

A tactile strategy

Joyce Russo is trying a new approach to strategic instruction: She's doing it in Braille.

Megan Phelps
University of
Kansas Center
for Research on
Learning

Russo is supervisor of blind and deaf-blind programs for the Louisiana State Department of Education and is one of a group of new Louisiana trainers who are being certified in both learning strategies and content enhancement.

The Louisiana group is involved in an intensive effort to implement learning strategy instruction and content enhancement teaching routines in classrooms throughout the state.

Russo's role in the Louisiana initiative has included developing ways the Strategic Instruction Model can be adapted to reach visually impaired children.

"More and more of our Braille-reading students are in general education classrooms, and I wanted to make sure they had the opportunity to benefit from these strategies," Russo said.

She began by working with a group of four or five students, all Braille readers between the ages of 8 and 10. The students ranged from gifted to moderately disabled. She taught them the *THINK Strategy* and the *Framing Routine*.

With *THINK*, one of the programs in the *Cooperative Thinking Strategies Series*, the adaptations for visually impaired students were relatively simple.

The strategy teaches students how to work together in teams to systematically solve problems. *THINK* builds on lessons learned in the *SCORE Skills* program, a set of social skills that are fundamental to effective groups. Students learn to share ideas, compliment others, offer help or en-



Joyce Russo, supervisor of blind and deaf-blind programs for the Louisiana State Department of Education, has adapted SIM materials for use by visually impaired students.

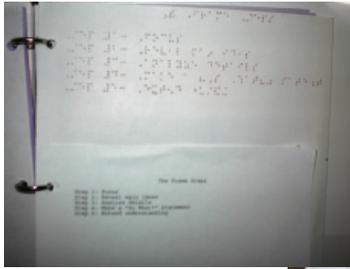
'More and more of our Braille-reading students are in general education classrooms, and I wanted to make sure they had the opportunity to benefit from these strategies.'

couragement, recommend changes nicely, and exercise self-control.

Russo made sure that all the necessary information for *THINK* exercises was included in the students' notebooks, written in Braille.

With the *Framing Routine*, a teaching routine designed to help students learn content and develop literacy skills, another step was necessary: creating a tactile representation of the routine's visual device.

The *Framing Routine* uses a visual device called the Frame, which depicts information that is essential for all students to learn. It shows the organization >>>



Russo developed a tactile representation of the Frame (right) and ensured that other materials were available in Braille to help her visually impaired students use the Framing Routine.



>>> or structure of concepts as well as the relationship among concepts.

To help visually impaired students understand the Frame device, Russo produced tangible examples that the students could feel to get an idea of what the structure looked like.

But the Frame is such a visual concept that she found students still had a hard time understanding the routine. All the students were writing the information linearly, with the exception of one boy who was not born blind and who still retains pinpoint vision. He was the only one writing the information in columns.

As the Louisiana initiative continues to grow, Russo is considering adaptations for more SIM materials. Other strategies and routines may be more difficult to adapt, she said.

“I’m thinking of the *Sentence Writing Strategy*. There are so many different kinds of markings. That may take a lot of looking at,” Russo said.

However, in most cases, the only adaptation necessary will be getting the materials written in large print for large-print

readers and in Braille for Braille readers.

“With VI (visually impaired) kids, it’s just a matter of making sure they get the information that everyone else has,” Russo said.

The response from the students she works with has been very positive.

“They loved it,” she said. “They really got into working with *SCORE Skills*.”

Russo said the exercises were especially important for visually impaired students because they needed the exposure to working in groups.

“They don’t necessarily lack the cognitive skills, but they lack social skills,” she said. “Their teacher said it helped them even

in their room community, giving and taking constructive criticism.”

Russo has been teaching the strategies and routines herself, but in the future her role will be to work with resource teachers and general education classroom teachers within a school district.

The goal is that general education teachers will have better ways to include visually impaired students when they teach the routines and that resource teachers will gain another tool to use in working with these students.

Russo spent 19 years as a classroom teacher, the last 11 of those working exclusively with visually impaired students.

“There was a real frustration there. A lot of the time you felt like you were just tutoring students instead of giving them skills they could take back to the classroom,” she said. “This (SIM strategies and routines) is something to give to the resource teachers that could benefit the whole classroom.” ●

A note about the author: Megan Phelps, former training assistant for the Center for Research on Learning, recently graduated from the University of Kansas with a master’s degree in journalism. We wish her well as she embarks on her new career.

More ...

We would love to hear from others who have adapted SIM materials to meet students’ needs. If you have adapted materials for visually impaired or hearing impaired students, please let us know.

For more information about the *Framing Routine*, see *The Framing Routine: Framing the big picture with essential details* in *Strategram* Vol. 12, No. 1 (September 1999). For more information about the *Cooperative Thinking Strategies Series*, see *Group Think* in *Strategram* Vol. 12, No. 4 (March 2000).

It's elementary!

Assignment Completion activities

Karen Koskovich, a SIM Trainer from Maquoketa, Iowa, who recently was recognized for her leadership in the SIM International Training Network, continues to develop unusual and creative methods to supplement Learning Strategies instruction.

During the past year, Koskovich has adapted several activities to help elementary students master the *Assignment Completion Strategy*. Here are some of her ideas.

Koskovich provided *Assignment Completion* contracts for parents, teachers, and students to sign. Each contract specified when students were expected to attend after-school sessions.

For the Describe Stage of strategy instruction, Koskovich developed and adapted many terrific activities for younger students. For **J: Jump to it**, for example, she adapted a jump rope rhyme related to completing homework (see the box at right). For **R: Record**, she adapted a puff book to include all the questions students need to answer during this step (page 4). For **C: Check the work**, she built on ideas for creating circle books (page 5). For **S: Set the course**, she helped students make corner bookmarks featuring a sailing ship (page 7).

Patterns for the circle book and bookmark are included in this issue of *Strategram*.

Daily review of the mnemonic

1. Give each student a handful of Alpha-Bits® cereal.
2. Students are allowed to eat all letters except PROJECTS BEST.
3. The group then practices each step of the strategy, eating the corresponding letter when they come to that step.

Other review activities

1. Throw Koosh balls, Nerf balls, or small stuffed toys to students. The student who catches the object must correctly state the next step of the strategy.
2. Display the mnemonic using magnetic letters on the overhead projector.
3. Prepare individual bags of letters and have students give one-on-one explanations to a teacher.

Describe: Jump to it

Irving Jump Rope Homework Rhyme

*(To the rhythm of Down by the River
where the Green Grass Grows)*

Here at Irving where homework counts, _____
is doing it in terrific amounts. (student's name)

He (She) worked, he (she) worked, he (she) worked so hard,
along came completions on his (her) progress card.

How many completions did he (she) get this week? _____

1...2...3...4...5...6...

(continued on page 4)

Describe: Record

Tiny book of questions

Koskovich helps students make helpful little books to remind them of all the questions they need to answer as they plan how they will complete their assignments. Students can quickly flip through their own copies of the books to see what information they are missing. Koskovich uses a puff book format, but the idea can be adapted to any small book format. Templates and instructions for making puff books, the circle books described on pages 5 and 6, and other book-making crafts can be found in *Read! Write! Publish!* by Creative Teaching Press (1992) (www.creative-teaching.com).

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Page 1 (front cover)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">?</p> <p><i>Do you have all the information you need to get this assignment done?</i></p> | <p>Page 2</p> <p><i>This book belongs to:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">-----</p> | <p>Page 3</p> <p><i>Do I have all the basic information?</i></p> |
| <p>Page 4</p> <p><i>Do I know what materials to use?</i></p> | <p>Page 5</p> <p><i>Do I know when this is due?</i></p> | <p>Page 6</p> <p><i>Do I know where to get the materials?</i></p> |

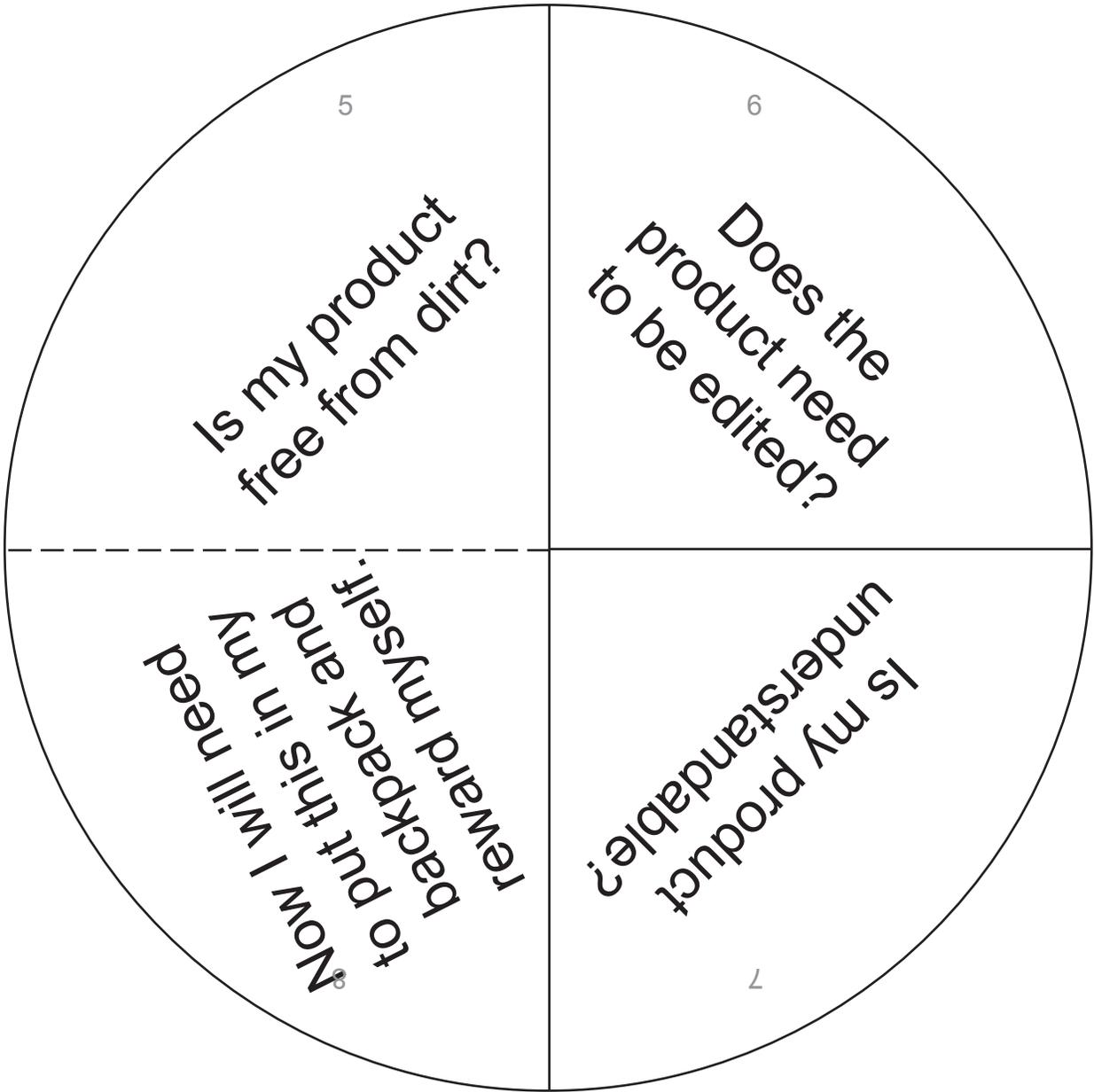
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Describe: Check the work

Review in the round

Koskovich uses this circle-book format to help students remember the questions they need to ask themselves during the **Check the work** step. To assemble the booklets, cut out both circles (pages 5 and 6) and cut along the dotted line, as indicated. Place the circle containing pages 1 through 4 on top of the second circle, aligning the cuts. Fold page 1 out of the way. Then tape the bottom of page 4 on the first circle to the bottom of page 5 on the second circle. Finally, fold the book into quarters. When students are ready to check their work, they simply review the questions, starting at page 1, and read around the circle until they reach the final page and their reward.





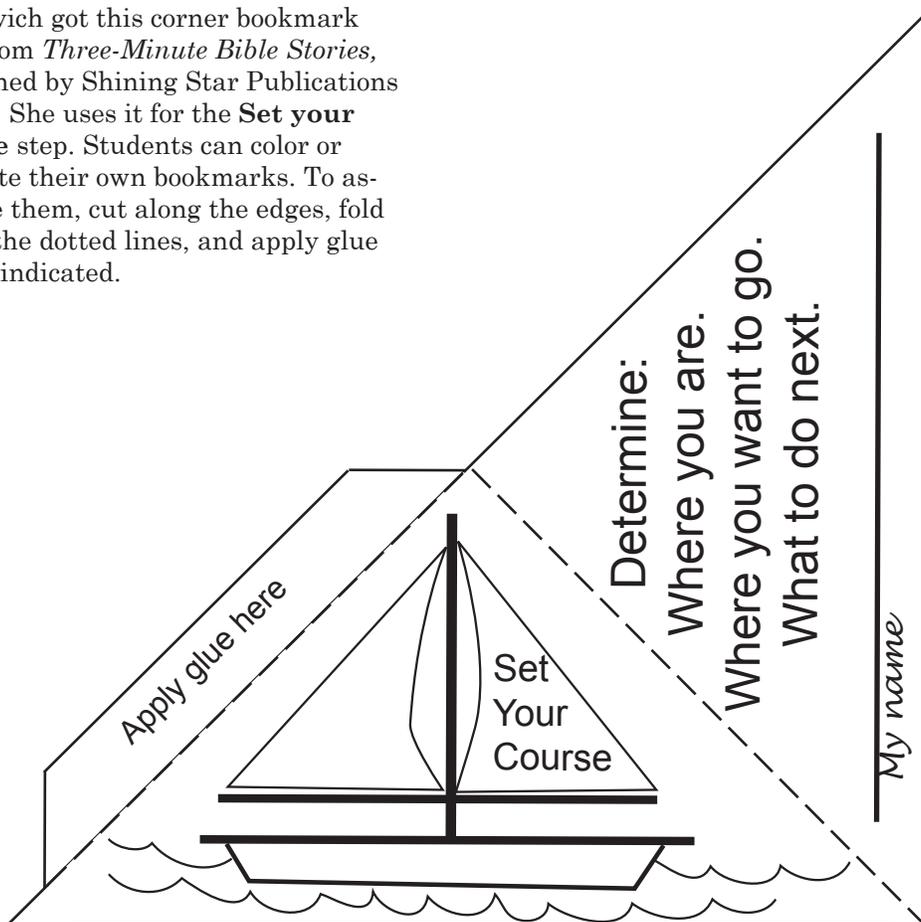
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Describe: Set your course

Corner bookmark

Koskovich got this corner bookmark idea from *Three-Minute Bible Stories*, published by Shining Star Publications (1994). She uses it for the **Set your course** step. Students can color or decorate their own bookmarks. To assemble them, cut along the edges, fold along the dotted lines, and apply glue where indicated.



Next in Strategram

The next issue of *Strategram* describes the *THINK Strategy*, a part of the *Cooperative Thinking Strategies Series* developed to help students work with others effectively. The issue will include suggestions for adapting the strategy to meet different needs.

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