

Book Review

White, D., & Braddy, A. (2017). *Ready-to-go instructional strategies that build collaboration, communication, & critical thinking*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin
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Designed for K-12 educators and administrators, this short and easy-to-read book is a useful reference tool for teachers and teacher education students alike. Educational consultants and authors Denise White and Alisa H. Braddy present over two dozen instructional strategies designed to be used in K-12 classrooms, describing the strategies themselves as well as the instructional benefits they can provide.

The strategies presented in the book are grouped into the following categories, each of which represent an instructional goal or concept that teachers may struggle with in their classroom:

1. Engaging Openers
2. Critical Thinking
3. Communication
4. Collaboration
5. Purposeful Movement
6. Reflection and Closure

Each chapter is dedicated to one of the above instructional goals/concepts and begins with a short vignette that describes a teacher struggling with the goal at hand. These vignettes are followed by a brief discussion of the goal and its importance in the classroom environment. The discussions often reference relevant supporting research, and a full reference list is provided in the back of the book. Next, strategies are introduced and described in depth, with the authors relating the nature of the strategy and the desired outcomes. Each strategy is also broken out into callout boxes which describe the preparation, time needed, preferred grouping, and procedures for the instructional strategy as well as suggested uses. The authors take care to provide useful and diverse suggestions for use across age groups and disciplines, and the directions are clear and concise. Testimonies from actual teachers are included, allowing readers to learn about successful real-life implementations of the strategies being discussed.

The consistent chapter structure and strategy callout boxes make browsing the text easy, and the vignettes and testimonies (called “Classroom Close-Ups”) allow readers to situate the core educational goals being discussed and the strategies being presented in more concrete, relatable contexts. Additionally, reflection questions are included at the end of each chapter to encourage deeper thinking on the instructional goal covered in that chapter, which may be useful

for educators attempting to strengthen their instructional skills in these areas. Administrators or teacher-education faculty may find these reflection questions helpful as well, perhaps using them when leading discussions about instructional techniques or asking teachers or pre-service teachers to reflect on their practices.

The strategies themselves range from the quite simple to moderately complex. For example, the Instructional Video Clips strategy, which involves showing a short video at the beginning of a lesson and assigning a connected learning objective (with the goal being to engage students), requires minimal preparation and would be quite simple to incorporate into the lesson. Twitterfest, a strategy that involves having students create and respond to “tweets” written on chart paper, is less simple. It requires much more in-class time and has more complicated procedures that some students may struggle to follow if unfamiliar with the activity. Educators will certainly find a broad range of strategies for each instructional goal.

Although the authors seem confident that the instructional strategies presented here are effective for K-12 (or even post-secondary) students, the majority of the strategies presented seemed most appropriate for younger students. Elementary and middle school practitioners would likely benefit from this text much more than secondary teachers, as high school students will likely find some of the activities overly simplistic or juvenile.

Overall, the text provides a number of valuable instructional techniques in an easy-to-use format. A matrix on the inside front and back covers allows readers to search for strategy by name or instructional goal and reproducible resources are provided for some strategies. While not every strategy presented here will be relevant to every classroom, the overall guiding principles of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and reflection that run through this text will allow readers to reflect on their current instructional practices and grow in these areas. This book would be a valuable addition to a university education and curriculum collection, a school library professional development collection, or a teacher’s personal collection.