**Identifying Critical Content**

**Secondary Example-Verbal Cueing**

**Example: High School (Any Content)**

Standard being addressed – Speaking/Listening Standard 1: come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study. The teacher wants to convey the important information about the task in a brief lesson using verbal cueing. The bold text indicates that the teacher is raising or lowering his voice to emphasize two items of critical importance that he wants his students to take away from the lesson.

Greetings, class. Today we are going to think and talk about what it means to **prepare for** and **participate in** a discussion. There are two important things to remember from this lesson today. Write them in your academic notebook. The first important thing is that **preparing means doing something positive ahead of time to get ready for the discussion**. The second important thing is that **participation means actively doing something positive during the class discussion**.

After this verbal cue, the teacher divides the class into small groups. Half of the groups list as many answers as they can to this question: What are some positive things you could do to prepare for class? The other set of groups list answers to this question: What are some positive things you should do during the class discussion to show that you are participating? The teacher walks around looking at the list of activities that each small group has generated and concludes that students can identify the importance of preparing and participating.

**Non-Example:**

The non-example secondary teacher begins his lesson the same way as the example teacher. Take careful note of where this teacher makes two common mistakes, thereby missing the opportunity to check that the desired effect of this instructional strategy was achieved.

Greetings, class. Today we are going to think and talk about what it means to prepare for and participate in a discussion. There are two things to remember from this lesson today. Write them in your academic notebook right now. The first important thing is that **preparing means doing something ahead of time to get ready for the discussion**. The second important thing is that **participation means actively doing something during the class discussion**.

Tomorrow, I want everyone to come prepared to participate in the class discussion about chapter two. Remember, part of your grade in this class depends on preparing and participating.

The non-example teacher left out two important pieces of his lesson: 1) giving students opportunities to do something with the important information, and 2) monitoring whether students understood the two pieces of critical content.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Secondary Example-Explicit Instruction**

**Example: High School Biology Class**

Standard being addressed - Reading Standard 1: read closely to determine what the text says explicitly. This will call for explicit modeling and thinking aloud by the teacher. The teacher’s modeling will give students an accessible way to understand how skilled readers extract meaning.

Today we’re going to learn what it means to read closely to determine what a text says explicitly. I’m going to show you a three-step way to do that. The teacher puts a paragraph relating to geology on the screen. (The teacher has already determined that many of his students have great difficulty figuring out what a text is explicitly about, so he decided to provide the students with a set of questions to guide their reading and thinking.)

I often find it hard to read something long and complicated while at the same time trying to remember what I’ve read. Today I am going to show you how to read one sentence at a time to see if it answers a question. The question is, “*What does the text explicitly say caused the land surface of the earth to change?*” The first step is reading one sentence. The second step is deciding if the sentence answers the question. Let me show you how it works. (Teacher reads aloud the first sentence of the text and rereads the question.) As I read this sentence, I don’t find anything that tells me a reason or a cause for the earth to change. So, I would answer no. This sentence does not answer the question. The third step is explaining why the sentence doesn’t answer the question. I say that the first sentence told us what the paragraph would be about, but it didn’t give any reasons for why the earth changed.

The teacher continues to model this process for students with the next sentence before asking students to try one on their own.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Non-Example Explicit Instruction**

Today we’re going to cover the first chapter in our new unit about how the earth’s surface has changed over time. I want you to really concentrate when you read this first section. You need to get every bit of meaning out of what’s there, so you will be able to write a one-sentence summary that answers this question: What does the text explicitly say caused the land surface of the earth to change?

The teacher provides no modeling. He expects students to read the whole text and write a summary rather than chunking the reading into digestible bites. Many students may be unable to accomplish this.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Secondary Example-Dramatic Instruction**

**Example: Secondary High School Biology**

 The secondary example and non-example are from a high school biology class. It focuses on the Next Generation Science Standard: Use a model to illustrate the role of cellular division (mitosis) and differentiation in producing and maintaining complex organisms. The high school biology teacher in this example will have her students develop a simulation of mitosis to help them understand the process of cell division.

 The teacher begins by giving students time to review their notes and activities from previous lessons in which they learned about the purpose and process of mitosis. Rather than memorizing each step for the process, students in small groups brainstorm how they can act out the process of mitosis, focusing on the obstacles that cells overcome in order to reproduce. As students are creating their enactment, the teacher walks around listening and giving guidance when necessary. Instead of asking each group to demonstrate to the entire class, the teacher has them partner with one other group. In addition to enacting mitosis, the groups summarize how the model illustrates the role of mitosis in producing and maintaining complex organisms.

**Non-Example:**

 The non-example teacher plans a similar lesson, but instead of asking students to brainstorm their own enactment, she guides a small group of students through the enactment while the rest of the class watches. This is an equally effective simulation but fails to follow through with the most important phase of instruction—involving the students and monitoring that they understand the process of mitosis and are able to summarize how the model illustrates the role of mitosis in producing and maintaining complex organisms.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Secondary Example-Advance Organizers**

**Example:**

The secondary example and non-example are based on the learning target to construct an explanation based on evidence for how the availability of natural resources has influenced human activity. They feature a high school social studies teacher who is teaching how to write arguments on discipline-specific content. Students will work on how to introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claims(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claims(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence based on a corresponding CCSS Literacy Standard. The teacher decides that the advance organizer will not only serve the primary purpose of conveying critical information related to the skill, but also show how this critical information will serve the students in the future.

Today we are going to take the first step in learning how to write arguments focused on how the availability of natural resources has influenced human activity. I am going to be modeling the various steps in the process for you. Your assignment today is to understand three important terms: claim, reason, and evidence. You may recognize these terms since TV cops and lawyers frequently use them. I want you to adapt what you think these terms mean related to criminal justice, and think of them in the context of writing an argument. A claim is the idea to be proved. A reason is a more specific statement that supports a claim. And the evidence is textual proof from something you have read that supports the claim.

The teacher goes on to provide examples and non-examples of these three terms, coming back repeatedly to the student-friendly definitions and the examples and non-examples. He then hands out graphic organizers and directs each of the previously organized student learning groups to skim through the on natural resources. He asks them to perform three tasks: identify a possible claim they could make as to how the availability of natural resources has influenced human activity; select at least on reason that might support the claim; and copy down one sentence from the text that supports the specific reason they have decided upon. While students are working in their groups, the teacher moves about, listening to their discussions for the critical content and reading the information they have written on their graphic organizers.

**Non-Example:**

The non-example secondary teacher has the same goal for his students: to be able to write arguments focused on how the availability of natural resources has influenced human activity. His students have completed the same unit on natural resources, and he is prepared to identify the critical content students need to know.

The non-example teacher’s mistake was that he did not clearly define the critical content. Without this, students may not be able to interact with the critical content in this lesson. The teacher outlined a vague advance organizer that does not provide structure and support for students to stay focused on the critical content throughout the lesson. The purpose of an advance organizer is to help students identify what is critical and stay focused on it throughout the lesson. This non-example does not help the students do that.

I’ve written three words on the board: claim, reason, and evidence. What do they communicate to you? The students brainstorm situations related to criminal investigations. I love legal thrillers and murder mysteries, but we’re not going there in this class. We’re going to look through our textbooks to find claims, reasons, and evidence for arguments related to natural resources. Pull out a piece of paper and write claims, reason, and evidence at the tip. Now look through this section on natural resources and identify claims, reasons, and evidence for how the availability of natural resources has influenced human activity.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Secondary Example-Visual Cue**

**Example:**

In the secondary example the teacher wants students to understand how to view and interpret a political editorial cartoon as a way to analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape perspectives.

Notice that we have two examples of cartoons on the front board. One is from the school newspaper, *Red Hawk News*, this week and one is from 1975. We’re going to use these examples to learn how to “read” cartoons and to analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives. Reading a cartoon is a bit different from reading a book or an article.

Let’s concentrate on the recent cartoon to start. First, read the caption and see if you can identify what the cartoon is mainly about. You are well acquainted with the recent cartoon, but you might need a little more time to figure out the details of the cartoon from 1975.

Notice that this cartoon contains a caricature—an exaggerated and even humorous drawing of someone. In this cartoon, the caricature represents our basketball coach. We know that Mr. Loveland’s ears don’t stick out quite that much, and his beard isn’t quite that scraggly. That is sometimes an important part of a political cartoon—a caricature of an individual who is involved in the event. Also notice that this cartoon contains a symbol, an object that stands for an idea. In our cartoon, the profile of an American Indian is a symbol of Chief Red Hawk, the controversial individual for whom our teams are named. Later in the lesson, we will look at how this symbol has changed from 1975 to now.

The last thing to consider when you’re reading a political cartoon is the opinion or message the cartoonist is trying to convey and whether he or she seems to have any particular bias. We’ll spend some time talking about this in order to analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives related to these cartoons.

The teacher points to various parts of the cartoon as she reminds students how to read a cartoon. Let’s review what’s important about reading a political cartoon: 1) read the caption and identify what the cartoon is mainly about; 2) identify any caricatures that help you figure out the meaning of the cartoon; 3) look for symbols that may stand for a certain idea or perspective; and 4) figure out the opinion or message the cartoonist is trying to convey.

To represent students’ knowledge and monitor whether students know what is important about reading a political cartoon, the teacher passes out a brief organizer on which students can write their responses regarding the four items they will “read” from the second cartoon. Once students begin working, the teacher walks around ensuring that students are able to complete the organizer with the critical content from the cartoon.

**Non-Example of Visual Cueing:**

Now let’s go into this same lesson presented by a teacher down the hall.

Let’s talk about what’s important about reading a political cartoon to analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives. Who can tell me what you think is necessary to notice when reading a political cartoon? Students respond with many answers, including the four statements the teacher was hoping to hear: 1) read the caption and identify what the cartoon is mainly about; 2) identify any caricatures that help you figure out the meaning of the cartoon; 3) look for symbols that may stand for a certain idea or perspective; and 4) figure out the opinion or message the cartoonist is trying to convey.

Those are all good answers. Now that we’ve talked about how to read a political cartoon, try it yourself. Here is a cartoon from a recent edition of our school newspaper. Use this organizer to answer questions about this cartoon. The teacher then passes out the organizer and students begin to work.

Notice that this teacher is using the same resources as the previous teacher. Sometimes, mistakes occur not because of the resources you use but how you use them. This teacher made the common mistake of failing to clearly explain how the visual cue relates to the critical content. She did not give students the opportunity to understand the essential steps of reading a political cartoon.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Secondary Example-Storytelling**

**Example:**

In the secondary example of using storytelling to identify critical content, we’re listening in on an interventionist who supports ELLs and other struggling students.

I want to tell you a story about how reading changed my life. When I was young, I didn’t like to read that much. I didn’t find books I liked until I was a sophomore in high school. Some of you may be like I was then. Somehow that year, I encountered two books that really got me into reading in such a way that I couldn’t stop. I guess I would have never considered going to college or becoming a teacher if I hadn’t discovered how wonderful reading was. My first book was **The Godfather**. Some students are laughing at the title. I know you’re finding it hard to believe that your sweet, gently teacher could fall in love with reading by such a gory book. But it grabbed me. The second book that really got my attention was **Gone with the Wind**. It was filled with Civil War history and romance. Neither of these books will be on your reading list this year, but that’s ok. Sometimes you just need to find a book that you want to read. Don’t stop trying to find that one. It will change your life when you do.

This story illustrates to students the need to find stories that interest them in wanting to practice reading to increase proficiency. The teacher gave a couple examples, and then tied the story together at the end by referring back to the critical content of increasing proficiency by finding stories that interest them.

**Non-example:**

The secondary non-example of storytelling features the same teacher telling the story slightly differently.

I want to tell you a story about how reading changed my life. When I was young, I didn’t like to read much. I didn’t find books I liked until I was a sophomore in high school. Some of you may be like I was then. Somehow that year, I encountered a book that really got me into reading in such a way that I couldn’t stop. I guess I would have never considered going to college or becoming a teacher if I hadn’t discovered how wonderful reading was. My first book was the Godfather. Some of the students were laughing at the title. I know you’re finding it hard to believe that your sweet, gentle teacher could fall in love with reading from such a gory book, but it grabbed me. The teacher then describes in detail the plot of **The Godfather**, which takes ten minutes of class time because of all the questions the students ask. The teacher ends the story with: This book will not be on your reading list this year, but that’s ok. Sometimes you just need to find a book that you want to read. Don’t stop trying to find that one. If will change your life when you do.

The teacher in this non-example is haring her love of reading, but makes the mistake of telling a story that is too long for students to stay focused on the critical content. Although this version of the story contains the same critical content as the first, many students may miss it since it was not the central focus of this story. The plot of **The Godfather** was.

**Identifying Critical Content**

**Secondary Examples-Using What Students Already Know**

**Example:**

The secondary example is based on the following learning target: develop and use a model of the earth-sun system to describe the cyclic patterns of seasons.

Today, we’re going to discuss what we know about the seasons of the year. As you tell me what you know, I’m going to write it down on the board. When we finish writing down what we know, we will then figure out if what we believe about the seasons matches the correct scientific knowledge.

As her students share what they believe, the teacher develops the following list:

* We have seasons because of how far away the earth is from the sun. In the summer we’re close to the sun and in the winter we’re far away from the sun.
* I know the earth tilts, and I think it tilts closer to the sun in the summer and far away from the sun in the winter.
* The earth is constantly moving, and that causes day and night. In the summer there are longer days, and in the winter the days are shorter.

The teacher quickly realizes that her students have several misconceptions about the critical content of this learning target. The teacher then has the students in small groups develop and use a model to describe the cyclic patterns of seasons. She tells the students that the model needs to demonstrate the earth’s rotation on its axis as well as the planet’s orbit around the sun. She helps students focus on which hemisphere gets more direct light at different positions of the earth’s orbit. Students will then decide whether the statements on the board are true or false and explain why using the model.

This example targets two actions. After determining that students in the class were unable to identify the relationship between critical content (seasons and the hemispheres receiving direct and indirect solar energy), the teacher had an activity ready to help students develop a mental model for this critical content. By having the students develop the model themselves, the teacher allows students to form their own mental images from the experience of using the physical model.

**Non-example:**

The secondary non-example teacher believes that if students have misconceptions, they shouldn’t be discussed in class. She feels the other students might be confused by the incorrect answers mentioned in class. She instead starts class by having students read a short piece of text that explains rotation and orbit. Then she asks two students to come to the front and act as the sun and the earth as she talks through the cause for the seasons.

In both of these activities in the non-example, the students are passive learners. Neither activity requires that students demonstrate they know what content is critical. The teacher does not check that students understand the relationship between the critical content, nor does she ensure that students have developed their own mental models for the cause of seasons.