Lessons From Building A Snowman

—Increasing the Snowball Effect Through Strategy Instruction—

Don Deshler
Director

One of my favorite wintertime activities as a youth growing up in western Montana was building a snowman. It didn't take me long to learn that if I wanted to have one of the better looking snowmen in the neighborhood, there were certain "tricks of the trade" that I had to learn! The first trick was to wait until the weather conditions were just right — if it was too cold, the snow wouldn't stick together; if it was too warm, the slushy snow was difficult to mold into desired shapes. Second, to get my snowman off to a good start I would carefully sculpt a snowball; I found that starting with a good core to each of the three main sections of the body was important. If the core was not well formed and as close to perfectly round as possible, that section of the snowman was lopsided and very difficult to work with. Next, it was important to carefully select where I wanted to place the snowman. The chosen location was usually at the bottom of a hill so that I could easily roll my initially formed snowball down the hill to the final location. In addition, I had to be sure that there was enough "untouched" snow surrounding my chosen location to allow me to make each of the three segments of my snowman sufficiently large (bigness, of course, was always a highly valued criteria among my friends!). Finally, when the time came to form each section, I would carefully roll the initially formed snowball through the freshly fallen snow. With each turn of the snowball it got bigger and bigger and bigger!! As it grew in size it also picked up a momentum of its own and easily moved down the hill to the final location. While I took some satisfaction in dressing the

snowman and putting a face and other final touches on him, I always seemed to enjoy most the moment when we put each of the three segments together!

As I reflect on the process of building a snowman, I can see some interesting similarities between that process and the process of developing a student who is a good strategy user (It probably doesn't surprise you a great deal that I've made such a connection, does it? It seems that people at the KU-IRLD see a strategies connection in just about everything in their lives!). Because of limited space, I would like to focus on just one of the similarities — I'll call it the "snowball effect." The snowball effect refers to what happens to that initially formed snowball if you carefully roll it down a hill of fresh snow — it grows and gains in both strength and momentum. Similarly, nonstrategic students can grow significantly as learners and gain great personal strength and momentum in other areas of their life if the teaching process to which they are exposed is designed to follow a logical scope and sequence of instruction. When nonstrategic learners are exposed to strategies instruction over a *sustained* period of time, they experience significant changes as learners. In short, when students receive consistent exposure to strategies instruction across several grades, they can be transformed into different kinds of learners — learners who have the personal wherewithal to independently attack problems and monitor their own performance. Unfortunately, much of the strategies instruction that currently takes place does not take advantage of the snowball effect that builds strength and momentum over

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time. Rather, it is often characterized by hit and miss efforts at presenting strategies to students, either within or across grades. As a result, little or no critical mass of effects are built, and in the long run, the student is not transformed as a learner.

There are several things that can be done to increase the probability of the snowball principle taking effect through strategies instruction. Three of the most important will be highlighted below.

Specify a Scope and Sequence of Strategies Instruction

One of the most significant things that a school district can do to ensure that strategies instruction will have a lasting impact on students is to specify a scope and sequence that strategies instruction will follow. There is no one scope and sequence that should be followed in all school districts. Rather, it is best if the plan of instruction is thoroughly thought through *and* agreed to by all key instructional and administrative personnel involved. By doing this, the plan of instruction can be tailored to meet the setting demands, the needs of the students, and instructional talents and preferences of the personnel in the district. Our experience has shown that in order to successfully implement any sequence of strategies instruction across several schools in a district, strong administrative leadership is needed. In most cases this leadership comes from a director of special services who is willing to take a stand by articulating a philosophy and method of instruction (in this case, learning strategies) that will be followed by the district. Often such leadership is lacking, and teachers are encouraged "do their own thing." This position is justified under the guise of "individualization." That is, it is argued that students with learning disabilities and other low achieving students are so heterogeneous in

nature that no overriding instructional thrust should be specified for them. The resulting outcome is programs that are very disjointed with little or no continuity from one grade level to the next. Consequently, students do not have skills or strategies learned in one year reinforced during subsequent years. Thus, the likelihood of students learning any strategy to a fluent, highly automatic level and retaining that strategy over time with an ability to generalize it to a variety of settings is greatly diminished.

One of the most challenging aspects of operationalizing a scope and sequence of instruction is to have personnel across schools come to an agreement of what strategies to emphasize at different grade levels. One example of how a sequence of instruction for the writing strand has been specified is the following.
Elementary School (grades 4-5) — simple and compound sentences from the Sentence Writing Strategy and the Error Monitoring Strategy.
Middle School (grades 6-8) — maintenance and generalization activities on all writing strategies taught during elementary grades; complex and compound-complex sentences from the Sentence Writing Strategy and application of the Error Monitoring Strategy to complex and compound-complex sentences during the 6th and 7th grades; topic, detail and clincher sentences from the Paragraph Writing Strategy during the 8th grade and application of the Error Monitoring Strategy to paragraphs; and whole paragraphs from the Paragraph Writing Strategy during the 9th grade and application of the Error Monitoring Strategy to paragraphs. **High School (grades 9-12)** — maintenance and generalization activities on all writing strategies taught previously and instruction in the Theme Writing Strategy with application of the Error Monitoring Strategy to themes.

Create Strategic Environments

Students can best be transformed into more efficient and effective learners *if* they are continually exposed to a "strategic environment." A strategic environment is one in which teachers deliberately attempt to organize and present their content in a strategic fashion. In addition, these teachers regularly model strategic approaches to dealing with information and, in turn, require their students to apply different strategies to empower them in understanding and mastering a set of information. In short, in order to help students become strategic learners and performers, they must be exposed to a great deal of strategies instruction *beyond* the actual learning strategy instructional manuals. Teachers can present content in a strategic way by using content diagrams and maps, visual depictions of key concepts, verbal associations, mnemonics, and clustering procedures for lists to be memorized, etc. As teachers present

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content using these procedures they should briefly explain to students *why* the particular instructional device they are using will promote learning. In turn, students should be regularly encouraged to "scope out" a set of material they must learn and determine if there are some strategies they can use to make it easier for them to learn and remember the material. When students are consistently exposed to instruction that models and prompts the use of strategies, they improve their efficiency and effectiveness as learners over time. Strategic environments need to be deliberately developed in *both* the regular and support classrooms.

S·I·M S·P·O·T·L·I·G·H·T

Super Trainer and Teacher

Judy O'Malley, Learning Strategies Resource Teacher, FDLRS Alpha, Palm Beach, Florida, has been nominated by Fran Clark, KU-IRLD as an excellent SIM teacher and trainer.

Since 1984, Judy has been involved in the development and implementation of the learning strategies program in Palm Beach County. She was one of the first teachers in the area to be trained in the Strategies Intervention Model.

Judy has been an effective resource teacher as well as trainer. As a resource teacher, Judy prepared supplemental guides to the

JUDY O'MALLEY
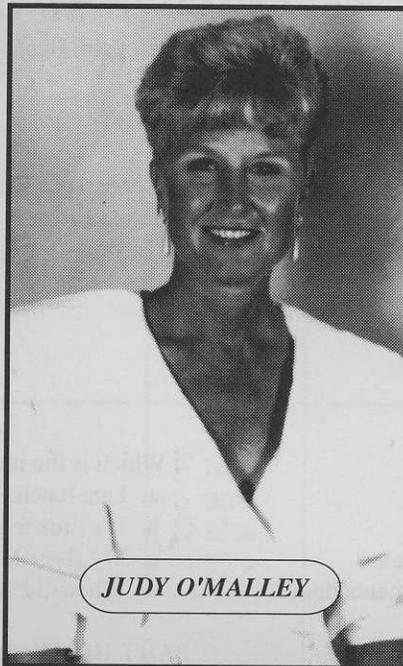
Paraphrasing Strategy and the *Sentence Writing Strategy*. Judy was also nominated for the William T. Dwyer Excellence in Education Award representing Exceptional Student Education at Forest Hill High School. Some of Judy's training responsibilities are to: conduct workshops to train teachers in the Strategies Intervention Model, develop a network for sharing creative ideas with other strategies teachers, familiarize regular education teachers with the SIM, and initiate pilot programs with elementary teachers for the adaptation of the Model.

Judy developed the test items on page 4 for the *Error Monitoring Strategy*. These items might be used on a nine-weeks or semester test.

The Helping Verb Rap

> This useful way to teach the "helping verbs" in conjunction with the *Sentence Writing Strategy*, was developed by Paula Willits, Florida Atlantic University Doctoral Candidate

Teaching Note: Teach the rap section by section, with mastery of each section before proceeding to the next. 1 = ABCD; 2 = HIM; 3 = SW; 4 = combine all three sections for the complete rap.

ALL: Helping verbs are just a snap (snap) when I learn the ABC rap!
Teacher: A B C D
    A (call on individuals or have students answer in unison)
Students: am are
Teacher: B
Students: be been being
Teacher: C
Students: can could
Teacher: D
Students: do does did
Teacher: Now HIM. H I M
    H
Students: have has had
Teacher: I
Students: is
Teacher: M
Students: may might must
Teacher: That's sooooo wonderful! S W
    S
Students: shall should
Teacher: W

Students: was were will would
ALL: Helping verbs are just a snap (snap) when I learn the ABC rap!

POSTTEST FOR HELPING VERBS

A _____
B _____ _____
C _____ _____ _____
   _____ _____ _____

H _____
I _____
M _____

S _____ _____
W _____ _____ _____
   _____

TEST ITEMS: *ERROR MONITORING STRATEGY*
Developed by Judy O'Malley, SIM Trainer, Palm Beach County, Florida

PART I: Match the following with the correct letter.

____ 1. missing question mark
____ 2. messy handwriting
____ 3. no indentation where needed
____ 4. mi sister
____ 5. i like cake
____ 6. Grils are silly

a. Overall Appearance Error
b. Capitalization Error
c. Spelling Error
d. Punctuation Error

PART II: Circle the right answer.

1. Monitoring is:
   a. driving too fast.
   b. always doing good work.
   c. looking for and correcting your mistakes.
   d. making sure you get all your assignments done.

2. Which word should be capitalized?
   a. merry   c. spain
   b. nurse   d. baby

3. If you're not sure how to correct a mistake and you've really tried, what should you do?
   a. Correct it the best you can.
   b. Forget it.
   c. Read it again.
   d. Ask someone for help.

4. The dictionary can be great help in correcting what kind of errors?
   a. Spelling errors.
   b. Capitalization errors.
   c. Overall appearance errors.
   d. Punctuation errors.

5. Which punctuation mark should be used at the end of these sentences?

   Who is the doctor in this office   "I really hate school"
   a. Period   a. Period
   b. Question mark   b. Question mark
   c. Comma   c. Comma
   d. Exclamation point   d. Exclamation point

6. What letters put together help you remember the 4 kinds of mistakes people can make?
   a. CHEC
   b. COPS
   c. HELP
   d. None of the above

7. Which is the incomplete sentence?
   a. I ate lunch.
   b. It's time to go home.
   c. My sister Mary.
   d. When did she leave?

PART III: Write answers to the following statements.

1. Name three things that have to do with the overall appearance of your written work.

2. What kind of errors do you think you make most and why?

3. What is the Error Monitoring Strategy called?

4. What do you look for in capitalization?

5. What do you look for in overall appearance?

6. What do you look for in punctuation?

7. What do you look for in spelling?

8. What is the last thing you do in every step?

9. What are the 2 capitalization questions?

10. What are the 4 overall appearance questions?

11. What are the 2 punctuation questions?

12. What are the 3 spelling questions?

13. What are the 6 steps of WRITER?

14. What is the purpose of this strategy?

Pgs. 4 & 5 may be reproduced

WORD IDENTIFICATION STRATEGY
MASTERY REQUIREMENTS

STAGES	% CORRECT	COMPREHENSION SCORE	MANUAL PAGE
Pretest			
Prefix/Suffix Test Score	80%	- - -	
Oral Reading Score	99%	- - -	14
Comprehension	- - -	60%	
Prerequisite Skills			
Identify Prefixes	90%	- - -	- - -
Identify Suffixes	90%	- - -	- - -
Read Prefixes	90%	- - -	- - -
Read Suffixes	90%	- - -	- - -
Verbal Rehearsal			
Word Identification Strategy Steps	100%	- - - - -	37
Rules of 2's & 3's	100%	- - - - -	37
Controlled Practice	99%	65%	42
Grade Appropriate Practice	99%	65%	45
Posttest	99%	65%	50
Generalization	- - -	3 correct answers	55
Maintenance	99%	- - -	58

WORD IDENTIFICATION ERRORS
(Pg. 59)

1. Mispronunciation/omits any sound.

2. Omits a word (more than three letters).

3. Substitutes a word.
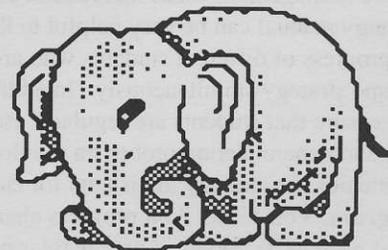
This form may be copied and placed in the strategy manual for use as a quick reference organizer.

Deborah Fennelly (8/88)
Mulberry Senior High
Mulberry, Florida

REMEMBER !

NEW VIDEOTAPE, MODELING THE FIRST-LETTER MNEMONIC STRATEGY: UNDERSTANDING THE HEART OF STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

A new videotape entitled "Modeling the FIRST-Letter Mnemonic Strategy," produced by the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities, is now available.

This videotape shows a teacher presenting a model of the strategy to a group of students in order to demonstrate how a model of a strategy should be presented (Please refer to Strategram, Vol. 1, No. 4, "The Heart of Strategy Instruction:Effective Modeling" by Jean Schumaker).

The videotape of the model stage of the FIRST-Letter Mnemonic Strategy was designed to demonstrate the four instructional phases of modeling. These instructional phases include: Advance Organizer, Presentation, Student Enlistment, and Post Organizer. The components of each phase are explained, modeled, and listed on the videotape to clearly illustrate how they are used in teaching.

Teachers who have been trained in the FIRST-Letter Mnemonic Strategy will find the videotape helpful in several ways:

1. It provides an example of the Model stage of strategy instruction that can be viewed frequently.

2. It provides a short overview of the strategy and the modeling process for other teachers and administrators.

3. It can be an inservice tool that can be used to reinforce effective instructional procedures.

Teachers and teacher trainers who order the videotape will also receive a training packet along with the video to assist them in its use. **An order form is provided on page 8**. Videotapes of the modeling stage of other strategies will be available in the future.


Develop Procedures for Tracking Student Progress

The one commodity that always seems to be lacking when teachers are instructing students to become strategic learners is *time*. There are always so many things to teach and review with students, and there is so little time! In light of this, it is very important that the few instructional moments available not be wasted. The most effective teachers we have seen are the ones who use a variety of record keeping systems to assist them in keeping track of students' progress and, in turn, maximize the instructional time with them. The importance of systems for tracking student progress increases as the number of students and the number of strategies each student has mastered increases. The Management Chart included in each learning strategy manual can be very helpful in keeping track of the progress of different students who are being taught the same strategy simultaneously. In addition, teachers can ensure that students are regularly assigned maintenance and generalization probes on previously-mastered strategies if a strategy log is kept for each student (See **Strategram,** Vol. 1, No. 3 on progress charts) on the strategies that need to be reviewed on a regular basis. Teachers can then program follow-up activities into their lesson plans for each student. Students can then be given the responsibility of managing their maintenance program

and prompting the teacher to do a maintenance or generalization probe. It is obviously very important for these records to be passed from one grade to the next and from one school to the next (for example, the middle school to the high school) so that a student's program can have a sustained thrust. In the absence of this type of instructional record keeping, strategy programs will become very disjointed for students and much of the snowballing effect will be lost.

A Final Word

Strategic learners are not created overnight. Our research has repeatedly shown that students become independent learners and performers when they receive a well-designed instructional program over several years. Such a program deliberately attends to the maintenance and generalization of strategies taught. Consistent, well-articulated instruction that attempts to expose students to a logical scope and sequence of instruction within *and* across grade levels can do much to create an instructional snowball effect that is sufficiently powerful to transform learners from passive to active problem solvers.
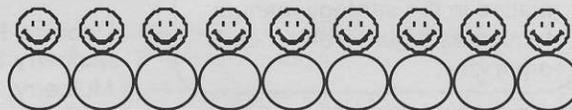
"A Moving Experience"

When teachers move from a district that supports the SIM to a new district, how can you elicit that same support from your new district? Irma Brasseur faced this dilemma three years ago when she moved from Iowa to Michigan. While in Iowa, Irma and others were well supported by the administration in their efforts to implement the SIM. Irma gained confidence in using the Model during her two years in Iowa. Irma then moved to Michigan which forced a reassessment of her use of the SIM.

Irma's past successful experience in using the SIM led to an initial decision to maintain its use in her new assignment. She then faced the challenge of selling the Model to her fellow teachers and the administration. While attempting to introduce the SIM to the mainstream teachers, resource teachers and the administration, Irma encountered a number of road blocks.

As in any district, when finances are a critical factor, a commitment to change is not always enthusiastically embraced. Irma through her experiences of the past three years has some ideas to help teachers faced with a similar situation:

1. Develop a strategic classroom and use the students as salespeople with other teachers and parents. For example, encourage students to have parents cue them to use strategies at home. Students can also mention how the use of a strategy (i.e., Test Taking Strategy) has helped them to succeed.

2. Develop a self-evaluation tool to provide self reinforcement for teachers and students.

3. Try to enlist one mainstream teacher to provide generalization activities for your students.

4. By talking informally to other teachers in non-threatening situations, try to spread the success of the strategies.

5. Use opportunities for small presentations to other teachers or administrators.

6. Set realistic goals! Don't expect to convince everyone in one or two explanations.

7. For establishing support, try to contact another trainer or teacher in the area. If you are not aware of one, write or call the KU-IRLD for names and addresses.

8. When asking administrators for support to attend training, tell them where you plan to go for training and why it would be beneficial to the district to support you.

Irma Brasseur has persevered using these approaches to implement strategic instruction in her new position. She is slowly spreading the news and gaining acceptance for the SIM in Michigan. Congratulation to Irma!

Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities
223 Carruth-O'Leary Hall
The University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas 66045
(913) 864-4780

ORDER FORM

Purchase Order No. _____

Quantity	Title	Unit Price	Extension
	Modeling the FIRST -Letter Mnemonic Strategy (Video Tape)	$25.00 ea	
		Subtotal	
	Kansas residents only Sales Tax - 4.5%		
	Shipping/Handling ($3.00)		
		Total	

**If Tax exempt, please furnish number

_____

Bill to:

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Authorized Signature

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