Lessons from The Thoughtful Classroom

Volume 1

MAKING STUDENTS AS IMPORTANT AS STANDARDS

The Official Newsletter of Silver Strong & Associates and Thoughtful Education Press

IN THIS ISSUE

Dear Friends,

Welcome to *Lessons from The Thoughtful Classroom,* our new newsletter. We hope you will find each issue packed with ideas you can use, stories you can pass on, and words you can remember to keep you in good spirits as you work to make our schools and our students more and more thoughtful.

At the beginning of any new venture, it is common to look back into our pasts for an image or a person, a name or a great event—something or someone to stand for the hopes and values we wish to see embodied in our venture's future. With this in mind, we would like to offer you the memory palaces of Matteo Ricci.

The year is 1583. The great civilization of China had already been testing its citizens for more than 500 years. Every third year, all who wanted to advance in the Chinese Civil Service would gather in one of the great cities of China for a test. The test covered the classic works of Confucius, Buddhism, and Taoism; the entire contents of the *Book of Songs* (which Chinese scholars had to memorize); the war philosophy of Sun Tzu; and the mysteries and rigors of chess. Young people's entire futures hung on the results of this immensely demanding test. Into this test-driven world—only a little less test-driven than our own—stepped a young Italian, Matteo Ricci, from the hill town of Macerata, north of Rome. Ricci, a distinguished scholar and teacher, had been sent by his pope to convert the Chinese to Christianity. It was the Pope's hope that if Ricci could pass along his Medieval and Renaissance study techniques, he might improve the performance of Chinese students on the Civil Service exams and thereby lay the groundwork for future conversions. What matters to us—and maybe to you—is not so much who Ricci was, but what he taught his students: *how to construct, maintain, and repair memory palaces.* Ricci taught his young Chinese students how to use their imaginations to build palaces in their own minds, places rich in both space and detail, into which these young and hopeful civil servants could pack all the wealth of knowledge they needed to both pass the test and build a future for themselves and their families. If longevity is any proof of success, then Ricci was a winner. He remained in China for 27 years, teaching up until a week before his death.

Renaissance China, like contemporary North America, created a world of demanding standards, and used tests to maintain vigilance and guard the portals of its students' futures.

Ricci, however, decided to give his students more than tools to pass the test; he gave them palaces, provisions for a mental space where their imaginations could find and store and treasure all that was beautiful enough to be of use to themselves and others. So, at the beginning of this newsletter—a little annex to a castle we dream on—we offer you this image: Be a palace for your students, and for yourself as well. ❖

Dr. Harvey Silver,
President of Silver Strong & Associates, co-founder of The Thoughtful Classroom

Richard Strong,
Vice-President of Silver Strong & Associates, co-founder of The Thoughtful Classroom

Making Students as Important as Standards

by Harvey Silver, Richard Strong, Matthew Perini, and Greg Tuculescu

The Third Generation of Accountability

When something goes wrong in an organization, one of the first questions we hear is, "Who is accountable?" It may sound like an easy way of assigning blame, but in reality, accountability is much less a means for scapegoating than it is a way to assess how well a system is working. At its heart, accountability implies reform. Resting within the demand for accountability lies the seed of organizational improvement.

Over the past few decades, accountability has become an important word for educators looking to improve practice, make their schools more effective learning organizations, and raise student achievement. But accountability has not been some fixed concept in American education; its message and implications for schools have changed and evolved with each new generation. In fact, we can trace the evolution of three distinct generations of accountability.

FIRST GENERATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

When the Age of Accountability in education began some thirty-plus years ago, its catchphrase, "All children can learn," was as simple as it was general. Over time, this generality came to be seen and used as something of a loophole in accountability: Of course all children can learn, it's just that some can learn calculus and others will flounder in remedial math; some can learn to write a first-rate literary essay while others will remain stuck at the sentence level, doomed to "learning" through a steady diet of parsing exercises. Because this first generation of accountability set no goals for learning, its effects were largely rhetorical. The language of schools changed, but the schools themselves did not.

SECOND GENERATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

That's when the second generation of accountability, complete with its armory of standards, was born. In the second generation, states responded to the disparities in what students were learning with core content standards, which, in turn led to dramatic changes in state assessment tests. Suddenly, the emphasis was on higher-level thinking, rigorous reading, problem solving, and writing. Multiple choice all but disappeared, leaving in its wake state tests such as Kentucky's Commonwealth Assessment Testing System (CATS) where 80% of its items required open-ended responses. The culmination of this second generation of accountability was the No Child Left Behind Act, that well-known piece of legislation requiring all schools to demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" in all sub-groups of student populations.

A good example of the shift from the first to the second generation of accountability is on view in the New York State testing system. One of the first states to implement state-wide assessment, New York relied for years on exams that held different expectations for different students. Students on a college track took an academic exam; the rest of the students took a general exam. Since 2001, however, New York has required all graduating students to pass more rigorous Regents exams in all subject areas. The trend of greater expectations for every school and every student embodied by the second generation of accountability became a nationwide movement, and its mantra reflected this new level of ambition: "High levels of learning for all students."

Never before had any nation set such high standards for every student. Curriculum alignment committees, standards-based lesson plans, direct instruction of test-taking skills, more academic programs all sprung up in response – sometimes at the expense of arts and music pro-

grams. And while some schools showed initial gains, those gains often came at a high price. Many communities worried that their schools were becoming unrecognizable test-taking factories. Powerful anti-standards advocates such as Alfie Kohn rose up in protest. In communities in California, Colorado, Massachusetts, and other states, some parents even revolted, keeping their children out of school and picketing against high-stakes testing. From the minds and mouths of students came a disturbing but far-too accurate perception: "My school is more interested in my test scores than in me."

THIRD GENERATION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

At the same time our education system has rallied around a unified set of standards, teachers have come to realize that their classrooms are more heterogeneous than ever. The great diversity of students' needs, interests, and learning styles renders one-size-fits-all approaches not only foolish, but outright damaging to student achievement. Thus, calls for differentiation have become nearly as loud as calls for uniform standards. And so we all stand at the beginning of the third generation of accountability with a new message based on the lessons of the previous generations: "Let's make students as important as standards."

The challenge of the third generation of accountability is to realize the dream unique to American Education: raising the levels of achievement for all students while still preserving the unique and precious gifts of each and every individual.

We believe that making this dream a reality requires answering five important questions:

1. **What skills do students need to develop in order to achieve at high levels?**
2. **What instructional strategies enable the greatest gains in student performance?**
3. **How can we address the diversity of our students in a way that is manageable and provides an equal opportunity for all students to achieve?**
4. **How can we design units of instruction that motivate learners with different learning styles yet still address the skills and core content knowledge students need to succeed?**
5. **How do schools become professional learning communities that support teachers through the improvement process?**

The answers to these questions can be found in a new and comprehensive approach to school improvement known as **The Thoughtful Classroom. The Thoughtful Classroom** rests on five distinct pillars, or practices for improving teaching, learning, and schools:

Pillar I: Hidden Skills of Academic Literacy
A concise list of the skills that separate high achievers from low and average achievers

Pillar II: Research-Based Strategies
Sixteen instructional strategies and a set of classroom tools proven to make a difference in student learning

Pillar III: Diversity That Works
A manageable system for differentiating instruction and assessment using learning styles and multiple intelligences

Pillar IV: Classroom Curriculum Design
A simple and deep unit design model that helps teachers maximize learning and motivate all students to do their best work

Pillar V – Instructional Learning Teams
Collaborative and coaching structures that make a professional and collegial culture a reality

To learn more about the Five Pillars of The Thoughtful Classroom and how schools across the country are applying these important ideas, please read our article published in New Horizons for Learning Online Journal at:
www.newhorizons.org/strategies/assess/silver.htm

Note: This excerpt has been adapted with permission from *New Horizons for Learning Online Journal*, Vol. XI, No. 1, Winter 2005.

INDUCTIVE ~~LEARNING~~ Writing: A POPULAR STRATEGY TAKES A "WRITE" TURN

by Harvey Silver and Matthew Perini

Thoughtful Educators around the country know the value of research-based strategies in improving instruction and raising student achievement. Time and time again, strategies such as Reading for Meaning, Compare and Contrast, Interactive Lecture, Reciprocal Learning, and Task Rotation prove their value in the classroom. Of these "old reliables," Inductive Learning has long been one of the most important and popular strategies in the Thoughtful Educator's toolkit.

Inductive Learning helps students explore topics and concepts by grouping specific terms, vocabulary words, or visual data into larger, more general categories. For example, if given a set of geometric shapes to group, students might consider a host of categories such as circles, triangles, shapes with four sides, three-dimensional shapes, irregular shapes, shapes with right angles, etc. The strategy does not stop at categorization, however; it also asks students to devise clear labels for their categories and then to make a set of predictions that they can verify or revise with evidence from a reading or as they progress through a unit.

Here's a quick example of Inductive Learning at work:

1. Students are asked to examine and review a list of words related to Ancient Egypt:

moon	**Kushta medicine plant**	**Nut: sky god**	**stars**
high priests	**surgery**	**worship**	**Geb: earth god**
planets	**patients**	**Re: sun god**	**constellations**
			scalpel

2. Students convert the list into labeled groups, such as:

medicine	*religion*	*astronomy*
surgery	**Re: sun god**	**moon**
patients	**Geb: earth god**	**stars**
Kushta medicine plant	**Nut: sky god**	**planets**
scalpel	**worship**	**constellations**
	high priests	

3. Students use the groupings to make predictions:

The Egyptians practiced medicine.
The Egyptians believed in many gods.
The Egyptians had an advanced culture.

4. Students collect evidence that supports or refutes their predictions:

Evidence For	Hypothesis	Evidence Against
pg. 34: "The Egyptians made great advances in the practice of medicine." pg. 35: "Doctors performed surgery..."	The Egyptians practiced medicine.	

Inductive Learning: Writing: A Popular Strategy Takes a "Write" Turn

What is so powerful about Inductive Learning is the way it actively engages students in so many sophisticated learning behaviors. Most notably, students must search for similarities and differences, a skill identified by Robert Marzano and his team (2001) as the single most effective strategy for raising student achievement. In addition, students are asked to make associations; identify methods of grouping; classify and categorize; determine the relative inclusiveness of groups; form generalizations; devise clear and concise descriptions; develop and test hypotheses; and assess their own understanding of the content and their process of learning.

Though it has many uses in the classroom, Inductive Learning is most commonly used to help students organize the vocabulary for a given unit, introduce new topics or learning units, and as a review tool. However, a growing number of Thoughtful Educators have learned how a simple twist can put the power of Inductive Learning to the task of improving students' writing skills. "I've used Inductive Learning for years now," says Michael Ledford, a teacher at Dewitt Elementary in Knox County, KY. "What I've seen more recently is that thinking inductively is critical to the writing process. In fact, the strategy's emphases on organizing details, finding and stating the big ideas that unite those details, and structuring large amounts of information into meaningful sets correspond directly to the problems many of my students have when writing."

Here's what teacher Michael Ledford does to turn Inductive Learning into Inductive Writing:

1. "First, I have students generate ideas related to the assigned topic or unit. I try to get a lot of information out in the open, so I often help students tap into their prior knowledge with prompts like, 'What do you know about _____?' 'What adjectives or descriptive words come to your mind when you think about _____?' 'What feelings do you have about _____?' Or, I'll use a simple tool for helping students generate ideas, like Give One, Get One; Fist List; or Kindling.

   Depending on what kind of writing students will be producing, I will modify my prompts. For example, if I want personal responses, I'll favor prompts regarding feelings and reactions, whereas explanatory writing requires more 'How?' and 'Why?' prompts. Where we are in the unit also makes a difference. At the beginning, before students have learned the content, the brainstorming will be more associative, more speculative. As the unit progresses, students will work more and more of the unit's vocabulary and key ideas into their brainstorming."

Here is a list of associations student Michael P. generated for the concept "night":

good night	crime	streetlights
ghosts	play	homework
beavers	frightened	go to sleep
raccoons	moon	home
stars	scary	dinner
police officer	shooting star	dark
nightlight	cold	rest
TV	black cat	blanket

2. "Then, I have students group the words into related categories and assign labels, just like in a regular Inductive Learning lesson. The only difference is that I ask the students to write a sentence or a phrase for each group instead of just a label. For example:"

Things that come out at night	Things that are scary	Things that keep you safe
beavers stars raccoons moon dark shooting star	ghosts dark scary crime cold	streetlights police officers

Things you do at home at night	Things dealing with sleep
home TV dinner play homework	rest go to sleep good night blanket nightlight

(Continued on Next Page)

A POPULAR STRATEGY TAKES A "WRITE" TURN (CONTINUED)

3. "After that, I ask students to write topic sentences based on their groups."

1. Many things come out at night that can't be seen during the day.
2. Young children are sometimes afraid of the night because it is dark and scary things happen.
3. Police officers and streetlights are things that help keep your street safe.
4. Children do many things at night in their homes.
5. Nighttime is also a time for children to rest and go to sleep.

4. "Last, the student uses the topic sentences and the items in each group to write a paragraph with supporting details. Before they start writing, I'll have the students look over their groups and topic sentences to decide if each group is truly worthy of a paragraph. I like to model the process with my students and to 'think aloud,' showing them how I decide if each topic sentence from Step 3 is meaty enough to yield an entire paragraph. If not, I'll show them how I connect two separate sentences and groups to make one coherent paragraph. For example, when my student Michael P. examined his third topic sentence, he realized it wasn't enough to hang an entire paragraph on, so he combined sentences 2 and 3, along with their attending details, into one paragraph."

Night

By Michael P.

Many things happen during the night. Because it is dark, things you can't see come out at night. You can see the moon and the stars. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you can see a shooting star. Animals, like beavers and raccoons, also come out at night to look for food, when no people are around.

Young children are sometimes afraid at night because it is dark and scary things can happen. Ghosts come out at night and black cats howl, which keeps you up. Animals also come out at night and people need to be careful. Streetlights and police officers help make your streets safe.

Children do many things in their homes at night. They watch TV, eat dinner, finish their homework and play with their brothers and sisters.

Nighttime is also time for children to rest and go to sleep. Your parents tell you when to go to sleep and you sometimes argue with them because you want to watch more TV or play. You cuddle up in your blanket at night and yell "Good night" to everyone in your family before you go to sleep.

References

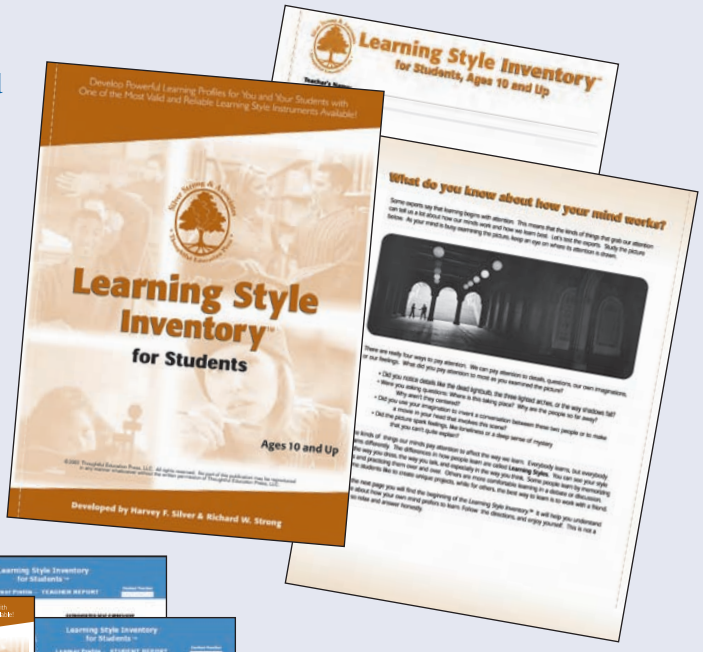
Marzano, R.J., Pickering, D., Pollock J.E. (2001). Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

THE *LEARNING STYLE INVENTORY FOR STUDENTS:*

The Next Generation of Learning Style Instrumentation

*The **LPI**, (above) is now replaced by the new and improved **LSIS**.*

For twenty years, one student learning style instrument has provided teachers, administrators, parents, and nearly one million students with the most valid and reliable information on how students learn: the ***Learning Preference Inventory (LPI).*** Over those twenty years, the *LPI* has become a significant part of who we are and how we help schools differentiate learning and raise achievement. So it is not without some sadness that we have decided to officially retire the *LPI* and launch in its place the all-new **Learning Style Inventory for Students (LSIS).** The new **LSIS** includes all the great features of the original *LPI,* such as the ability to measure student learning style preferences, statistically valid and reliable results, and free scoring, but the new **LSIS** is a next-generation instrument offering a host of powerful new features, including:



- ***Advanced reporting for both the teacher and student***
- ***The 3 unique keys to unlocking each student's success***
- ***Strategies and tools for helping students turn their weaknesses into strengths***
- ***Aggregate reporting for schools and districts***
- ***Data files to merge student style preferences with Student Data Management Systems in your school or district***
- ***Student's Introduction to Learning Styles with each inventory***
- ***Free LSIS User's Manual * showing users how to administer the LSIS, interpret the results, and differentiate instruction***
- ***Free online access to the LSIS Resource Center, packed with tools, tips, and powerful resources for educators***

For more information on all of the features and benefits of the **Learning Style Inventory for Students** please call (800)962-4432 or visit www.ThoughtfulEd.com/lsis.

** Free with each LSIS Classroom Kit.*

To learn more about the benefits of the LSIS and its innovative reporting system
Call 800-962-4432
for a FREE
LSIS Information Kit

Also includes FREE access to the LSIS Resource Center! www.ThoughtfulEd.com/lsis

The LSIS Resource Center is a great place to find research, FAQs, testimonials, and case studies. And best of all, you'll find **tips for struggling students** – insights, tools, and classroom-ready strategies for working with specific students' learning style profiles in these crucial areas: reading, writing, math, science, social studies, homework, and attention.

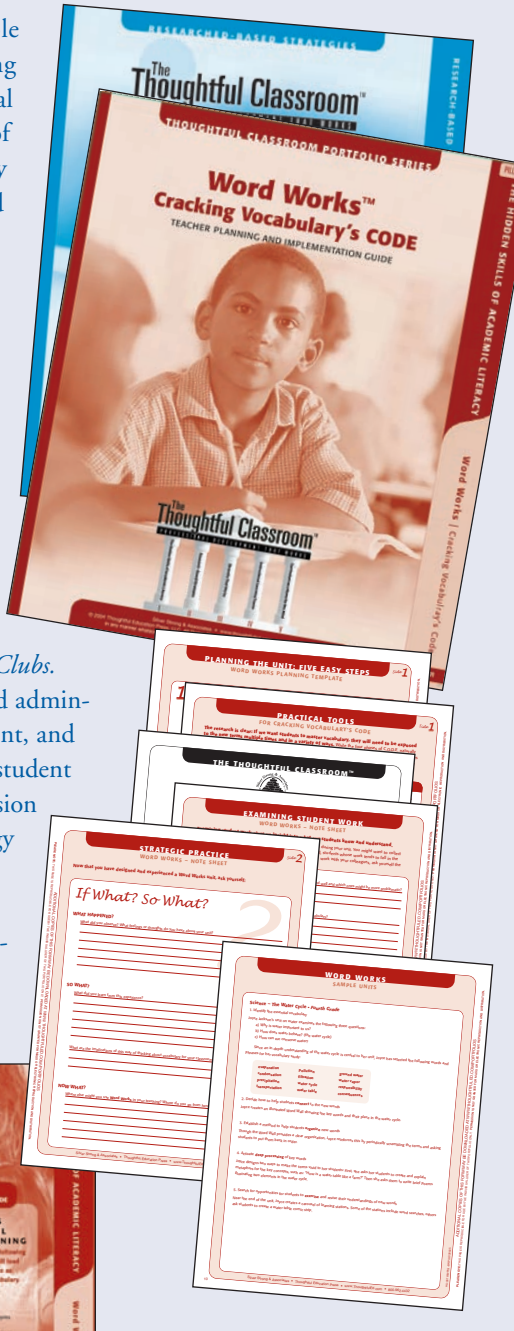
Cutting to the Chase:
Improving Learning Clubs with Thoughtful Classroom Portfolios

This is the story of five Thoughtful Classroom™ trainers, thousands of teachers and administrators, and one simple but deep idea that came out of their years of interactions.

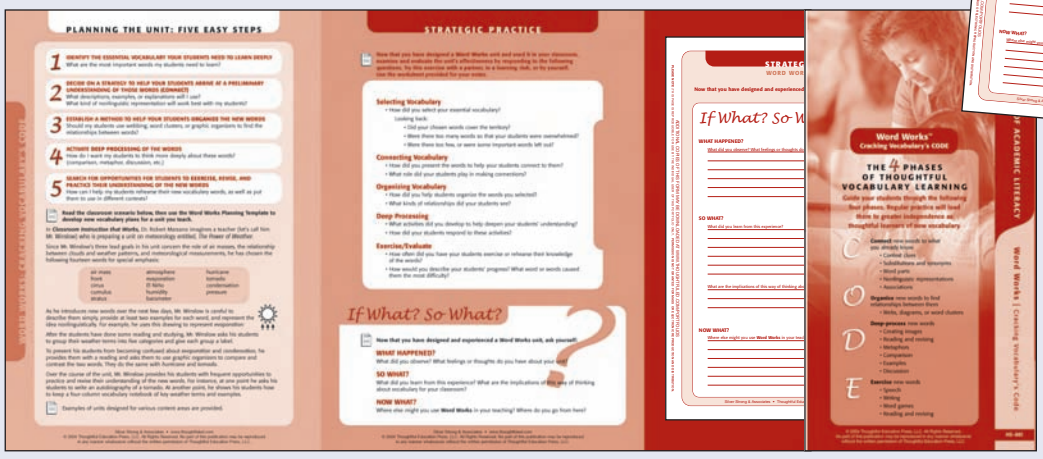
First, the idea: a ready-to-use portfolio focused on a single strategy, skill, or technique for improving teaching and learning. No dense prose. No long-winded introductions. In place of those elements, imagine a durable six-panel folder with a small bundle of reproducible planning templates nestled inside its pocket. Look closely at the portfolio and here's what you'll find:

1. A brief introduction to the strategy and a set of goals for implementing it in the classroom
2. A set of simple planning steps and a short classroom vignette illustrating the strategy in practice
3. Acronym-based guidelines (such as READS for the strategy titled *Reading for Meaning*) that help students learn how to apply the strategy independently
4. A reflection guide for evaluating the lesson's effectiveness
5. A set of guidelines for examining student work along with milestones for assessing your effectiveness in implementing the strategy or technique
6. A small collection of reproducible resources including blank planning templates, note sheets keyed to critical sections of the portfolio, and a set of sample lesson plans developed by teachers at various grade levels and content areas

What you've just imagined is a **Thoughtful Classroom Portfolio**, and this is where the story shifts to five Thoughtful Classroom trainers and the thousands of teachers and administrators they work with. Dr. Dan Moirao, Joyce Jackson, Susan Morris, Barb Heinzman, and Vic Klein serve as consultants and coaches to schools across the country. Among them, they have over 40 years of experience in facilitating and conducting *Learning Clubs*. In Learning Clubs, teams of teachers and administrators work together to plan, implement, and evaluate lessons to make a difference in student learning. Typically, a Learning Club session focuses on a single research-based strategy such as Compare and Contrast, or an agreed-upon core skill such as mastering vocabulary that the Learning Club members want to develop in their students.



Each portfolio includes worksheets for planning and practice, sample lessons/units, and evaluation forms.



Each portfolio provides a convenient side pocket designed to hold sample lessons and templates, worksheets, and student work for evaluation.

"The idea of a Learning Club," says Joyce Jackson, a teacher of 30 years who works with Kentucky's Division of School Improvement, "is that responsibility for learning and implementing new techniques is shared. Responsibility does not reside with a few dedicated teachers. Nor does it reside with a tenacious administrator. And responsibility certainly doesn't reside with a trainer or coach in monthly or bi-monthly visits. It resides with *everyone.* By emphasizing shared responsibility and regular meetings, Learning Clubs create a powerful support group that allows teachers to test and refine their work in integrating the best research-based techniques into their classroom practice."

When put into building-wide practice, Learning Clubs make a significant difference in schools. Teachers, administrators, and trainers commonly report benefits such as:

- Greater use and variety of research-based strategies in classrooms.
- Significant gains in student achievement.
- Increased confidence and morale among the faculty, leading to collective action toward school improvement

Vic Klein, Principal of Highland Falls Elementary School in New York, explains what a school-wide commitment to Learning Clubs means from an administrator's perspective: "Suddenly, everyone is working to assure that the learning community succeeds as a whole. No one points fingers. And instead of an evaluator, the principal becomes a partner in helping teachers improve practice–a facilitator of learning and professional discourse."

But over the years, Dan, Joyce, Susan, Barb, and Vic had been hearing a common refrain from educators: Although the Learning Clubs were having a noticeable and positive effect on morale and achievement, something was still missing.

The five trainers' initial response was to write a book on how to conduct Learning Clubs. But a book turned out to be the wrong choice. Teachers were looking for something else–something that really cut to the chase.

So the five trainers went back to the drawing board. And this time, they brought more teachers and administrators with them.

"There's really no substitute for teachers' experience when it comes to developing a product like this," says Barb Heinzman, who taught for thirty-four years before becoming a Thoughtful Classroom coach and trainer. Barb continues, "Of course, you draw from your own teaching experiences, but it's also critical to get a wide range of feedback and responses so you can produce something that will work for all teachers." After collecting months of feedback from Learning Club members in schools across the country, the idea of the **Thoughtful Classroom Portfolio** was born.

Dr. Dan Moirao, a professor at the California State TEACH program and former Superintendent of Schools in Heyward, CA, was one of the originators of the Learning Club concept over twenty years ago. "If I had to guess," Dan says, "I'd say I've conducted 300 Learning Club sessions with teachers and administrators. But when we got all these educators together to help us design the appropriate materials for Learning Clubs, I was humbled by how much they knew that we didn't. By suggesting a portfolio rather than a book design, the teachers and administrators really helped us separate and highlight the essential elements of a successful Learning Club." What's especially noteworthy to Dan is the difference the new design has made in schools. "The portfolios have really transformed the Learning Clubs I'm working with," he says. "The teachers and admin-istrators are working with greater focus than ever. They're designing, implementing, collaborating, and refining their practice at a whole new level."

As Susan Morris, a seasoned professional staff developer and founder of a Learning Assistance center for college students, explains, "My favorite definition of professional development is Michael Fullan's idea that the best professional development consists of 'teachers talking to teachers about teaching.' It sounds so simple at first, but there's a real power there–the power of professional collaboration towards a common goal with everyone working as colleagues and equals. That is what we tapped into during our feedback loops, what we relied on when it came time to developing the portfolios, and what we see happening in the Learning Clubs now more than ever, thanks to the portfolios. We're all very proud of the **Thoughtful Clasroom Portfolios** because we've seen the difference they make."

Thoughtful Classroom Portfolios can be used with equal success by Learning Clubs or by individuals looking to incorporate the best research-based techniques into their repertoires. Current titles in the **Thoughtful Classroom Portfolio Series** include:

- ***RB-001 Reading for Meaning*** (Improving Students' Reading Comprehension)
- ***HS-001 Word Works: Cracking Vocabulary's CODE*** (Direct Vocabulary Instruction)
- ***DT-001 Task Rotation*** (Differentiating Activities, Assignments, and Assessments by Learning Style)

And, coming soon:

- ***From Note-taking to Note-making***
- ***Interactive Lecture***
- ***Compare & Contrast***

Check for more titles available soon at www.ThoughtfulEd.com.

The Thoughtful Classroom Portfolio Series

$10.95 per title

(quantity discounts available)

Available at www.ThoughtfulEd.com or call (800) 962-4432

From the Bottom to the Top

How Maine SAD 37 Became the Highest-Performing Elementary District in Maine

by Linda Lippitt

A quick glance at the last few years of test results and performance indicators for Maine's School Academic District (SAD) 37 will cause most people to do a double take. After all, the list of accomplishments is staggering:

- Harrington Elementary School was one of only 36 schools across the country to earn the **2005 National Distinguished Title I School Award.**
- Between 2002 and 2004, the district saw a **28.25% gain in reading and math scores** among 4th and 8th graders.
- In 2004, the district was recognized by the State Department of Education as the **highest-performing elementary district** in the state of Maine.
- In the spring of 2004, the eighth graders at Cherryfield Elementary **scored first in the state,** with Columbia Falls less than two points behind in second place.
- In 2004, at the fourth-grade level, all five schools finished in the **top 26 schools in the state,** with Harrington at number three and Cherryfield and Columbia Falls tied for fifth.
- In 2003, four of the district's five elementary schools **received commendations from the state** for Continued School Improvement.

All of this from a district that only two years ago posted test scores that placed it near the bottom of the district-by-district performance list – the very same list that SAD 37 now sits atop.

How Maine SAD 37 Accomplished This: Three Factors

Factor 1: Community-Wide Commitment

Making this rapid ascent even more impressive is the demographic diversity of the district. "SAD 37 includes students from a wide range of social, language, and economic backgrounds," says Superintendent George Kiley. "We knew, right from the beginning that we would need to pay attention to that diversity–to use it as an asset, if we wanted to turn things around. And so we reached out and committed to working together as an educational community of teachers, administrators, parents, and students." According to George, this vital element of community involvement is often missing when districts embark on an improvement path. "I've seen cases where the school and the community are entrenched in an 'us-vs.-them' mentality. From a perspective of trying to improve an entire district, nothing could be more difficult to overcome. If we hadn't made the first step of reaching out and discussing our vision with the community, it would have been nearly impossible to get the results we got."

Factor 2: A Conscientious Faculty

If community-wide commitment is the first factor contributing to SAD 37's success story, then the faculty is surely the second. A simple visit to the five schools in the district reveals a deep knowledge base on issues surrounding instructional effectiveness and student diversity among teachers and principals. Teachers make frequent use of research-based instructional strategies such as Compare and Contrast, and Reading for Meaning in their classrooms. But more impressively, the teachers take the time to teach students how to use these strategies on their own as learning tools. Teachers do more than cover critical content and skills; they show students how to be good learners and critical thinkers. The evidence of this is found throughout the district, from the second graders who use "Top Hat" organizers to examine story characters, to the upper elementary students who like to talk about their favorite strategies: Word Walls; Learning Logs; Give One, Get One; and Etch a Sketch.

In addition to their work in research-based strategies, SAD 37 teachers are equally committed to addressing the wide range of cognitive diversity among students. By making regular use of strategies such as Task Rotation, in which teachers deliver instruction or assess student learning based on a simple learning style model, SAD 37

has solved the problem of manageability that can sometimes derail differentiation plans.

Thanks to their teachers' efforts in addressing diversity, students around the district show a refreshing brand of self-understanding. Sit in on a few class discussions, and you'll hear students who can talk comfortably and knowledgeably about their own learning style profiles, the kinds of activities they excel at, what causes them the most trouble in school, and how they would like to grow as lifelong learners. Out of these conversations have emerged each class's "Learning Truths," a large poster with a list of simple statements or agreements about learning.

Of course, this kind of commitment to high-quality teaching and learning takes more than teachers and students. According to Ron Ramsey, Principal of Harrington Elementary, which won the 2005 National Distinguished Title I School Award, The Thoughtful Classroom is a "growth process." Principals and administrators play a vital role in supporting teachers by providing the time, resources, and encouragement they need to analyze and refine their practice and think through professional choices.

Factor 3: The Thoughtful Classroom

Anchoring this work in using research-based strategies, addressing student diversity, and developing a professional learning culture is The Thoughtful Classroom, a professional development program designed by educational pioneers Harvey Silver and Richard Strong. Based on over 30 years of research and practice in hundreds of schools, The Thoughtful Classroom provides schools and districts such as SAD 37 with a framework for positive change and long-term improvement.

This framework rests on five "Pillars":

Pillar I – The Hidden Skills of Academic Literacy
A concise list of the skills that control over 50% of all items on state testing systems

Pillar II – Research-Based Strategies
Sixteen instructional strategies and a set of classroom tools proven to make a difference in student learning

Pillar III – Diversity That Works
A manageable learning-style-based system for differentiating instruction and assessment

Pillar IV – Classroom Curriculum Design
A simple and deep unit design model that helps teachers maximize learning and motivate all students to do their best work

Pillar V – Instructional Learning Teams
Collaborative and coaching structures that foster a professional and collegial culture

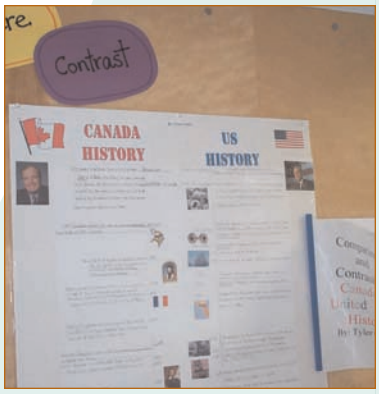
SAD 37 has participated in The Thoughtful Classroom for the past three years, and according to Superintendent Kiley, the program works like a "partnership in learning." Administrators and members of the leadership team conduct a joint assessment with Thoughtful Classroom trainers and develop a plan that meets each school's needs; Thoughtful Classroom trainers deliver Foundation Seminars, Follow-up Workshops, and Summer Curriculum Writing Camps; Thoughtful Classroom coaches work with small groups of teachers, helping them to plan, deliver, and refine lessons and incorporate new tools and strategies into their repertoires; and principals go on "Field Trips" and "Walk Abouts" with Thoughtful Classroom trainers in order to conduct observations that are quick, powerful, and data-driven.

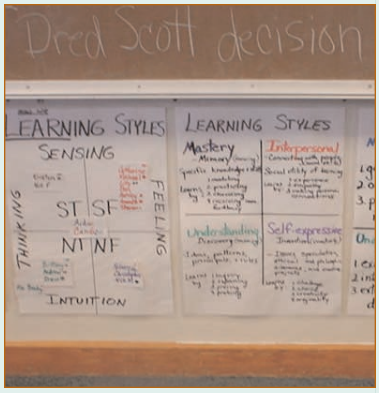
David Beal, Principal of Columbia Falls Elementary, emphasizes the way The Thoughtful Classroom creates "open expectations" for teachers. Teachers, after all, are being asked to develop high levels of expertise in their craft as they master a repertoire of techniques across all Five Pillars. This requires a strong culture of support. That's why SAD 37's teachers are members of Thoughtful Classroom *Learning Clubs*–regular meetings in which grade-level teachers discuss the new strategies and how they have affected their students. In a typical Learning Club session, teachers will analyze samples of student work, collaboratively plan and revise lessons, and trade ideas and experiences.

Conclusion: Looking Good and Sounding Smart

For Maine SAD 37, the accolades keep coming. Earlier this year, Harrington Elementary School–a school in which 62% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch–was one of only 36 schools in the nation to receive the **Distinguished Title I School Award for 2005.** Over the entryway of Harrington Elementary hangs a brightly colored banner that reads "Look Good. Sound Smart." This emphasis on self-esteem and pride in learning could just as well apply to the entire district–a district where the collaborative efforts of teachers, administrators, parents, students, and Thoughtful Classroom trainers and coaches have all contributed to a remarkable success story. ❖

DR. LINDA LIPPITT
Dr. Linda Lippitt is Co-Director of Community Learning Collaborative, a non-profit educational organization based in Santa Fe, NM. As Director of Research for About Learning, Inc., Linda developed a comprehensive program design and materials for assessing the effectiveness of long-term staff development initiatives.

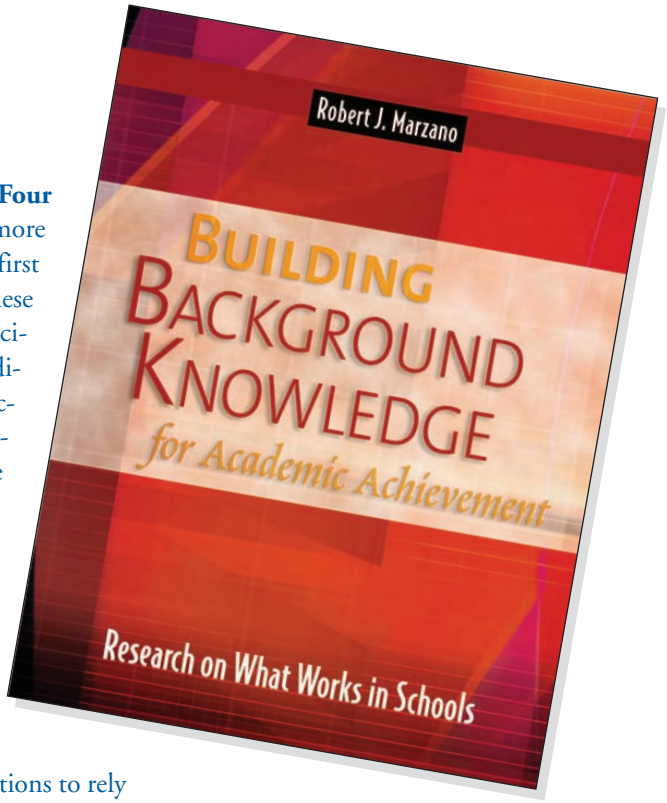




Above: Walls and bulletin boards around Maine SAD 37, showing the work of educators and students throughout the district

An Important Addition To Every Educator's Library

by Richard Strong



If Robert Marzano's *Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement: Research on What Works in Schools* (August 2004, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) is not the most important book in education published in the last year, if there is another comparably important book waiting in the wings, then there is little hope that the rest of us will ever catch up. *Building Background Knowledge* will take years for us to digest, despite the fact that nearly every other page contains at least two ideas you could put into practice tomorrow. The book has a simple, seven-chapter structure followed by an appendix that just might change our world—at least a little.

Chapter One lays out the argument for focusing on background knowledge. With his usual master's touch for converting his findings into simple, eye-opening charts and graphs, Marzano exposes the deep connections between socio-economic status, income levels, and an individual's background knowledge. Along the way, he makes an extremely persuasive case that improving students' background knowledge is a best bet for overcoming the effects of poverty. Why? Because background knowledge is at least as important as–and often trumps–innate ability when it comes to student achievement. The effect of this opening is to bring us by page 16 to an understanding of the problem. This leaves Marzano 110 pages to provide solutions. That's better than a 1 to 7 ratio of theories to applications. Our kind of book.

Chapters Two and Three describe an indirect approach to enhancing students' background knowledge. **Chapters Four and Five** emphasize a more direct approach. The first chapter in each of these pairs describes the principles that underlie indirect or direct instruction, while the following chapter lays out the approach as a series of steps. In the paired design of these four chapters, we see Marzano's genius, as this structure readily permits educators who like to forge their own applications to rely on the principles, while simultaneously providing the rest of us with a stepwise approach that lets us see what we can do tomorrow. These four chapters, the heart of *Building Background Knowledge,* revolve around three related ideas:

1. **Knowledge (background or foreground) comes in "bimodal packets,"** each with a linguistic and nonlinguistic component, or a label and a store of images and propositions. If you go back to grade school and think about your mother pinching the plastic bag closed around your sandwich and then writing on a piece of tape the bag's content ("tuna"), you've got a pretty good picture of these bimodal packets.
2. **Background knowledge manifests itself as vocabulary.** Take summer camp for example. At camp, we play soccer, learn how to dive, smell the pines, feel the "noogies,"and make lanyards in arts and crafts. Along the way, we collect and store this knowledge in

"*Building Background Knowledge* will take years for us to digest, despite the fact that nearly every other page contains at least two ideas you could put into practice tomorrow."

our little bimodal "lunch bag" packets with a label on the outside:

Or imagine settling down on a summer afternoon as a fourteen-year-old and reading Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea* from cover to cover in just three hours. As you read, you'd be filling up quite a few lunch bags with new words and ideas.

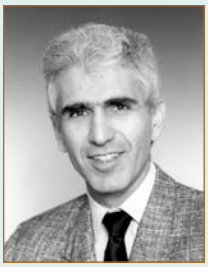
Some of our experiences are real (summer camp). Some are virtual *(The Old Man and the Sea).* Both get stored in bimodal packets–vocabulary.

3. **Vocabulary can be acquired in two ways:** through indirect instruction, namely wide reading and mentored experiences, and through direct instruction, or teaching students the words and phrases that make up background knowledge consciously and deliberately as part of the curriculum.

With this as foundation, Marzano lays out the research showing how to institute or modify our sustained silent reading and our student interest programs to enhance students' vocabulary indirectly. He then moves on to inform us of the principles that underlie direct vocabulary instruction. Some of these principles we know, but it's nice to find support (Teaching word parts helps); some make explicit ideas we've always known but may not have articulated or applied ("Effective vocabulary instruction involves the gradual shaping of word meanings through multiple exposures"); and some are just shocking ("Effective vocabulary instruction does not rely on definitions").

A six-step process for teaching vocabulary directly follows in **Chapter Five**, putting everything in perspective. For most school-based readers, these first five chapters, packed as they are with rich diagrams, practical examples, a wonderful set of references, and great research are worth every penny spent.

But Marzano has one more card to play. **Chapters Six and Seven** describe two different slants to the problem of identifying just what words students need. What specific vocabulary words should students learn at what grade level to make sure their knapsacks of background knowledge are fully packed? **Chapter Six** describes Marzano's process for determining the necessary vocabulary at various grade levels. **Chapter Seven** maps out a very sensible district-wide approach for managing vocabulary instruction. Which brings us to the **Appendix**–sixty-six pages containing 7,823 words drawn from 11 content areas broken down into four levels: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12. E.D. Hirsch and his colleagues once attempted a list like this, but Hirsch took reading *The New York Times* as his touchstone and collected his list by interviewing his friends. Marzano, on the other hand, is scientific. He has put together this list by carefully examining the state standards in all the major content areas. With a few notable exceptions that seem to be the fault of the standards themselves rather than a flaw in Marzano's research (for example, no authors' or characters' names in English), Marzano has given us the words we need to make a difference.



DR. ROBERT J. MARZANO

Dr. Robert J. Marzano is the author of more than 20 books, 150 articles and chapters in books, and more than 100 curriculum guides and related materials for teachers and students in grades K-12. His works include *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* and *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action.*

Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement: Research on What Works in Schools

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"With his usual master's touch for converting his findings into simple, eye-opening charts and graphs, Marzano exposes the deep connections between socio-economic status, income levels, and an individual's background knowledge."

A SAMPLE TOOL FROM THE AWARD-WINNING BOOK

TOOLS FOR PROMOTING ACTIVE, IN-DEPTH LEARNING

by Harvey Silver, Richard Strong, and Matthew Perini

TOOL #26

MATH NOTES

Purpose: A tool used to teach students how to use notemaking to examine the components of word problems and to develop thoughtful solutions.

Procedure: Word problems are a source of difficulty for many math students. Suddenly, math students have to become careful readers and determine how to set up the problem for themselves. What students need is a systematic way to gather the facts, determine the question, represent the problem, and think through the steps that will yield a solution.

To use **Math Notes,** the teacher chooses a word problem. Using a blank Math Notes organizer, the teacher helps the students identify the facts of the problem and decide what is missing. Students determine the main question that needs answering and search for hidden questions and assumptions.

Next, the students look for a visual way to represent the problem and sketch it. Students identify what steps need to be taken to solve the problem and then solve it on the bottom of their organizer.

It is a good idea to have students keep a notebook of all the problems they solve using Math Notes. That way, when they encounter new problems, they can refer to their notebooks and look for methods they used to solve similar problems.

STEPS

1. Using a blank Math Notes organizer, the teacher models an example, allowing the students to hear the thinking out loud while breaking the problem down into:

   - The Facts: Identify the facts of the problem and decide what is missing.
   - The Question: Determine the main question that needs answering and search for hidden questions and assumptions.
   - The Diagram: Sketch a visual representation of the problem.
   - The Steps: Decide what steps need to be taken to solve the problem.

2. Students practice solving problems using Math Notes and collect their work in problem solving notebooks.
3. As students encounter new problems, they review their notebooks and look for effective problem-solving models.

EXAMPLE: MATH NOTES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE PROBLEM

There are 6 fourth-grade classes in Joyce Kilmer Elementary School. All the classes have 24 students, except for one, which has 25 students. All the fourth-grade students are going on a field trip to the zoo. If vans hold 8 students, and buses hold 45, determine how many buses and how many vans will be needed to transport all the fourth graders to the zoo.

The Facts

What are the facts?

- Vans hold 8 people.
- Buses hold 45 people.

What is missing?

- Number of kids in 4th grade.
- Number of vans and buses Grade 4 needs.

The Steps

What steps can we take to solve the problem?

- Find out how many people are going on the trip.
- See how many will fit in buses, because buses hold more people, and fewer vehicles make less pollution for the environment.
- Put the leftovers in vans.
- Count the number of vehicles we used.

The Question

What question needs to be answered?

- How many vans and buses does our grade need?

Are there any hidden questions that need to be answered?

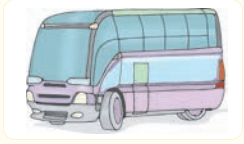
- How many people are going on the trip?
- Are empty seats OK?

The Diagram

How can we represent the problem visually?

= 8

45 =



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