Building Better Instruction
How Technology Supports Nine Research-Proven Instructional Strategies

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Audience: Teachers, teacher educators, technology coordinators, library media specialists

Grade Level: K-12 (Ages 5-18)

Technology: All

Standards: NETS•S 3; NETS•T 11
(http://www.iste.org/standards)
Findings from a single research study can tell us a lot, but a meta-analysis of findings from a number of studies can tell us even more. In *A Theory-Based Meta-Analysis of Research on Instruction*, Robert J. Marzano analyzed the results of more than 100 research reports on instruction, involving more than 1.2 million subjects. The goal of the analysis was to identify those instructional strategies that have a high probability of enhancing student achievement for all students in all subject areas at all grade levels. (Editor’s note: See Resources on p. 11 for book and other information.)

Based on this meta-analysis, Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock identified and subsequently reviewed nine categories of instructional strategies that are most likely to lead to enhanced student achievement in their book, *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Many teachers are using these strategies, and they are asking how technology can be integrated with these strategies to improve student learning. In this article, we review the research-based instructional strategies and give concrete examples of readily available technology that support them.

**Nine Strategies**

1. **Identifying Similarities and Differences.** Classroom practices associated with identifying similarities and differences include comparison tasks, classifying tasks, and the use of metaphors and analogies. For example, you might ask students to compare ideas or objects, classify or group items into categories, or use a metaphor or analogy to see how seemingly dissimilar things are related.

2. **Summarizing and Note Taking.** These strategies are clustered as part of the same instructional category because both require students to distill information. Summarizing requires students to analyze information at a fairly deep level, thus strengthening their understanding.

   Students can summarize information in different ways, including deleting information that isn’t critical to the overall meaning of the text, substituting some information, and keeping some information.

   Note taking is similar to summarizing because students must first determine what is most important and then state that information succinctly.

3. **Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition.** These strategies deal with students’ attitudes and beliefs. Students who believe the amount of effort they put into a task increases their achievement actually do better, according to Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock. Many students aren’t aware of the importance of believing that their level of effort is related to their achievement. But you can explicitly teach this and share examples with students. You can help students understand the role of effort and how important it is in their learning by asking them to track their effort and achievement using rubrics or charts.

   It is equally important to reward students for achieving specific goals. Though there are many ways to tell a student he or she has done well, recognition is most effective when it is abstract (e.g., praise) or symbolic (e.g., tokens such as coupons or stickers) and contingent on students’ attaining specific performance goals.

4. **Homework and Practice.** Homework and practice are considered together because both provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding and strengthen their skills. In terms of homework, one vital point to consider is the importance of establishing a homework policy and being sure students and parents understand it. Similarly, it’s important to ensure that the purpose of assignments is clear.

   Mastering any skill takes lots of practice. In fact, research referenced in Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock’s book indicated students need to practice a skill 24 times to reach 80% competency, with the first four practices yielding the greatest effect.

5. **Nonlinguistic Representations.** The primary way teachers present new knowledge to students is through speaking and reading. But psychologists theorize that humans store knowledge in two forms: linguistic and nonlinguistic—words and images.

   Nonlinguistic representations of knowledge can take a variety of forms, including graphic representations, physical models, mental pictures, drawings, and kinesthetic classroom activities. A number of studies indicate that each of these types of activities helps students to develop nonlinguistic representations that enhance their understanding of content (see *Classroom Instruction That Works*, pp. 73–74, for a list).

6. **Cooperative Learning.** Grouping students for cooperative learning activities can be a very powerful instructional strategy. Informal, ad hoc groupings may last only a few minutes or an entire class period. More formal groupings for cooperative learning may last a few days or weeks, as defined by a unit of study. Coop-
Feature

crative groups designed for support, sometimes called “base” groups, may
last the entire semester or school year. See the Cooperative Learning Center
at the University of Minnesota Web site for more on cooperative learning.

7. Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback. Setting objectives estab-
ishes a direction for learning. Once students understand the parameters
of an objective, they should brainstorm to determine what they know
and what they want to learn. Specific, timely, and regular feedback to stu-
dents enhances their learning. Also, feedback should include an expla-
nation of why an item is correct or incorrect and be criterion referenced.
In other words, students should under-
stand where they stand relative to
a specific target of knowledge or skill.

8. Generating and Testing Hypotheses. The strategy of generating and test-
ing hypotheses is effective because it
requires students to apply their
knowledge and thus deepens their
understanding. Several processes
encourage students to generate and
test hypotheses, including systems
analysis, invention, experimental inquiry, decision making, and problem
solving. Within this strategy, students
plan and conduct simple investiga-
tions (e.g., formulate a testable ques-
tion, make systematic observations,
and develop logical conclusions).

9. Cues, Questions, and Advance Organizers. These tools give students
a preview of what they are about to
learn or experience and thus help
activate students’ prior knowledge.
Cues and questions should focus on
what is central and important, as
opposed to what is unusual. Higher-
level questions can deepen students’
learning, because they require stu-
dents to restructure information
or apply knowledge. Advance organ-
izers are most useful with information
not easily presented in a well-
organized manner. For example, cre-
ating an advance organizer for a field
trip can provide students with informa-
tion about what they are about to
see and do.

Note in the table on p. 9 how
strongly these can affect student
achievement. Translating effect sizes
into percentile gains makes the poten-
tial benefits of a given instructional
strategy clearer and more dramatic.

Supportive Technologies
Technology should always be viewed
as a tool, rather than an end in itself. How-
ever, many times, a single tech-
nology application or process will
help address a number of different
instructional strategies. This section
explores examples of such technology.

Word Processing. Almost all teachers
have access to a word processing pro-
gram. The rubric on p. 9 was created
using Microsoft Word’s Table feature.
Students might use a rubric like this
to rate their effort and achievement on
particular assignments and keep
track of these ratings over time. They
might then use Word’s Graph Chart
feature to better see the relationship
between their effort and achievement.

An English teacher might use an
advance organizer to facilitate the
writing process. You could first use
the organizer to help students select a
writing topic. Students would identify
five possible topics, which they would
add in the circles; they would then
identify at least three facts about each
topic, which they would add in the
quares. Using an organizer like this
can help students make better topic
choices. After students select a topic
to write about (e.g., endangered ani-
mal), they can use the same advance
organizer to develop the introduction,
three supporting paragraphs, and the
conclusion.

Word processors can be excellent
tools for summarizing. One approach
frequently used is to delete informa-
tion that isn’t critical to the overall
meaning of the text, substitute some
information, and keep some information. Using the Track Changes tool
in Word, students can easily delete
words and phrases, view the revised
text, and make changes as needed.

Technology can also be a helpful
tool for analogies. You could create
an analogy task template using the
drawing tools in a word processing
program. Once the template is cre-
at, you or your students can easily
change the text.

Using the annotation feature in
Word allows for peer editing and
helps facilitate an ongoing dialogue
between teacher and student, provid-
ing timely feedback.

Microsoft Word and PowerPoint
also can be used to create graphic
organizers. You can use the Organization Chart feature to illustrate two
common structures for organizing
information.

Web Resources. The High Plains
Regional Technology in Education
Consortium (HPR*TEC) has a range of excellent online tools for teachers.
NoteStar, for example, allows teachers
to create online research projects for
their students. Students can then use
NoteStar’s features to take notes from
online sources and organize their
notes by topic or subtopic. NoteStar
automatically embeds the Web site
annotation into each note. NoteStar
also enables students to summarize
easily. Students can copy and paste
directly from a Web site and add
their own information, making sure
to note which information is quoted
and from where.

Another HPR*TEC resource
is RubiStar. This online resource
provides generic rubrics that can
be printed as is or customized. Rubi-
rics can be excellent tools in setting
objectives and providing feedback.
Find a great rubrics library online at
Discovery School.
To help students understand the roles and responsibilities involved in cooperative grouping, you might encourage them to create a rubric to assess their group’s effectiveness in working together. Find rubrics related to cooperative learning skills on the University of Northern Iowa’s professional development Web site. These rubrics can serve as references for students as they construct their own rubrics.

You might find it helpful to study the Web sites of textbook publishers, which often include statements of general concepts, organized by chapter and unit. Suggested activities can provide cues for students to activate prior knowledge and anticipate new content; unit and chapter outlines available on these sites also can serve as advance organizers. Some great examples include Glencoe, Harcourt, and Macmillan/McGraw-Hill. Many education publishers have Web sites that support their texts. Don’t overlook these valuable resources.

A unit strategy that promotes cooperative learning and generating and testing hypotheses is the WebQuest. Not to be confused with a Web scavenger hunt, a WebQuest is an organized activity following a specific model. Visit Bernie Dodge’s WebQuest Page for an overview of this model and hundreds of WebQuests, organized by grade level and discipline.

Homework policies and daily assignments can be posted on a school’s Web site for easy access. Also, for a fee, several companies host school and teacher Web pages (e.g., eBoard.com, Myclass, and Blackboard).

Organizing and Brainstorming Software. Software for these activities can be integrated into a number of the instructional strategies. For example, Kidspiration, Inspiration, and Kid Pix offer great graphic organizers for identifying similarities and differences. These applications come with templates that allow younger students to drag pictures and older students to type words into the appropriate boxes as they sort, classify, and compare items. Students can also create Venn diagrams and comparison tables.

Inspiration is another great resource for classroom activities that require students to summarize text. Rapidfire is a brainstorming tool within Inspiration that allows teachers and students to quickly and automatically create concept webs. In particular, teachers can show students how to use the Rapidfire feature to create a summary web. With a single click of a button, students can switch between concept web and outline views. This approach also reinforces nonlinguistic representation.

You also might use Inspiration to construct a KWHL chart, which...
students can use to answer the questions: What do you know? What do you want to know? How will you find out? What did you learn? KWHLD charts can be used to set goals and provide feedback to students.

Students can use a program such as TimeLiner for several strategies, especially summarizing and note taking, advance organizers, and nonlinguistic representation.

Data Collection Tools. Handheld devices and appropriate software give teachers and students the mobility to collect, share, and analyze data. The Palm Web site spotlights several success stories. These examples show how PDAs help teachers and students generate hypotheses, take notes, identify similarities and differences, and provide immediate feedback.

Students can use several tools to formulate and test their hypotheses. Scientific instruments from companies such as Vernier allow students to collect real-time data. Students can use probes with provided templates and experiments to test hypotheses in real-world settings. Vernier probes also connect to Texas Instruments scientific calculators.

Scalar and others make USB microscopes that capture still images and movies and save them to the computer. These images can be used to create nonlinguistic representations of science concepts.

Health and physical education teachers can use instruments such as pedometers and heart rate monitors to collect data on student activity levels to generate and test hypotheses about exercise and health. One good example is the Digi-Walker.

Multimedia. Nonlinguistic representation is a natural match for digital media creation. Software tools such as iMovie and Windows Movie Maker allow students to create and share video presentations that illuminate concepts or tell stories in unique or compelling ways. Digital still cameras allow students to capture visual phenomena easily, such as photographing plants at various growth stages. Find examples of excellent digital still and video projects online at the Apple Learning Interchange (ALI).

Presentation tools such as PowerPoint and HyperStudio can support the use of all nine strategies. These programs contain templates that make it easy to get started in multimedia creation. You can use presentation software to model appropriate use of the strategies for students and colleagues. Students can use presentation software to summarize the main idea of a unit or research paper and present it to an authentic audience. Many teachers find cooperative learning to be an ideal strategy for the creation of multimedia projects. Find a Grade 2 student project about geometric shapes using PowerPoint online at ALI's student project site.

Strategies Applied

The nine instructional strategies reviewed in this article are most useful when students learn to apply them consistently themselves. You should first model the use of the strategies and then assist students in learning and practicing them. As you create lesson plans, consider using three approaches in incorporating the effective strategies.

1. Focus on the strategies. A teacher decides to concentrate on the strategy of setting goals and providing feedback. He then identifies lessons where the strategy applies and determines how technology can be integrated into the lessons.

2. Focus on the available technology. Although technology use shouldn't trump content or strategy, it can be used to lead the way in lesson planning. For instance, a primary teacher preparing to teach the concept of a community might...
inventory available technology and discover that PowerPoint and a computer projector are readily available. She decides that the strategies of setting goals and identifying similarities and differences are compatible with using a computer projector in a whole-class situation. For the goal-setting activity, she constructs and shows a PowerPoint slide show that illustrates the big ideas in the community unit. After students have examined several examples of communities, she uses graphical organizer or concept-mapping software, such as Kidspiration, in a whole-class activity, during which students determine how the communities studied are similar and different.

3. **Focus on the unit.** A teacher presenting a unit on the Lewis and Clark expedition decides that many of the strategies and available technologies can be integrated in the unit. For example, he decides to integrate summarizing and note taking using word processing and Web features, identifying similarities and differences using Venn diagrams, and nonlinguistic representations using graphic organizers. Starting with a unit focus is the most ambitious approach. Teachers who are comfortable using multiple technologies in a unit find this approach a good way to incorporate instructional strategies throughout that unit.

**Conclusion**

Millions of dollars are spent annually on classroom technology, but having technology available in classrooms is only half the battle. The classroom strategies we have outlined here provide guidance and tools for helping students increase their capacity for learning in a deliberate and focused way. We've suggested ways to integrate technology in the implementation of those research-based classroom strategies and ways to apply the strategies consistently.

Lesson planning should focus first on content and classroom strategies, then on ways in which technologies can enhance the lesson. Building lessons on a solid, research-based foundation of effective strategies, adding appropriate technologies, and consistently applying those strategies should help ensure high-quality instruction that has the potential of maximizing student achievement.

**Resources**

**Books**


**Education Publishers**

Glencoe: http://www.glencoe.com
Harcourt: http://www.harcourschool.com

**Hardware**

Digi-Walker: http://www.digiwalker.com
Scalar: http://www.scalamerica.com/
USB.htm
Texas Instruments: http://www.ti.com
Vernier: http://www.vernier.com

**Software**

HyperStudio: http://www.hyperstudio.com
Inspiration/Kidspiration: http://www.inspiration.com
TimeLiner: http://www.tomsonder.com

**Online Tools**

Apple Learning Interchange (Grade 2 student project): http://ail.apple.com/ail_sites/deli/exhibits/1000171/Student_Work.html
Bernie Dodge's WebQuest Page: http://Webquest.sdsu.edu
Cooperative Learning Center: http://www.co-operation.org
Discovery School: http://school.discovery.com/schooleguide/assess.html
NoteStar: http://notestar.teachers.org
Palm Education Success Stories: http://www.palmeone.com/us/education/studies
Rubistar: http://rubistar.4teachers.org
University of Northern Iowa's Professional Development Rubrics: http://www.uni.edu/profdev/rubrics.html

**Web Page Hosts**

Blackboard: http://www.blackboard.com
eBoard: http://www.1.eboard.com
Myclass: http://www.myclass.net

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