students together explore similarities and differences between two or more items of conceptual information.”

**VOLUME 15, ISSUE 2
(DECEMBER 2002)**

RESEARCH BASED? SIM IS!

by Don Deshler

“Center for Research on Learning researchers have found that the teachers who achieve the greatest gains with students are those whose instruction is consistently responsive, systematic, and intensive. These teachers are not only knowledgeable about what is involved in each of these instructional domains but, through much practice, also have learned to integrate them within all aspects of their instruction...It is our contention that these factors are at the heart of all effective instruction.”

**VOLUME 16, ISSUE 2
(MARCH 2004)**

SUCSESSES WITH READING
STRATEGIES

by Paula Hamp

“Forty-eight percent of our incoming freshmen were not reading at grade level; this staggering number did not include the incoming special education students, another 20 percent of our incoming ninth-graders...I presented the idea of doing an intensive summer program teaching three of the KU strategies: *Word Identification*, *Self-Questioning*, and *Visual Imagery*...the end result is that every one of these students completed their freshman year with the needed number of

Continued on page 7

SNIPPETS (cont. from page 6)

credits. Not a single student failed a course during their freshman year, and the average student improved one year five months on the reading comprehension section of the ITEDS while the average freshman who did not take the summer program only improved an average of four months."

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 4 (MARCH 2006)

LANGUAGE OF LITERACY: THINKING ABOUT WORDS & WORLD VIEWS by Julie Tollefson

"Among linguists, the Linguistic Relativity Principle holds that the words we use actually shape our thinking. Thus, this conversation about language and literacy among SIM professionals is important, Barb [Ehren] says, 'because it may very well change the way we view the world of adolescents, especially those who struggle.'"

Time to Renew!

Strategram Subscription Form 2008-2009

Name: Address: City: State: ZIP: Phone: E-mail address:

Payment: Check or Credit Card or PO# VISA/MasterCard Number: Personal Card Business Card If business, name of institution: Expiration Date: Signature Authorization:

Mail completed form and your payment of \$15 (U.S.) to KU-CRL, Joseph R. Pearson Hall, 1122 West Campus Road, Room 517, Lawrence, KS 66045-3101

Your subscription entitles you to all six issues of the current volume. Use this form to renew for the 2008-2009 publication year (Volume 21).

SIM Professional Developers: Your Strategram subscription is included in your Strateworks membership fee. Do not pay separately.

KU-CRL CALENDAR

January 12-14, 2009

Instructional Coaching Institute, Level 1 Lawrence, Kan.

January 15-17, 2009

Instructional Coaching Institute, Level 2 Lawrence, Kan.

May 26-30, 2009

SIM Learning Strategies Institute for Preservice Educators Lawrence, Kan.

May 26-30, 2009

Teaching Content to All: Effective College Teaching Lawrence, Kan.

June 16-19, 2009

SIM Strategies for Reading and Writing (formerly SIM Level 1) Lawrence, Kan.

June 16-19, 2009

More SIM Strategies (formerly SIM Level 2) Lawrence, Kan.

June 23-26, 2009

SIM Institute: Introduction to Teaching with Content Enhancement Lawrence, Kan.

August 10-12, 2009

Instructional Coaching Institute, Level 1 Lawrence, Kan.

August 12-15, 2009

Instructional Coaching Institute, Level 2 Lawrence, Kan.

October 5-7, 2009

Instructional Coaching Institute, Level 1 Lawrence, Kan.

www.kucrl.org/institutes

Got a SIM tip, activity, or suggestion for the classroom?

E-mail jtollefson@ku.edu

STRATEGRAM

Vol. 20: Issue number 6. Published six times per year by The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, Joseph R. Pearson Hall, 1122 West Campus Road Room 521, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045-3101. Subscription rate: \$15 per year. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher, unless otherwise stated.

©2008 by The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045-3101. All rights reserved.

Director of Communications

Julie Tollefson

Consulting Editor

Don Deshler

Contributors

Patty Graner

Mona Tipton

Art Director

David Gnojek

WWW.KUCRL.ORG

INSIDE THIS ISSUE OF **STRATEGRAM**

- **What Makes a Master** 1
Twenty years ago, Don Deshler described attributes of effective teachers in an article that is still relevant today. In this issue, we reprint his original article alongside another adding one attribute Don says he overlooked before.
- **Knowledge Sharing** 4
Patty Graner reflects on her 20-year relationship with *Strategram*.
- **Snippets** 5
We look back at some of the golden nuggets printed in *Strategram* over the years.
- **Calendar** 7

NEW ONLINE

Testimonials

In the spring, the Center's Communications Team interviewed teachers and administrators in Alameda, Calif. Hear some of what they had to say about the value of SIM in clips posted in the SIM section of our Web site. In particular, visit kucrl.org/sim/content.shtml and the pages for the *Course Organizer*, *Unit Organizer*, and *Content Mastery* routines.

WWW.KUCRL.ORG