StoryCorps #2: May 2021
SIM Goes to Harvard Medical School

Audio file - SIM StoryCorp2_May 2021.mp3

Transcript

00:00:00 Jocelyn Washburn

SIM Story Corps is a candid conversation between two educators about what's really important in the field of education, students, connections, hope success. How did SIM contribute to attaining what matters most? Listen to these stories of the educators' hearts to find out. Then we invite you to find a partner. And tell your story in this SIM story corps, we'll hear Richard Goldhammer, a SIM professional developer in Massachusetts, and Sue Woodruff, a SIM professional developer in Michigan, talk about Richard's experiences with integrating STEM into his work as a Learning Specialist at Harvard Medical School.

00:00:41 Sue Woodruff

So Rich, how did you learn about SIM?

00:00:45 Richard Goldhammer

Well, I learned about SIM back in 1991 when my boss at the time was directing services for students with learning disorders at BU, and I coordinated the program. And, uh, he talked about the magic of KU and the chance to learn learning strategies and I was hooked.

So, in 1992 I went to Kansas along with some colleagues who'd gotten wind that I was going; Dr. Bashir from Emerson College, Dr. Mooney from Boston College, and Phil Tatro from Dean Junior College. So, we all descended onto the SIM conference and formed a study group and I think the first strategy we learned was PIRATES (*Test Taking Strategy* pneumonic). But I was just taken in by direct instruction. Everything about it I soaked up and it was a wonderful chance to develop as a teacher and later I went back (in the 2000s). I attended probably 3 conferences in the 1990s and went back in the 2000s and in the late 20 teens. Lo and behold, I met you through Jim Knight, and the rest is history as far as we go. And you've had such a profound influence on my work at HMS that I could never thank you enough.

00:02:13 Sue Woodruff

Well, thank you so much but so tell me, you're at HMS, if you tell us what that is and how do you apply SIM now?

00:02:20 Richard Goldhammer

Well, sure. So, Harvard Medical School (HMS). I work in the Office of Learning Resources and Support as the one learning specialist there and my boss is a psychiatrist who directs the office and does a lot of

administrative work along with seeing students. I just see students, mostly one to one, but when I give presentations, it might be to, you know, 100 students.

In the one-to-one setting, I continue to use direct instruction principles. Assessing has now morphed with fewer visits into learning full conversations with students about how they approach learning, so I can, and they can understand what they do and anticipation of thinking about describing, modeling, giving feedback, guided instruction together about maybe an approach that would be more effective. Somehow instructional coaching, from attending the conference or to back in the 20 teens and reading Jim Knight's book has become a part of my work and engaging in conversation with students and that is fed nicely into they're becoming metacognitive in their thinking, reflecting on themselves as learners and physicians, which HMS is very keen for students to do. And therefore, to set the basis for becoming lifelong learners.

00:03:57 Sue Woodruff

So, it sounds like the whole process of learning how to learn has really impacted what you do there, because it's pretty amazing, you know, that this position is at Harvard Medical School, and yet you can still help these students do better and they've been responding to you. Plus, the instructional coaching you're working with adults, so that's gotta help too. That's fabulous.

When you first started at HMS, how did you feel initially? and then, how do you feel now? Was it intimidating to start there?

00:04:30 Richard Goldhammer

Oh, for sure. I mean, and you know my story, I've been a learning specialist at various universities and coordinated some programs at BU and then later at MIT, which was intimidating in and of itself, but Harvard Medical School I definitely felt intimidated when I started in 2015. The faculty, staff, and students could not be more respectful and accommodating, but they're super achievers and, you know, gifted and from all over the world. So, I wasn't sure how direct instruction would work, how some of the Strategic instruction principles would work, and I found out by trying, failing, reflecting, learning, repeat. But it was very productive to do that as I started to streamline, modeling feedback, and of course assessing, well and describing all came to the floor as important pieces to continue to use, along with the paraphrasing strategy, which I'll touch on in a minute. You know, I love that strategy and I feel more confident now. A lot more confident and, you know, like all of us, as lifelong learners, we acquire knowledge. And, as a colleague at HMS has said, knowledge lifts all boats. And I agree with that. And meeting you and working with you from, I think it was late in my third year there (to present) was the game changer because now I had someone to try, fail and learn with. And who could support me as I started to retarget what I was trying to do and learn in a way that was very safe and respectful and wise I might add.

00:06:33 Sue Woodruff

And it sounds, I know, from talking with you, the students have responded tremendously well to your instruction too.

00:06:40 Richard Goldhammer

I've been, I've been grateful for that, yeah.

00:06:42 Sue Woodruff

So, can you give me an example of the kind of thing that you've done related to the principles of strategic instruction with these students at Harvard Medical School?

00:06:52 Richard Goldhammer

Of course, and I will just say one more thing about my experience with Harvard Medical School students. Students of all levels of success at the medical school benefit in some way, whether it's the principles involved with modeling or feedback or open-ended questions and listening that is so central to instructional coaching. But, for an example, I have a PowerPoint which introduces students to more effective approaches to learning as they begin to practice in our sessions. And there's content related to or reflecting the brain as a controller of processes related to re-regulating blood pressure or reestablishing homeostasis, an important theme in the pre-clerkship curriculum, and so we talk about the Texas two-step versus the three-step waltz, which you may recall. I like the Texas two-step, but in this case, it's really reflecting an ineffective approach to learning, where a student might read a chunk of text, like for example about blood pressure and take notes, and it becomes a 1-2. I read one and two I take notes.

And as we all know that approach can become too rote and you forget to decide what's important to write down, and the notes can become quite lengthy, pretty much as lengthy as the original passage. And so, you know, they get to see that and have some amusement, but we want to move forward, and this is where RAP (*Paraphrasing Strategy* pneumonic) comes in, the waltz, which is in my mind, represents 3 step notes. So, I might read or watch a chunk of information, in this case about regulating blood pressure, ask what it's about, and look away as I'm doing it never to peek. So, I force my mind to really apply what I know to this new information initially and then put it into my own words. Once I've done that, I can select the notes I want to write. I have also transferred that information initially into long term memory, the point of learning. Maybe not the point, but a major purpose to acquiring knowledge.

00:09:38 Sue Woodruff

And especially for these students at Harvard Medical School who have so much.

00:09:41 Richard Goldhammer

Oh yeah.

00:09:42 Sue Woodruff

Rich, thank you so much. I appreciate talking with you today.

00:09:45 Richard Goldhammer

You're very welcome.