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Even tech sector is slow to hire

ECONOMY: Industry widely seen as bellwether for recovery remains sluggish

By CATHERINE RAMPPELL
The New York Times

For years, the technology sector has been considered the most dynamic, promising and globally envied industry in the United States. It escaped the recession relatively unscathed, and profits this year have been soaring.

But as the nation struggles to put people back to work, even high-tech companies have been slow to hire, a sign of just how difficult it will be to address persis-

tently high joblessness. While the labor report released last week showing August figures provided mildly positive news on private-sector hiring, the unemployment rate was 9.6 percent.

The disappointing hiring trend raises questions about whether the tech industry can help power a recovery and sustain U.S. job growth in the next decade and beyond. Its tentativeness has prompted economists to ask, "If

See **HIRING** on 2A

INSIDE: President Obama presses for \$50 billion for projects, while the GOP says Americans "are rightly skeptical" of new stimulus initiatives. **3A**

SHARAPOVA AT A LOSS

Maria Sharapova of Longboat Key, once the No. 1-ranked women's tennis player in the world, falls to the current top-ranked player at the U.S. Open. **1C**



AREA FEELS MORE PAIN IN SLUMP

CONSTRUCTION: Slide has been steeper in Southwest Florida than rest of state

By DOUG SWORD
doug.sword@heraldtribune.com

The drop in construction, and the jobs that go with it, is hitting Southwest Florida two to three

times harder than it is other parts of the state.

New construction is down on both of Florida's once-booming coasts. On the east coast, though, counties are reporting 30 percent declines from the boom, while every county between Manatee and Lee has recorded at least a 74 percent drop in the value of new construction.

In Sarasota and Lee counties, the decline has been more than 90 percent.

The new figures, based on a Herald-Tribune analysis of reports from the state's 67 county property appraisers, come as no surprise to Bill Dooley, chief executive of DooleyMack Constructors Inc., a Lakewood Ranch-based contractor with five offices around the state.

"I certainly think it's down 80 percent on this coast," Dooley said. "We are extremely busy over in Fort Lauderdale."

That is in Broward County, which actually reported a 13 percent increase in new construction for 2009, though the county is still down 31 percent since the peak of the boom in 2006.

Nationally, construction spending hit a 10-year low in July, according to the Associated General Contractors of America. That is a 34 percent decline from the industry's February 2006 peak.

A 34 percent decline would be welcomed by contractors in many parts of Florida, where

See **CONSTRUCTION** on 6A

A FIBER FUTURE?

DARK LINES ARE A DRAW FOR BUSINESS

Having unused fiber available makes cities more attractive

By MICHAEL POLLICK and DOUG SWORD, Staff Writers

To win more companies like the television studio that plans to build a campus in Lakewood Ranch, Sarasota and Manatee need more dark fiber.

Optical fiber is the medium that carries most digital traffic around the country and the world. A dark fiber is one not already in use. The company that leases it "lights it up," installing the laser-powered transceivers at both ends that allow the thin glass strands to convey data at the speed of light.

One new fiber today can convey 40 gigabits per second worth of data — 40 times more than what data-intensive businesses typically look for these days.

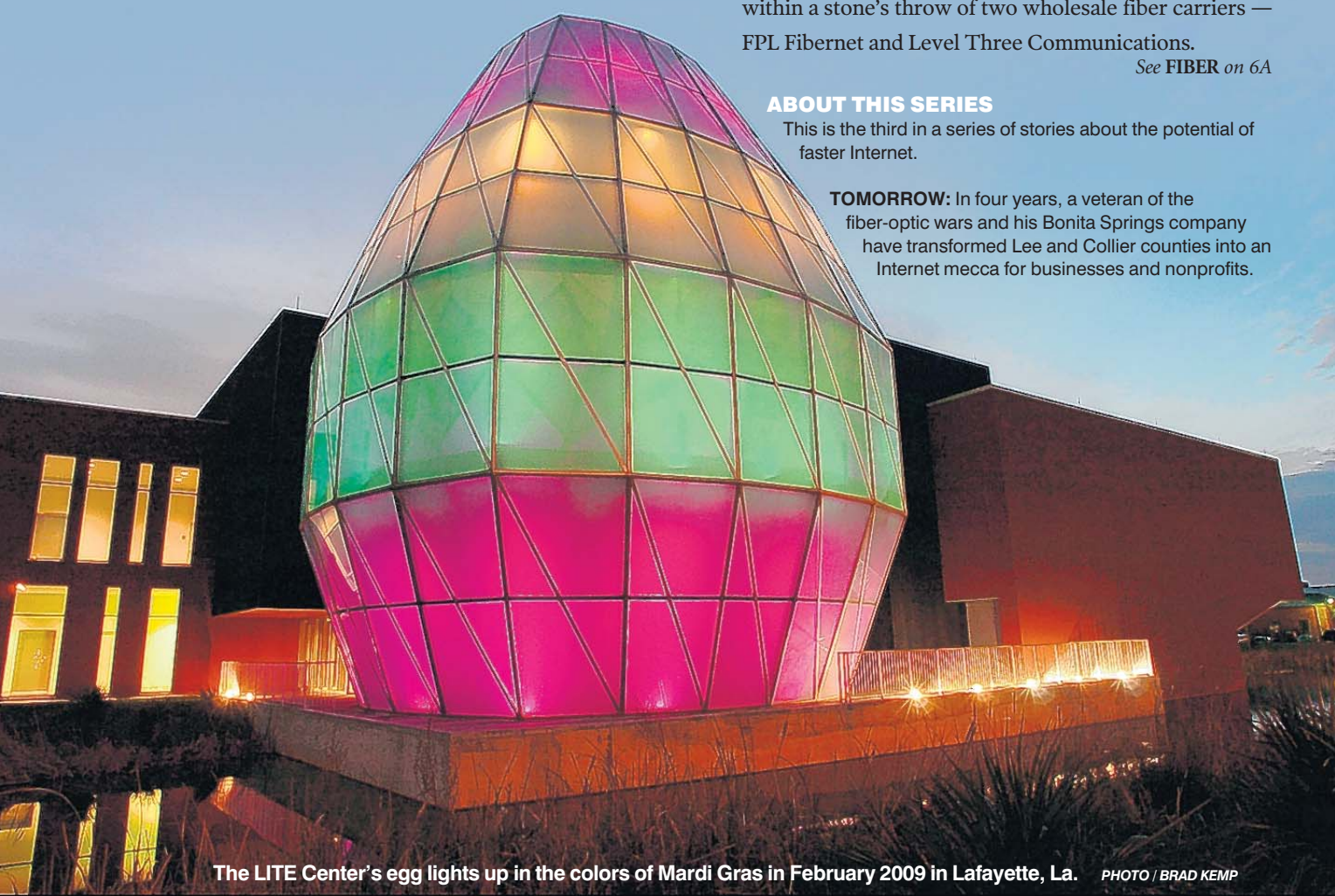
The challenge facing Southwest Florida: Add enough dark fiber to recruit the Information Age pioneers who will power the 21st century economy. The new TV production operation moving to Lakewood Ranch is within a stone's throw of two wholesale fiber carriers — FPL Fibernet and Level Three Communications.

See **FIBER** on 6A

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This is the third in a series of stories about the potential of faster Internet.

TOMORROW: In four years, a veteran of the fiber-optic wars and his Bonita Springs company have transformed Lee and Collier counties into an Internet mecca for businesses and nonprofits.



The LITE Center's egg lights up in the colors of Mardi Gras in Lafayette, La. PHOTO | BRAD KEMP

INSIDE: See a graphic comparing the decline in production in Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties since 2005. **6A**

INSIDE

NOTE TO READERS NO BUSINESS SECTION

The stock markets were closed for Labor Day, so there is no business section in today's Herald-Tribune.

SARASOTA COUNTY GOLF AND TENNIS CUT

Middle school tennis and golf have been eliminated because of steeply declining revenues. **1B**

WORLD

STILL DEFIANT

The U.N. says Iran will not cooperate with inspectors looking into its nuclear program. **4A**



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SNN LOCAL NEWS 6

DEATH CALLED SUSPICIOUS

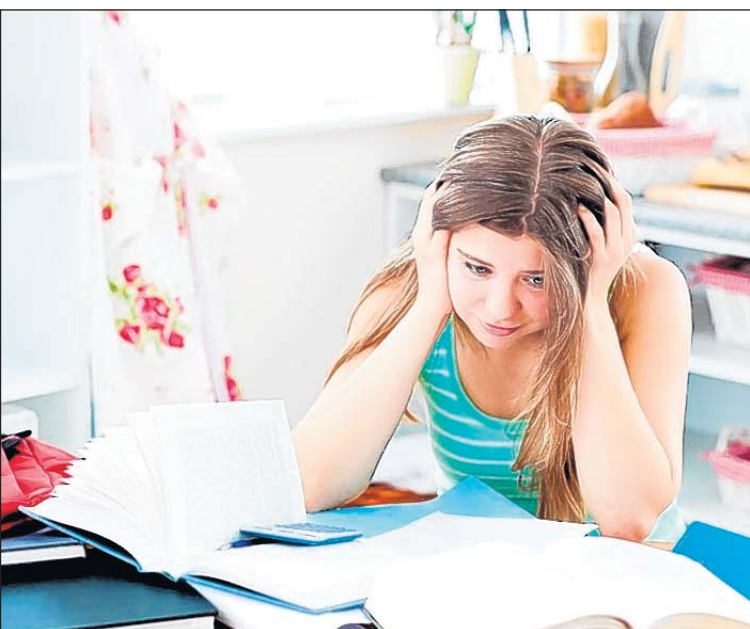
Sarasota police discover the body of a woman in a Newtown home that was thought to be vacant.

Classified6C Obituaries8B
Comics10B Opinion8A
Lottery2A People9B
Movie Log9B Sports1C



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OUR 85TH YEAR
NUMBER 339 4 SECTIONS

The old rules of studying? Forget them.



Psychologists have discovered that some of the most hallowed advice on study habits is flat wrong. For better results, they suggest changing up study locations and varying the type of material studied.

SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

HONING MINDS: Variation is more valuable than routine, scientists say

By BENEDICT CAREY
The New York Times

Every September, millions of parents try a kind of psychological witchcraft, to transform their summer-glazed campers into fall students, their video-bugs into bookworms. Advice is cheap and all too familiar: Clear a quiet work space. Stick to a homework schedule. Set goals. Set boundaries. Do not bribe (except in emergencies).

And check out the classroom. Does Junior's learning style match the new teacher's approach? Or the school's philosophy? Maybe the child isn't "a good fit" for the school.

Such theories have developed in part because of sketchy education research that doesn't offer

clear guidance. Student traits and teaching styles surely interact; so do personalities and at-home rules. The trouble is, no one can predict how.

Yet there are effective approaches to learning, at least for those who are motivated. In recent years, cognitive scientists have shown that a few simple techniques can reliably improve what matters most: how much a

See **STUDY HABITS** on 6A

SPORTS RAYS FALL TO RED SOX

Another early exit for Jeff Niemann costs the Rays another chance to gain ground on New York. **1C**



Lines still dark are a major lure for new business

FIBER from 1A

"Where they are building the studio, they could in fact build in gigabit connectivity with just microwave," said Mark Hewitt, co-founder of Sarasota-based Ecosystem Partners, a company heavily involved in plans to build out the nation's broadband capacity.

Lafayette, La., and Florida's St. Lucie County have already grabbed their slice of Hollywood by being pioneers in providing ultra-high-speed broadband.

In Lafayette, a municipally owned electric utility has just completed construction of its own high-speed broadband network covering every street in town.

Lafayette's gamble pays

Louisiana might at first seem like an unlikely site for a movie studio.

But in Lafayette, a municipally owned electric utility has just completed construction of its own high-speed broadband network covering every street in town.

To help make "Secretariat" — a future Disney film about the historic race horse of the same name — Toluca Lake, Calif.-based Pixel Magic set up an office in Lafayette, where filmmakers were shooting location shots.

Pixel Magic has since decided to maintain an office in Lafayette and plans to eventually employ 100 to 200 people there.

"The fact that we have the high-speed Internet between here and there is a big plus so we can show the clients the work in progress — production companies and studios," said Ray Scalice, Pixel Magic's general manager.

Even though Sarasota County has hundreds of strands of high-speed data-conveying fiber optic cable running along its utility poles and under its streets, the network is largely controlled by corporations that have a vested interest in doling it out at the retail level.

Level Three Communications and FPL FiberNet mostly stay away from dealing with end users, leaving that field to entrenched phone company Verizon, which operates the FiOS network, and Comcast, the entrenched cable television and In-

ternet provider.

The two companies maintain that they are providing enough speed right now to business customers.

Bob Elek, Verizon's Florida spokesman, said the company does not provide widespread service at higher than 50 megabits per second download speed "because there's not enough of you wanting 100 megabits per second."

The domain of the digital

Digital Domain — a trophy catch as the world enters into the broadband economy — knew exactly what it needed to set up a Florida campus in a relaxed beachfront community: its own hotwire to a bigger city where it could rent space on servers in storm-safe sites at reasonable rates.

Each of the movie scenes that the company creates are really huge digital files that need to be transported quickly and without interruption to the place where they can be stored and accessed by other workers, maybe on the West Coast or maybe in Europe.

"We can't have the shot break apart on the way," said John Textor, whose Wyndcrest Holdings is a major shareholder in Digital Domain.

What Textor and his company found in Port St. Lucie was a very small but advanced Internet provider called Home Town Cable that could provide him with his so-called "last-mile of service," coupled with a dark fiber provided by AT&T, one of the handful of companies that owns most of the heavy-duty fiber-optic pipes crisscrossing the nation.

In Port St. Lucie, the combination gave Digital Domain a huge dedicated data pipeline that will run directly from the company's 150,000-square-foot studio campus to rented servers in Miami, a hub of Internet connectivity.

Sarasota County did not offer the same opportunity.

"We knew there wasn't great fiber over there," Textor said. "Assuming we would not have been able to somehow string together a dark fiber network, it would have cost us another \$3 to \$4 million because we would have to have our own data center."



John Textor, a shareholder of Digital Domain, said it would have cost the company more to move to Sarasota. PHOTO / STEVEN MARTINE

Long-term investment

Investing in fiber-optic networks is not the kind of enterprise where you turn a quick profit.

Mitchell Rubenstein and Laurie Silvers founded, grew and then sold the Sci-Fi Channel, now Syfy, and then built out their Home Town Cable Plus network with some of the proceeds.

Even though Rubenstein is on the board of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County, he was reluctant to illuminate his company's role as the Internet provider to Digital Domain. "All it does is tell our competitors what we are doing," he said.

An online brochure says that Home Town set up shop "in the middle of 50,000 acres of developable land" and built a "multi-million-dollar state-of-the-art Central Office/Headend and fiber based delivery system in what has become one of the fastest growing communities in the U.S."

Retailer QVC and a service-for-hire company both run call centers there. In 2008, San Diego-based Torrey Pines Institute for Molecular Studies chose Port St. Lucie as the site for expanding its research operations. The company now maintains a 20-acre campus there employing 200 people.

More recently, the publishing company E.W. Scripps has begun building a printing plant there for

its five Florida newspapers.

In each case — biomedical research, a call center and publishing — having affordable ultra-high-speed Internet connections makes the enterprise more efficient by far.

That is how Home Town Cable Plus has made itself at home.

"You have to look for areas that have super-poor service, so when you go in, your service is so extraordinary that you can take customers away," Rubenstein said.

Home Town offers 100 megabit-per-second service for about \$100 per month. It works at the same speed both for downloading and uploading.

"We are very inexpensive," Rubenstein said. "Because we are small, we have built the system in such a way that we have plenty of bandwidth. With larger systems, they want to keep upgrading you."

Speed in Louisiana

While Home Town was built with private capital, Lafayette managed to go all-fiber starting from a city-owned electric utility.

In 2004, the Lafayette Utilities System decided to string up fiber-optic cable. As soon as LUS announced that plan, it faced legal opposition from the incumbent cable television provider, Cox Communications, and the incumbent

phone company, Southern Bell.

After four years of litigation, LUS prevailed and began building its network in 2008. It is only now being finished.

"We have huge demand on the business side," said Amy Broussard, a sales and marketing analyst at the LUS fiber division. "You can get 100 megabits upload and download for your business for \$200 a month, so we have a huge demand for that."

The community's biggest economic development coup thus far — largely based on its broadband system — was landing Pixel Magic's mini special effects studio.

"Usually they render and edit in California," Broussard said. "They opened an office here with a 100-meg connection, and they were able to do all their editing and rendering in town and then upload it to California with no problem."

Before picking Lafayette, Pixel Magic "was looking at New Orleans and found this was just a better deal and the fiber had a lot to do with it," said company spokesman Patrick Flanagan. "Downloading a film frame, we are getting speeds of two, three seconds per frame."

The other guys

For every Pixel Magic or Digital Domain, there are hundreds of less flashy employers who can use high-speed Internet to make their business sing.

When digitally connected companies come calling, the availability and cost of high-speed Internet connections is one of the first things they ask about, said Eric Basinger, executive director of the Manatee County Economic Development Council.

"The quality of life stuff, that is an afterthought," Basinger said. "Cost of business and infrastructure — those things have got to be there for them."

Even companies that do not need extreme Internet speed seem to find ways to use it if it is available.

Golfballs.com is an Internet-enabled retailer of all things golf that happens to be based in Lafayette. Thanks to the new fiber-optic network, company President Tom Cox said he is now paying about \$200 per month for 100 megabit-per-second upload and download speed.

"I'm not a network engineer," Cox said. "But you have 25 people on the connection and there's ample bandwidth for everybody to use."

Beyond that, the golf retailer will use his newly-acquired high-speed connection in two ways: video demonstrations of products on his site, and direct video conversations with clients.

"We are not far away from having face-to-face conversations with customers," Cox said.

Building slump is deeper in region

CONSTRUCTION from 1A

Construction is down by two-thirds since the Great Recession began and, despite outliers like Broward County, 36 percent last year alone.

On the extreme end of fortune's list are St. Lucie, Marion and Sarasota counties, where new construction has virtually stopped. The value of new construction is down 93 percent in St. Lucie and Marion, home to Ocala. In Sarasota County, the decline is 92 percent.

There are some possible bright spots for the construction industry in the figures. Besides Broward, construction was up 2 percent in Pinellas and it was down just 3 percent in Volusia.

Real estate followers in Broward County could come up with no particular reason to think that the county had found a magic bullet for bucking the overwhelmingly downward trend.

While the industry is faring better in Broward, Dooley doubts construction spending actually increased in 2009, attributing it instead to timing. In property appraiser reports, the value of a new property is added to the tax rolls when the building is ready for occupancy. Sometimes one year's numbers jump or dive because bad or good weather slowed projects down or sped them up.

The uptick in manufacturing led to construction of some new industrial space, and warehouses, said Jack McCabe, a real estate consultant in Broward. And construction was completed on some new office space, as well.

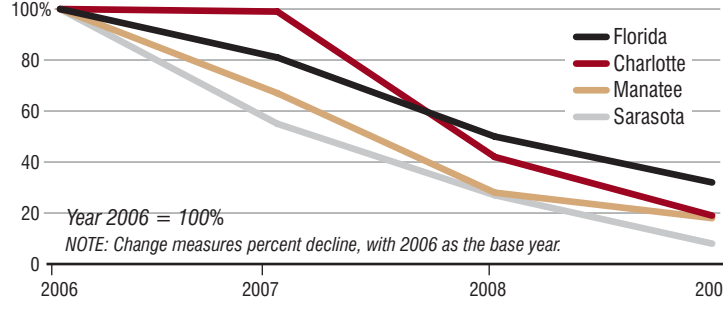
"But those were commercial projects that started back in '06 or '07," he said.

Be assured that the uptick has

New construction plummets

Construction is down by two-thirds statewide and down by 81 to 92 percent in Charlotte, Manatee and Sarasota counties over the course of the recession.

New construction as percent of 2006 level



SOURCE: Florida Department of Revenue

STAFF GRAPHIC / BARRY MCCARTHY

nothing to do with the residential market, McCabe said.

"Nothing is being built in residential," he said.

The major east coast county having the hardest time is Palm Beach, where new construction dropped 70 percent between 2007 and 2009. There was an enormous overbuild of new housing in that county, McCabe said.

The big losers and the moderate losers break into two categories.

"The ones where we saw the most severe drops were more the bedroom-type communities like St. Lucie or Sarasota that did not have a large manufacturing or employment base," McCabe said.

New construction, once a driver of the local economy, was down a startling 69 percent in Sarasota County last year, bringing the three-year slide for the county to 92 percent. An industry that once generated \$2.1 billion a year came in at \$170 million in 2009, only \$3 million ahead of smaller Charlotte County and actually behind some of the state's more sparsely populated counties.

This year is not looking bad for everyone, but geography plays its part in that.

"Our numbers are going to be up; unfortunately it's not here in Sarasota County," said Jack Cox, president of Halfacre Construction.

The firm is getting work all around Southwest Florida, including a parks project in Manatee County and jobs in Charlotte County, he said.

Manufacturing has had a bump in sales this year and Halfacre is

seeing more work in that area, but not in Sarasota County, even though the county's manufacturers have reported increased sales this year.

But there is so much vacant space in the market that manufacturers are likely absorbing that rather than building their own, Cox said.

In 2006, the five counties stretching from Manatee to Collier reported \$14.3 billion in new construction, 21 percent of the state total of \$69 billion.

But last year, new construction in those five counties dwindled to \$2 billion, only 9 percent of the state's total of \$22 billion.

The region that boomed the hardest is now busting the hardest. In 2006, Lee County surpassed even Miami-Dade County by posting \$6.7 billion in new construction. Four years later, Lee has dropped from first to ninth in the rankings for new construction.

Also in 2006, Sarasota County was ninth among the state's 67 counties in new construction, but dropped to 25th last year, behind much more sparsely populated counties like Monroe and Bay, and barely ahead of Charlotte County, \$170 million versus \$167 million.

While Florida's economy began recovering early this year, some industries are going to be left behind, said Sean Snaith, a University of Central Florida economist.

"Construction is not back; it is still in decline and probably will be for a couple of years," Snaith said.

Forget the old rules about how to study

STUDY HABITS from 1A

student learns from studying.

The findings can help anyone, from a fourth grader doing long division to a retiree taking on a new language. But they directly contradict much of the common wisdom about good study habits, and they have not caught on.

For instance, instead of sticking to one study location, simply alternating the room where a person studies improves retention. So does studying distinct but related skills or concepts in one sitting, rather than focusing intensely on a single thing.

"We have known these principles for some time, and it's intriguing that schools don't pick them up, or that people don't learn them by trial and error," said Dr. Robert A. Bjork, a psychologist at UCLA. "Instead, we walk around with all sorts of unexamined beliefs about what works that are mistaken."

For instance, many study skills courses insist that students find a specific place, a study room or a quiet corner of the library, to take their work. The research finds just the opposite. In one classic 1978 experiment, psychologists found that college students who studied a list of 40 vocabulary words in two rooms — one windowless and cluttered, the other modern, with a view on a courtyard — did far better on a test than students who studied the words twice, in the same room. Later studies have confirmed the finding, for a variety of topics.

The advantages of this approach to studying can be striking, in some topic areas. In a study recently posted online by the journal Applied Cognitive Psychology, Doug Rohrer and Kelli Taylor of the University of South Florida taught a group of fourth graders four equations, each to calculate a different dimension of a prism. Half of the children learned by studying repeated examples of one equation,

say, calculating the number of prism faces when given the number of sides at the base, then moving on to the next type of calculation, studying repeated examples of that. The other half studied mixed problem sets, which included examples all four types of calculations grouped together.

Both groups solved sample problems as they studied. A day later, the researchers gave all of the students a test on the material, presenting new problems of the same type. The children who had studied mixed sets did twice as well as the others, outscoring them 77 percent to 38 percent. The researchers have found the same in experiments involving adults and younger children.

"When students see a list of problems, all of the same kind, they know the strategy to use before they even read the problem," said Dr. Rohrer. With mixed practice, he added, "each problem is different from the last one, which means kids must learn how to choose the appropriate procedure — just like they had to do on the test."

The finding undermines the common assumption that intensive immersion is the best way to really master a particular genre, or type of creative work, said Dr. Nate Kornell, a psychologist at Williams College and the lead author of the study. Cognitive scientists do not deny that cramming can lead to a better grade on a given exam. But hurriedly jam-packing a brain is akin to speed-packing a cheap suitcase — it holds its new load for a while, then most everything falls out.

"With many students, it's not like they can't remember the material" when they move to a more advanced class, said Dr. Henry L. Roediger III, a psychologist at Washington University in St. Louis. "It's like they've never seen it before."