Right Start Newsletter

Elementary Edition March, 2008

Advance organizers help students learn

Teaching new material to students can be like asking them to head into unfamiliar territory without road maps.

Why not provide advance organizers to use as road maps? They'll give students a cognitive strategy for learning and retaining information.

Research shows that advance organizers help students learn and retain more. When information is presented graphically, as well as verbally, all students—including those with disabilities—learn both the content and the vocabulary of the new material.

Perhaps the most well-known advance organizer is the KWL chart. As students list what they already know, what they want to find out, and then what they have learned, they get an idea of how to link what they are learning to what they already know.

To use advance organizers:

- Focus on the most important information. Give students a "preview of coming attractions"—showing them what they will be learning.
- Present information graphically if you can. Pictures and charts will make it easier for students to remember key points.
- Use technology where you can. A colorful, dynamic organizer will be even more memorable than a black-and-white chart.

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Help your students follow directions

Most students follow group directions well; others need more individualized attention. When you need to connect with a student who has trouble following your directions:

- Use statements, not questions. Say, "Please sit down and finish

your work." Don't ask, "Would you like to sit down and finish your work?"

- Stand close to the student. You will communicate your strong interest in getting a response. It also allows you to speak in a soft voice, but still be heard.
- Look at the student and say politely, "I have something to say, but I really need to have you look at me. Thank you."
- Give the student directions. Have him repeat them. Ask the student to follow the directions, but do not ask more than twice. Put consequences into place if necessary. Thank him for cooperating if he does follow your directions.

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Deserved praise deserves the right language

How do you deliver praise? If you find yourself using vague, tired phrases, then think about whether you really meant to praise the student in the first place.

Students can tell the difference between sincere praise and hollow words. Sincere praise will motivate and encourage students. Hollow words can make them skeptical—about you, and about their ability to do their work.

The next time you deliver praise:

- Be specific. Tell the student exactly what she's doing right. "I was so pleased with your work today, Amy. When you couldn't solve the math problem the first time, you recalled a strategy we used in class and tried that."
- Avoid clichés. "Good job!" is probably the "praise" teachers utter most often. It may spill out of your mouth before you even realize it. If your student deserves praise, then your student deserves praise that's genuine and specific.
- Avoid downplaying a student's problem in an attempt to praise. This is not praise. Statements like, "This shouldn't be a problem for you" may be meant to communicate that you think the student has the ability and skills to do the work.
  But the student may not take it this way—instead, he may feel you are placating him or even making fun of him. "You seem to be struggling with this; let's find out why," is a better choice of words for motivation.

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Use 'quick checks' to keep students focused

You are midway through explaining a new concept when you look at your students. Two are staring out the window. One is wiggling a loose tooth.

Two are whispering to each other. Here are some ways you can check students' understanding while presenting your lesson:

- Use white boards. Many teachers use small individual white boards so students can quickly answer a question. When students hold up their boards, it's easy to check for understanding.
- Use cues. As you're teaching a new subject, stop regularly to have students show you their level of understanding. Ask, "How many of you think you could do this right now?" Then have them show you thumbs up for yes, thumbs down for no and thumbs sideways for maybe. Or try using colored cards—green, red and yellow—for the same purpose.
- Read body language. If a third of your students are gazing out the window, odds are they aren't learning about the life cycle of a butterfly. Sure signals that student attention is wandering include: limited or no eye contact, unfocused eyes, and a head resting on a hand or on the desk.

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REMINDER

Please remember to keep your GCS Professional Folder updated. Please be sure to keep all the documentation from this year. The documents that should be in your BT1 folder are listed below. Your third administrative observation should be completed by April 15th. Your administrator may choose to do an unannounced third observation. The only observation that should have been announced was your first one.

As a BT1, you should have 3 administrative observations, 1 peer observation from another career teacher other than your mentor, a summative evaluation, an IGP, and your mentor log. North Carolina requires that you demonstrate continuous professional growth each BT year. The easiest way to document this growth is to earn a minimum of 2 CEUs between July, 2007 and June, 2008 and have it documented on the GCS Professional Development site. You should keep documentation for each BT year

Documents That Should Be Included For First Year (BT1) Teachers
Mentor Log
FODA 1- Sept. 30th – Oct. 30th Observation 1
FODA 2- Jan. 15th Observation 2
FODA 3-April 15th Observation 3
Teacher (Peer) Evaluation
Summative Evaluation –April
IGP for Year 1
Documentation of Continuous Professional Growth (Example: Transcript from GCS Professional Development Site or GCS Professional Development Log

REMINDER

The 10 month payroll cycle for the 2007-08 school year is August 31, 2007 through May 31, 2007 even though the 2007-08 employment term is August 22, 2007 through June 16, 2008. To provide employees with a full check each month, it is necessary to pre-pay employees. Unless you chose the 12 month salary option or you work in a school that has an alternate school calendar, your last payroll check for the 2007-08 school year will be May 31st, even though you are required to work days in June to complete the 10 month employment term. We thought this might be a helpful reminder as you budget for the coming months.

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We have moved from Eugene St. to:

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