**Identify Critical Content**

**Verbal Cueing**

**Example Background:**

This scenario involves content for LAFS L1A-follow agreed upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion). In this example, the teacher begins with “listening to others” and identifies two pieces of critical information about the listening skill. The bold text indicates where the teacher changes the pitch of his voice to indicate that critical content follows.

Good morning, class. Today we are going to learn how to listen. One important thing about listening is that **you do not talk when you are listening**. The second important thing about listening is that **you should look at the person who is talking to you**. You are listening to me right now. I can tell because **you are not talking and you are looking at me**.

After this brief introduction, the teacher goes on to teach the rest of the lesson. He first solicits some student volunteers to demonstrate the two important things about listening: not talking, and looking at the person who is talking to you. In this example, listening is a new skill the teacher wants his students to learn. He will use the verbal cueing he used for the introductory lesson as a reminder whenever he asks students to talk to a partner.

**Non-example Background:**

This non-example is based on the same grade level listening standard as the previous example.

Good morning, class. I thought we’d talk about **listening** today. I hope when we get done with our lesson you’ll know how to be a good listener. Listening is really an important thing to do in school. I know you all know that because you’re sitting so quietly and being such good listeners now. I want you to practice listening today. I have some stickers here, and whenever I see a good listener during the day, I’m going to silently give that person a sticker.

The non-example teacher doesn’t actually identify the critical content for the skill of listening. The teacher fails to focus on what is important and makes general statements instead. In this scenario, there is no indication of what is critical about listening. Before you teach a lesson, summarize the content in a sentence or two. This is the critical content you need to cue to the students.

**Identify Critical Content**

**Explicit Instruction**

**Example Background:**

Focuses on the K-5 foundational skill to demonstrate basic knowledge of one-to-one letter-sound correspondences by producing the primary or many of the most frequent sounds for each consonant. The example teacher is teaching one consonant at a time. A formative assessment showed that most students in the class do not associate the /s/ sound with the letter s. So the teacher has chosen to provide explicit instruction on the /s/ sound.

Today we’re going to learn a new sound. Our new sound goes with the letter **s**. I’m going to make the sound for you, and then you will have many turns to practice the sound. When you know the sounds that go with the letters, you will be able to read words and books. Listen to what I say and watch my lips.

Here’s our new sound for today. (The teacher points to the s on the board.) The letter says **/s/.**

(The teacher points to the letter and says…) Together. What sound? /s/Yes.

The teacher and students repeat this segment several times while the teacher watches students’ eyes and mouths to see if any of them are having difficulty. In the next phase of the lesson, the students respond in unison without the teacher’s support. In this type of explicit instruction, only one sound at a time is introduced and then practiced to mastery.

**Identify Critical Content**

**Explicit Instruction**

**Non-example Background:**

The non-example of explicit instruction is also focused on learning letter-sound correspondence for the letter s.

The teacher is excited about all the information the children have inferred from the picture. At this point, she has yet to introduce the most important information of the lesson: the connection between the printed letter and sound it makes. She goes on to ask students to signal a thumbs-up whenever they hear the sound that the letter s makes while she is reading the story aloud to them.

I have a wonderful new story to read aloud to you. (Teacher holds up book titled **Sam’s Silly Sister Sue**.) Can someone tell me what he/she sees on the front cover? Students point out that there is a girl roller-skating. A fluffy dog and a little boy are laughing at her. Students agree that Sam is the boy, the girl is sister Sue, and the dog is probably named spot.

The teacher has made a couple common mistakes. First, she provides vague information. She also assumes that the students have the prior knowledge to determine the relationship between the letter s and its sound from her read-aloud.

**Identify Critical Content**

**Dramatic Instruction**

**Example Background:**

The specific standard being addressed is distinguishing shades of meaning among verbs differing in manner or intensity by defining or choosing them or by acting out the meanings. The teacher has chosen this set of words to use dramatic instruction for the first time with her students: look, peek, glance, stare, glare, and scowl. In this lesson, students will act out the meanings of the words. The teacher posted cues on a bulletin board for students to consult. The dramatic instruction has scaffolding and extending built in such that struggling students will have a third opportunity to master the word meanings by adding the right facial expressions or hand movements (if needed), while advanced students will be challenged to write a short play that incorporates both the words and facial expressions.

(The students are sitting on a rug in front of an easel that contains a list of the words with their meanings, as well as their picture cues.)

On Monday we began to learn some new words. The words, meanings, and picture cues to help you remember the meanings are here on the easel. Today we’re going to add one more thing to each word to help us remember what it means. We’re going to act out the words. Let me show you what I mean.

(The teacher points to the word peek, pronounces it, points to the picture cue, and reads the meaning. Then she acts out the meaning of the word peek for her students.) Everybody show me what peek looks like. Terrific. I was peeking at my students. Who were you peeking at? The students answer, “The teacher.”

I’m going to act out another word. (The teacher acts out the word scowl, and then reads the word and its meaning.) I was scowling at you. But it was just a pretend scowl because I am not angry with you. Now, everybody show me what your scowl looks like. Excellent. Now show me what a peek looks like. I’m going to peek at the word, and I want you to show me the face that goes with it.

All of the students in the group can produce dramatic facial expressions to match the words peek and scowl. The instruction gets more dramatic as the students begin to acquire the subtleties of this set of words and become more comfortable in pronouncing the words and producing the definitions in English. The teacher checks throughout the lesson that students can match facial expressions to their corresponding words, as well as read them on the chart and produce a spoken meaning for each word.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Dramatic Instruction**

**Non-example:**

The non-example elementary teacher has the same general plan as the example teacher, but she misses the mark at a crucial point in the lesson. Her students never get to try out any of the faces, and she stops the lesson without monitoring the students’ abilities to match the appropriate facial expressions with the words and meanings on the chart.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Advance Organizers**

**Example Background:**

The learning target being addressed is taken from the K-5 writing standards: students write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply the reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure. In the example, the teacher begins with the phrase state an opinion and identifies two critical pieces of information related to that task. The teacher has developed the organizer as a way to present an academic challenge to her students while at the same time conveying critical content.

Today we are going to learn how to give an opinion. Here is what’s important for you to know about giving your opinion: **An opinion is what you think of something. Giving your opinion is telling someone what you think of something**. For example, I have an opinion about a movie I saw this weekend. Remember that my opinion is what I think of the movie, not what the movie is about. I would be giving my opinion, or what I thought of the movie, such as it was really funny.

**Non-example:**

The non-example is based on the same grade level and learning target: starting an opinion.

I saw the movie *Frozen* this weekend and it was terrible. (Many children quickly shout out their disagreement with the teacher’s opinion.) Now wait a minute. I was just stating my opinion. I can see that all of you have different opinions. And we all have a right to our opinions.

The non-example teacher made the common mistake of overwhelming students with information. They are focused on their own opinions rather than learning about other opinions. Students are vocalizing their opinions of the movie before the teacher has even conveyed the critical information: what an opinion is and how to give an opinion. Some of the students may have prior knowledge about giving opinions, but those who don’t could easily conclude that this was a new part of the morning routine—talking about the movies everyone saw over the weekend.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Visually Cue**

**Example Background:**

This example is taken from reading standard 1: read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it. In the following example, the third grade teacher has prepared a poster to use as a visual cue during the lessons. She begins the lesson with the poster covered. The poster contains a cartoon drawing of a detective holding an oversized magnifying glass.

I know you’re eager to see what’s on the easel. When I lift the black drape, I want complete silence. Then I’m going to choose someone to tell me the first thing you thought when you saw this poster. If someone gives the answer you were thinking, put your hand down. The students suggest detectives, crimes, police, clues, and evidence.

This year we are going to read like detectives. Every time we read, we are going to look for two kinds of clues. The first kind of clue shows us exactly what an author is telling us. Those clues are right there on the printed page. They are easier to find. We are also going to look for clues that aren’t right there on the printed page. You will have to read like a detective and use your detective brain to find the hidden clues. Let me show you how this works. (The teacher writes a sentence on the board and models how she would first decide exactly what the author is telling the reader. Then she poses an inferential question for students that can be answered only from their prior knowledge and experiences. She thinks aloud for them about how she uses her detective brain to find hidden clues so she can answer the question.)

There are two important things you should look for when reading like a detective: clues that are right there on the printed page and ones that are hidden, which you will find in your detective brain.

(To practice this skill, the teacher passes out a set of statements with corresponding questions. The students will need to first look for the clues in the printed words, and then find the hidden ones in what they know and have experienced. The students work in pairs to complete the assignment as the teacher circulates the classroom, checking on their work.)

**Identify Critical Content**

**Visual Cue**

**Non-example:**

The teachers uses the detective motif on the worksheet she prepares for her students, suggesting that they might like to color the picture of the detective while she is explaining the worksheet to them. She does not talk about the significance of the detective, because she assumes her students will be able to make a connection between how detectives detect and how careful readers read. The teacher explains how to answer the questions on the worksheet without referring to the visual cue or linking reading to the detective graphic.

The mistake this teacher makes is that she does not link the critical content of the lesson to the visual cue. Without an over linkage between those, many students do not make the connection between them. Therefore, the visual cue that she took time to locate and place on the worksheet was wasted.

**Identify Critical Content**

**Storytelling as a Cue**

**Example Background:**

This example is based on Standard 10 for Reading: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently. It comes from a fourth grade teacher who was an English Language Learner in early elementary school. Here is the story she tells her students.

We have a big goal to meet this year: reading more books, reading harder books, and learning new things from these books. I came to the US when I was seven years old. I was in second grade and I was scared. I didn’t understand English and I didn’t know how to read. I bet you are wondering, “How did you get to be so smart that you could be a teacher?” Two things helped me: 1) I came to school every day, paid attention, and did my homework, and 2) I started to read. In the beginning, I could read only easy books, but that didn’t matter. I just kept reading more, and pretty soon I was reading harder ones. I read all the time. I read before school in the morning, during lunchtime, and sometimes I even read books after I was supposed to go to sleep at night. I read stories, but I also read books about space, animals, and famous people. When I didn’t know what a word meant, I asked somebody or looked it up.

This year, our class is going to read many books, and by the end of the year, the books will be harder than the books we start with. How will we do that? We are going to come to school every day, pay attention, and do our homework, and we are going to become reading machines that just don’t quit. If I can do what I did when I was in second grade, you can do the very same thing.

This story highlights the importance of reading and helps students see that reading with increasing complexity takes practice. This teacher kept the story short and focused on the critical content of how to increase proficiency by reading varied texts and learning new words.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Storytelling as a Cue**

**Non-example:**

This example begins in similar fashion.

We have a big goal to meet this year: reading more books, reading harder books, and learning new things from these books. I came to the US when I was seven years old. I was in second grade and I was scared. I didn’t understand English and I didn’t know how to read. If I can learn to read, so can you. This year, our class is going to read many books, and by the end of the year, the books will be harder than the books we start with. (The teacher then begins to read the book she selected.)

This teacher misses the mark because her story is so brief that it doesn’t address the critical content of increasing proficiency by reading varied texts and learning new words. Students may not even realize that the intention of the story was to identify critical content. They may think the teacher just wanted to tell them a little about herself.

**Identify Critical Content**

**Student Prior Knowledge**

**Example Background:**

The elementary example of using what students already know to cue critical content is based on a first grade science standard: use observation of the sun, moon, and stars to describe patterns that can be predicted. The teacher has prepared four cards for each set of partners. Each card depicts the sun in different stages: rising, setting, high in the sky, and one card dark with no sun at all.

Today, we are going to talk about patterns in the sky. Some people use telescopes to observe things in the sky. We are going to find out how much we know about space from looking at it with our own eyes. The objects in the sky we are going to talk about are predictable. That means we can depend on these objects to be in certain places in the sky at certain times. I want to remind you before we begin that there are certain objects we might see in the sky that don’t count: birds, planes, balloons, or helicopters. These things come and go; they do not have predictable patterns. Now, who can tell us something you have observed about the sun that is predictable?

(One student ventures that he’s seen the sun coming up in the morning. The teacher commends his powers of observation and elaborates on his description to explain that scientists have a special word for the sun “coming up.”) We say the sun is rising, and the exact moment that we can see the sun rising is called sunrise. Do you know that word? Say it to your partner. Find the picture card that matches that word.

(The teacher then asks for more observations and sees another student with her hand raised.) You look as though you might have observed something else about the sun. Tell us. (The student explains that the sun doesn’t just rise, it sets. She goes on to say that she sees this at night before she goes to bed.) The word for that is sunset. Say that word to your partner, and find the picture card that matches that word. The teacher pauses for students to do that, watching partners to see if they pick the correct card.

We now have two observations about the sun: it rises and it sets. What else have you observed about the sun? Is there a predictable pattern? Tell your partner. (The teacher allows time for the students to discuss where they’ve seen the sun at different times of the day.) What is the predictable pattern of the sun in the sky each day? Order your cards to show the predictable pattern of the sun in the sky. (The teacher walks around guiding and encouraging students as needed.)

In this example, the teacher uses the cards to help students create a mental model of the pattern of the sun in the sky. She first makes sure students know the crucial vocabulary. Then she guides them to think about the relationship of their observations of the sun.

**Identify Critical Content**

**Using Student Prior Knowledge**

**Non-example Background:**

The non-example lesson starts the same way but lacks the necessary actions of using what students already know to cue critical content. This teacher is addressing the same standard but does not have the sets of sun cards.

Today, we’re going to talk about patterns in the sky. Some people use telescopes to observe things in the sky. We are going to find out how much we know about space from looking at it with our own eyes. The objects in the sky we are going to talk about are predictable. That means we can depend on these objects to be in certain places in the sky at certain times. I want to remind you before we begin that there are certain objects we might see in the sky that don’t count: birds, planes, balloons, or helicopters. These things come and go; they do not have predictable patterns. Now, who can tell us something you have observed about the sun that is predictable? (One student ventures that he’s seen the sun coming up in the morning. The teacher commends his powers of observation and elaborates on his description to explain that scientists have a special word for the sun “coming up.”) We say the sun is rising, and the exact moment that we can see the sun rising is called sunrise. (The teacher then asks for more observations and sees another student with her hand raised.) You look as though you might have observed something else about the sun. Tell us. (The student explains that the sun doesn’t just rise, it sets. She goes on to say that she sees this at night before she goes to bed.) The word for that is sunset. We now have two observations about the sun: it rises and it sets. What is the predictable pattern of the sun in the sky each day? (The teacher listens as a third student describes sunrise and sunset. Then she asks the other students to tell their partners what they know about sunrise and sunset.)

The non-example teacher simply asks a few students to share their observations, instead of making sure students understand crucial vocabulary and basic facts or helping them formulate a mental model. The teacher is not aware, from this activity, which students know the key words or are able to use observations to describe the predictable pattern of the sun in the sky.