



THE TEACHER'S TOOLBAG

The beginning of a new school year brings with it both the evaluation and resetting of goals and the introduction of new goals. With this fresh start, students, parents and teachers anticipate progress and in many instances a “better” year than previous ones. The factors that influence educational outcomes for our children are now well documented. Many of these are outside the teacher’s sphere of influence, for example the family’s socio-economic status, but sadly in some cases these are used as excuses for poor student progress. Particularly in the new year, teachers should consider those things that they **can** change, looking into the set of attitudes, knowledge, techniques and practical resources in their “teacher tool bag” which will lead to the best teaching and learning outcomes possible.



REMINDERS FOR GOOD TEACHING PRACTICE

- Be positive in your interactions with students.
 - Listen with interest and compassion showing students that you enjoy their company.
 - Avoid making excuses for unsatisfactory learning progress.
 - Instead, reflect on the content of what you are teaching and your delivery of instruction.
 - Monitor the pace and order of your instruction, matching it with your knowledge of students’ strengths and weaknesses.
 - Remember that teaching is not testing.
 - Use appropriate questions. *
 - Wait after talking! This has been shown to have a positive influence on classroom atmosphere and on student participation. *
- * See Newsletter No. 25 Questions – the key to learning. (October 2008)
- Provide first hand experiences for students and support learning with the use of visual/concrete aids and props.
 - Be passionate about words, stimulating students’ interest in their meaning and use.
 - Talk about your own thoughts and feelings, modelling the use of vocabulary, which describes these. For example, *decided, planned, remembered; anxious, elated, disappointed.*
 - Teach explicitly.
 - Activate the students’ background knowledge.
 - Teach in a strategic manner.
 - Encourage students to ‘elaborate’ on what they have learnt.
 - Acknowledge cultural influences.

EXPLICIT TEACHING

Explicit teaching is student centred. It implies that teachers know what is important for their students to learn and that they then take steps to talk about this with them. In other words,

explicit teaching requires the teacher to “share the map” of teaching, rather than the student having to guess and “get inside the teacher’s head” to establish the purpose of learning. (My Read <http://www.myread.org/index.htm>). Explicit teaching does not just involve clear directions or sharing the learning goals. It involves assessment of what students know, as well as planning for and implementing the steps involved in achieving the teaching and learning goals. Explicit teaching also allows opportunities for practice, interaction and review so that students become firmly grounded on one step before moving to the next. The principled approach of explicit teaching, from assessment, through to planning, implementation and review, is particularly suited to literacy instruction. Explicit teaching is “an approach that clearly explicates and maintains the ‘what, the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of any given lesson.” (My Read www.myread.org) Explicit teaching is also one way a teacher can help their students achieve an understanding of “the big picture” of a topic. Facts and data are important to remember but only if the student can also ‘see’ how they are placed within a context or framework of understanding.

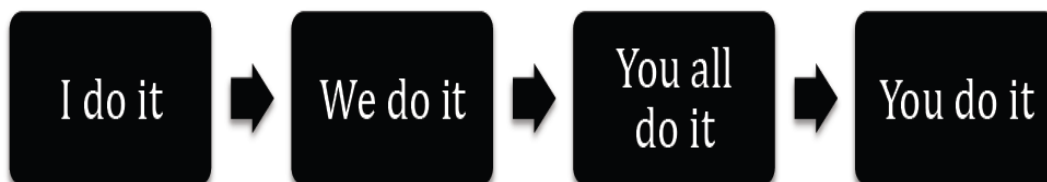
ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

We can make sense of new information only if we can link it in some way to what we already know or are familiar with. As part of the teaching process, effective teachers find ways to activate student’s background knowledge. They then use strategies to link or ‘anchor’ the new information to what students already know. The use of an analogy strategy can help students use something they know or understand to connect with the new information. For example: familiarity with a chocolate-coated caramel may assist in understanding the layers of the earth. Keith Lenz and Edwin Ellis, in their work with middle school and senior students in inclusive settings, talk about the importance of making “real world connections” when teaching major concepts.

STRATEGIC INSTRUCTION

A number of researchers and writers stress the importance of encouraging “meta-cognitive” abilities in students. That is, the ability to consciously think about and reflect on their learning. The Strategic Instruction Model (SIM) was developed at the University of Kansas. It contains a wealth of information about helping students become more strategic, and how teachers can make complex information more understandable, meaningful and memorable.

Edwin Ellis, also one of the original team in Kansas, has developed “Makes Sense Strategies”. Below is one of the simple but effective frameworks all teachers should have in their ‘tool bag’ - the ability to explicitly model and scaffold the use of the strategy so that all students learn to apply it.



In the busy classroom it can sometimes be tempting to jump from Box 1 (the teacher’s demonstration of the use of the strategy) to Box 4 (where the students initiate and use the strategy on their own) or even going straight to Box 4 - assuming that all students are ready. Practice takes different forms – guided practice, group practice, paired practice and individual

practice. All are important but only individual practice will result in mastery. All students, not just those with special needs, benefit from the extra, guided support.

For more information about these approaches visit LD on line and the links to writers mentioned in the resource section.

ELABORATION

Even when we have been able to take in and comprehend new concepts or information at the time of instruction, this knowledge may not “stick” and may not be available to be used later unless we “do something with it”. This process of taking in information (either through listening or reading) and then cognitively “re-working” it and changing its format, without altering the “essence”, is referred to as **elaboration**. Without elaboration, information is unlikely to be integrated into our knowledge or recalled at a later date.

Teachers can plan a variety of tasks to help students elaborate:

- Predict what other information might also relate to the topic.
- Pose questions that you want to ask or that you could answer about the topic.
- Visualize or form images about the information or events.
- Create a mnemonic to assist recall of information.
- Select key words that remind you of information or understandings.
- Summarize the ideas.
- Prioritize what you have learned, from the main idea to 2 or 3 important aspects.
- Re-word or paraphrase a particular piece of information.
- Draw a response to what you have learned.
- Use a graphic organizer to record knowledge.
- Build a model that demonstrates understanding of a topic.

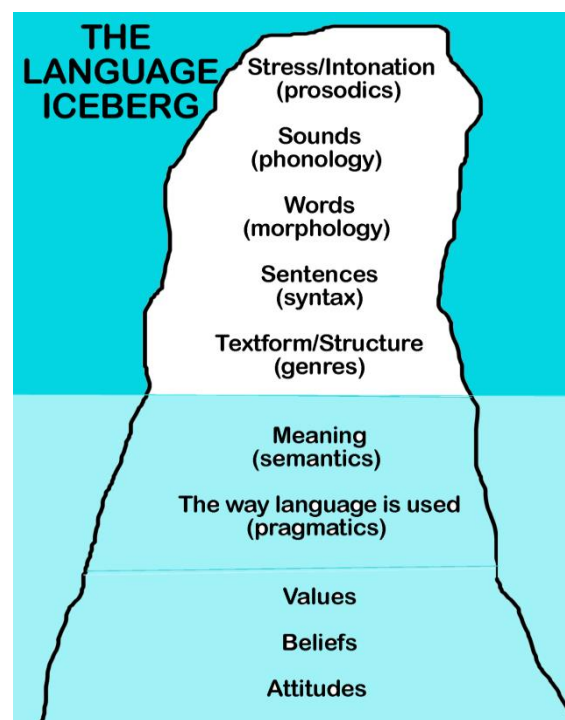
The choice and effectiveness of strategy use will depend on the learning task and also on the age of the children. Teachers need to support students to try different strategies and encourage them to talk about how these helped or didn't help.

CULTURAL ISSUES

As well as reminders, strategies and resources, the teacher's tool bag contains other somewhat intangible elements in the areas of beliefs, attitudes and values. Although these are often hidden, they will still markedly influence the atmosphere in the classroom, the relationships between students and teachers and the teaching and learning that takes place. Konigsberg and Collard (2000) described these as being below the waterline in what they termed the “language iceberg”.

See diagram (right).

The meaning of the language that we use, our choice of words, the cohesion of our sentences and the expression in our voice will be influenced greatly by our underlying viewpoints.



Adapted from Konigsberg and Collard (2000).

In our teacher 'tool bag' we must have the means by which we can examine our educational, social and cultural bias. This is not easy as one's cultural perspective or bias is often unspoken. The cultural mismatch may be reflected in our inappropriate expectations of students or in our lack of understanding of the expectations of others. It may also be behind our judgements of 'undesirable' behaviours, such as the student's reluctance to attempt certain tasks, or perform in front of an audience.

Attending professional seminars, reading research studies and journal articles or having discussions with teaching colleagues will promote ongoing learning and raise our awareness. Teachers interested in pursuing discussion of cultural difference and diversity with their students in grades 5 to 10 will find useful information from the Innovative and Dynamic Educational Activities for Schools (IDEAS) website.

An awareness of what lies beneath what we say to our students and their families as we interact with them so regularly, will mean that we can better use our own language to build bridges and assist teaching and learning. There is an amusing little book called "Duck! Rabbit!" by Rosenthal and Lichtenheld, which highlights two different ways of viewing the same thing. It reminds us that cultural differences are not 'right' or 'wrong'; they are just different. We need to work to develop our own self-awareness and be ready to accept the possibility of difference in others.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

<http://www.myread.org> (Strategies for teaching reading in the middle years).

Konigsburg, P. and Collard, G. (2000) Figure 1. The Language Iceberg. In Ways of Being, Ways of Talk. Department of Education and Training (Western Australia) p.91

Innovative and Dynamic Educational Activities for Schools (IDEAS) on the ACSA website

http://www.acsa.edu.au/pages/images/ideas_developing.pdf

Keith Lenz – Associate Professor, School of Education, University of Kansas. Center for Research on Learning. <http://www.kucrl.org/>

Strategic Instruction Model. New Horizons for Learning.

http://www.marthalakecov.org/~building/strategies/graphic_tools/lenz.htm

Edwin Ellis – Professor, Special Education, Department of Special Education and Multiple Abilities, University of Alabama. Numerous research articles as well as ebook articles. See below. LD on line. <http://www.ldonline.org/> Searching for the name Edwin Ellis brings up 10 relevant articles for teachers supporting students in learning strategies including the following titled Watering Up the Curriculum for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities.

Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld. (2009) Duck! Rabbit! Chronicle Books

Brent, M. and Millgate-Smith, C. (2008) Working Together. Also One in Eleven. Both from ACER Press, Melbourne. Ph. 1800 338 402

This article was originally written and published by Elizabeth Love and Sue Reilly in February 2011. It was re-formatted with slight changes by Lucia Smith in September 2012.