

An Extraordinary Time

Teaching in the 21st Century

What kinds of teaching techniques take advantage of what we have learned from brain research?

The 21st century! What a glorious time to be an educator! Today, neuroscience is providing us with more and more research about the functioning of a healthy human brain. Knowing how children learn has important implications for classroom management, instructional strategies, and curriculum development. For many educators, this information will only give a name to the strategies that they have been using intuitively. For others, it will provide a means to consistency and continuity, thereby enhancing their instruction and choice of teaching aids.

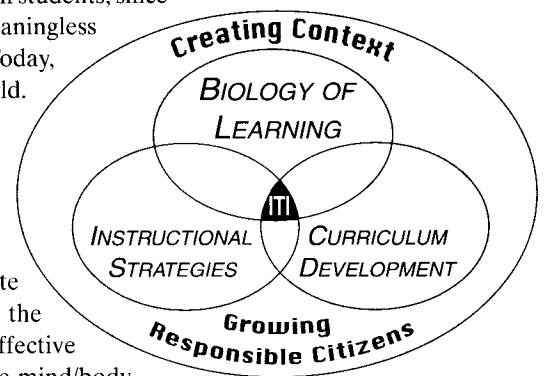
What kinds of teaching techniques take advantage of what we have learned from brain research? Integrated Thematic Instruction, ITI,¹ began in the early 1980s when I was a teacher of the gifted and talented. Gifted programs were deemed important to provide a more stimulating learning experience for high academic achievers. Proponents sought to offer qualitatively different instruction, free of worksheets and textbooks. By 1984, I decided that what I was doing for gifted students a half-day a week needed to be done for all students, since every student would prefer a classroom that is mentally stimulating, free of meaningless worksheets, and enhances their opportunities to become responsible citizens. Today, those beliefs form the foundation for thousands of ITI classrooms around the world.

ITI is a combination of four major teaching/learning/science constructs:

1. Biology of Learning
2. Instructional Strategies
3. Curriculum Development
4. Creating Context (Growing Responsible Citizens)

By using the scientific method, we can turn raw data into a hypothesis, replicate the hypothesis until the elements and outcomes are predictable, and then state the findings as natural law (at least, the best we know at the time). Powerful and effective teaching occurs when we build our craft on natural law—the science of how the mind/body learns—and implement those predictable elements through a proven, comprehensive model rather than through piecemeal approaches, guesswork, or tradition. The ITI model combines the science and art of teaching to provide a comprehensive framework that has proved effective with diverse socioeconomic groups, with both children and adults, in thousands of classrooms around the world.

There are many facets to the ITI model. Before you can successfully approach a yearlong integrated theme, you will need to build a class community with shared values, goals, and language to express and



By Susan Kovalik

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define behavior. Creating the conditions for learning is the foremost step in creating a climate that works well for students and teacher alike.

In 1998, I was invited to present the ITI model to a group of Seventh-day Adventist educators in the Oregon Conference. At that time, I had not heard of Ellen G. White, but as I began to explain ITI, the attendees kept saying that they'd heard this before. They shared with me several of Mrs. White's books. Thus began the integration of the education writings of Ellen G. White with the philosophy and implementation strategies of ITI. An outline and some suggested strategies are listed below.

Creating the Conditions for Learning

Creating the conditions for learning is an imperative for every educator. Teachers must shape an atmosphere for learning that taps into and preserves the natural curiosity and pure delight that children bring to school. ITI curriculum uses the real world with all its wonder and opportunities for applying knowledge. According to Ellen White, "Teachers are dealing with things real, and should speak of them with all the force and enthusiasm that a knowledge of their reality and importance can inspire."²

The Principles of ITI

The ITI model is built upon five principles from neuroscience:

1. Body and brain functions are inseparable: Emotion is the gatekeeper to performance;
2. Intelligence is a function of experience;
3. There are many ways to demonstrate understanding (Multiple Intelligences);
4. Learning is a two-step process: (a) seeking meaningful patterns, and (b) building usable programs;
5. Temperament influences how we take in, process, and output information.

In this article, I will address the first principle, which is critical for creating a dynamic learning environment.

Emotion Is the Gatekeeper to Performance

"The influence of the mind on the body, as well as of the body on the mind, should be emphasized. . . . The power of the will and the importance of self-control, both in the preservation and in the recovery of health, should be emphasized. Likewise the depressing and even ruinous effect of anger, discontent, selfishness, or impurity should be shown. On the other hand, the marvelous life-giving power to be found in cheerfulness, unselfishness, gratitude, should be emphasized."³

To create an environment that is free of threat and nurtures reflective thinking, we must understand the body-brain con-

nection. In creating this environment, teachers must define the behaviors and character traits that will enhance *who we are* and *what we do* while together (teachers and students alike). ITI teachers can use a variety of strategies to create a safe and predictable environment for learning. These include:

- Procedures
- Agenda
- Lifelong Guidelines
- LIFESKILLS

Each of these practical strategies lets students know what behavior is appropriate and expected as a member of the class family.

Procedures

Procedures are the specific steps that guide students and teachers in their daily activities. They provide a structure for

such regular routines as:

- Entering and leaving the classroom;
- Getting ready for the day;
- Taking lunch count;
- Checking attendance;
- Going to the library and the cafeteria;
- Riding the bus;
- Going to music or art class or to physical education;
- Turning in homework (when and how);
- What to do with free time;
- How to behave on a field trip.

For every activity that occurs **routinely**, there should be established procedures. This ensures consistency and continuity. Confusion reigns when the teacher does things differently each day based on whim or convenience. When students can depend on a consistent daily schedule, they can give their full attention to learning. For younger students, try posting these procedures on chart paper and review them regularly until they become automatic. Give older students a printed list that they can store in a binder. Review the procedures until they become automatic.

Agenda

An agenda is a description of how the day will unfold. It should be posted on the chalk board or flip chart each day before students enter the room. It is usually created as a mindmap (see example on page 36), using a circular field with symbols and color to highlight the words and the activities. The agenda specifies what the individual student, each learning group, and the teacher are responsible for throughout that day. It is not the same as an assignment list on the chalk board that tells students what page to turn to, what questions to answer, and when to do various activities.

Upon arriving in the classroom, each student, from second grade up, copies the agenda. This helps them become mentally focused and facilitates time management and organization. As

each activity on the agenda is completed, the item is checked off. Items remaining at the end of the day become homework or classwork for the next morning.

Developing Character: Lifelong Guidelines and LIFESKILLS

“Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings, and never was its diligent study so important as now.”⁴ “Teachers can gain the respect of their pupils in no other way than by revealing in their own characters the principles they wish to teach.”⁵

The Lifelong Guidelines and LIFESKILLS were developed to address the need for a common language and shared understanding of how to show respect at school, starting with the adults on campus and following through to the students.

The Lifelong Guidelines⁶ are:

- Trustworthiness:** To act in a manner that makes one worthy of confidence and trust.
- Truthfulness:** To be honest about things and feelings with oneself and others.
- Active Listening:** To listen with the intention of understanding what the speaker means to communicate.
- No Putdowns:** Not to use words, actions, and/or body language to degrade, humiliate, or dishonor others.

Personal Best: One’s best possible performance, given the time and resources available.

The LIFESKILLS⁷ are the behaviors of Trustworthiness, Truthfulness, Active Listening, and Personal Best:

Integrity	Initiative
Curiosity	Caring
Courage	Common Sense
Organization	Sense of Humor
Effort	Flexibility
Patience	Pride
Resourcefulness	Responsibility
Friendship	Cooperation
Perseverance	Problem Solving ⁸

The LIFESKILLS are posted in the classroom, hall, and office for all to see and are introduced in class using examples of people the students know, characters in books they have read, or articles in the newspaper. To reinforce LIFESKILLS, teachers acknowledge their use with “target talk”: “Anita, you are using the LIFESKILL of initiative by picking up the book and putting it where it belongs on the shelf.” “Dick, it took organization and flexibility to switch your music lesson with Bob.” “Class, you all used the LIFESKILL of patience while I was talking with the principal.” This gives students tangible examples of what these behaviors look like and what is expected of them.

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Teachers are not to use “I” statements such as, “I like the way Table 1 is cooperating,” or “I like the way the boys came into the room.” The goal of LIFESKILLS is not for the teacher to manipulate student behavior or for the students to do things to please the teacher, but to create an inner locus of control. LIFESKILLS help create a climate in which students take responsibility for their own behavior.

If your school or classroom doesn’t actively model respect and community, you must take the time to create these qualities. It can take up to a month or more of daily opportunities for students to learn how to use self-control and to understand how to get along with others.

To reinforce the desired classroom climate, you must establish consequences for behavior that doesn’t follow the Lifelong Guidelines and LIFESKILLS. The consequence should be directly related to the incident. For example:

- If you’re uncooperative in the group, you have to work by yourself for a specific period of time;
- If you break the rules during recess, you have to stay in for a day;
- If you misuse the classroom materials, you lose access to them until you agree to use them respectfully.

Once the classroom functions as a community, you should expect that the only time students don’t use the LIFESKILLS would be if an event occurred that was beyond their control (at home, on the bus, older kids picking on them, illness, etc.). In this situation, ITI has a way for students to get back on track, called “Australia,” developed from a story by Judith Viorst in her book, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.* Throughout this day, everything goes badly for Alexander. After each incident, he exclaims in frustration, “I think I’ll go to Australia.” In the classroom, we create “Australia,” a corner where students can go to refocus the frustration, anger, sadness, or other feelings that have kept them from attending to learning. In the corner is a comfortable chair, a map of Australia, a Koala bear, and a 10-minute audiotape of classical music. During this 10-minute respite, a student chooses to let the “bad

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stuff” go and to allow his or her body and brain to restore itself. Afterward, the student can again benefit from the learning activities of the classroom.

When the school and classroom provide daily examples of how to treat each other with respect, the school becomes a fertile field for meaningful learning of both content materials and acceptable behavior.

The 21st century! What an extraordinary time to be an educator. It is possible to replicate success in the schools and classrooms when we all agree to the basic tenets of respect and responsibility, then act as if our future depended on it—for it does! ✍

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Susan J. Kovalik, classroom teacher and curriculum innovator for more than 35 years, has spent more than two decades developing a model for curriculum and instruction based on brain research. In 1980, she developed the ITI Model Teaching Week, an innovative way to show teachers how ITI strategies work with students in their own school. Since that beginning, more than 40,000 teachers have attended the one-week experience watching how their students respond to brain-compatible curriculum and instructional strategies and becoming inspired to begin their own ITI journey. Ms. Kovalik is currently the president of Susan Kovalik and Associates, which sends experienced ITI instructors around the world teaching and coaching educators. As a result, thousands of educators and hundreds of schools around the world are actively engaged in creating body/brain-compatible schools using the ITI model. Ms. Kovalik conducted a breakout session on the ITI model at the 2000 North American Division teachers’ convention in Dallas, Texas. She has written several books, including *Teachers Make the Difference*, *Kid’s Eye View of Science*, and *ITI: The Model*, as well as more than a dozen videos. She can be contacted at Susan Kovalik and Associates, 17051 SE 272nd St., Suite 17, Kent, WA 98042; telephone: (253) 631-4400; E-mail: skovalik@oz.net; Web site: <http://www.kovalik.com/>.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Susan J. Kovalik and Karen D. Olsen, *Exceeding Expectations: A User’s Guide to Implementing Brain Research in the Classroom* (Covington, Wash.: Susan Kovalik & Associates, 2001).
2. Ellen G. White, *True Education* (Ontario, Canada: Pacific Press, 2000), p. 142.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 172.
6. Sue Pearson, *Tools for Citizenship and Life* (Kent, Wash.: Susan Kovalik & Associates, 2000), p. 1.3.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 1.4.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 24.1-24.12.
9. Judith Viorst, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1987).

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