Strategram

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Content Enhancement and Literacy

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The links between Content Enhancement and literacy—which seem so clear to us—are not always as evident to those outside the SIM fold. In the past year, we have encountered more than one individual who has questioned our insistence on teaching teachers to use the *Unit Organizer Routine* or the *Concept Comparison Routine* when the school struggled with very real, very urgent literacy needs. What, they demanded, could these planning and teaching routines possibly have to do with improving the reading and writing skills of struggling students? Why weren't we teaching the reading and writing strategies that the students so obviously needed?

Our answers to these challenges often take the form of two-way conversations in which both parties tackle the many complexities surrounding what literacy really means. As these conversations begin, our first objective is to agree upon a goal: What do students need to be able to do to be considered literate? Most school leaders agree that standardized tests require students to be proficient in higher-order processes such as complex thinking, drawing inferences, and summarizing. The standards are geared toward preparing students to be thinkers and problem solvers.

Our conversation moves next toward establishing what each party means by literacy. When we raise the question of literacy with secondary general education teachers, often they think "reading." Further, they associate reading with decoding and associated skills. Understandably, these teachers may not embrace a starring role in literacy improvement. They were drawn to the profession to share their passion for science or social studies, not to teach decoding.

Our definition of literacy, in contrast, is broader than just the ability to recognize words in text. We think of literacy as a composite of processes: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. We now know that these processes are

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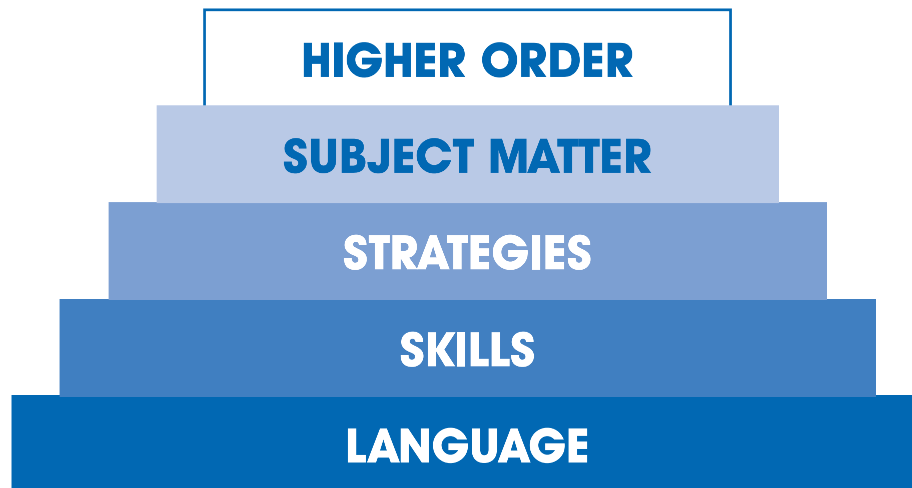
Figure 1



Building Blocks for Content Literacy

reciprocal: You have to consider the complete package, not just a portion of it, in designing fixes to literacy problems in schools.

We use figure 1—the building blocks for content literacy—to illustrate the components of academic competency. Typically, we start at the bottom and describe how each component contributes to improved success for learners. We can turn our explanation on its head, though, to help make clear links between Content Enhancement and literacy. Starting at the top, if we have agreed—as most school leaders will—that our goal is for students to graduate from high school as competent thinkers and problem solvers, what must be in place to allow that to happen? The answer is that students must have solid knowledge and understanding in academic content areas before they can engage in meaningful higher-order thinking. How, then, do students become masters of their subject-matter knowledge? They must be able to effectively apply an array of strategies and skills to learn and master the content taught in their general education classes. What is the foundation upon which students build effective strategies and skills? Language. Indeed, success in each and every area represented by the blocks in this figure is dependent upon students' ability to use language.

Taking one block at time, we can see how Content Enhancement Routines support learning, and we can draw connections among content literacy requirements (each block in figure 1), Content Enhancement, and components of reading comprehension.

Language

Proficient readers quickly recognize the majority of words they encounter in text, and they have rich vocabularies. Each Content Enhancement device supports language acquisition and use through built-in features and the interactive process used to complete them. The Anchoring Table, for example, helps build vocabulary by developing analogies illustrating how new concepts are similar to known concepts.

A key aspect of literacy is the language students use to express relationships among concepts and ideas. Used appropriately, Content Enhancement devices really beef up students' abilities to express higher thinking because the devices help them learn and understand the words they need. Many students, for example, have trouble with higher-order processes because they don't know the language essential for making connections. The line labels in a Concept Diagram help students learn that language. Teachers must model and

Learn more! See page 7

help them practice so they can successfully demonstrate their thinking and language abilities.

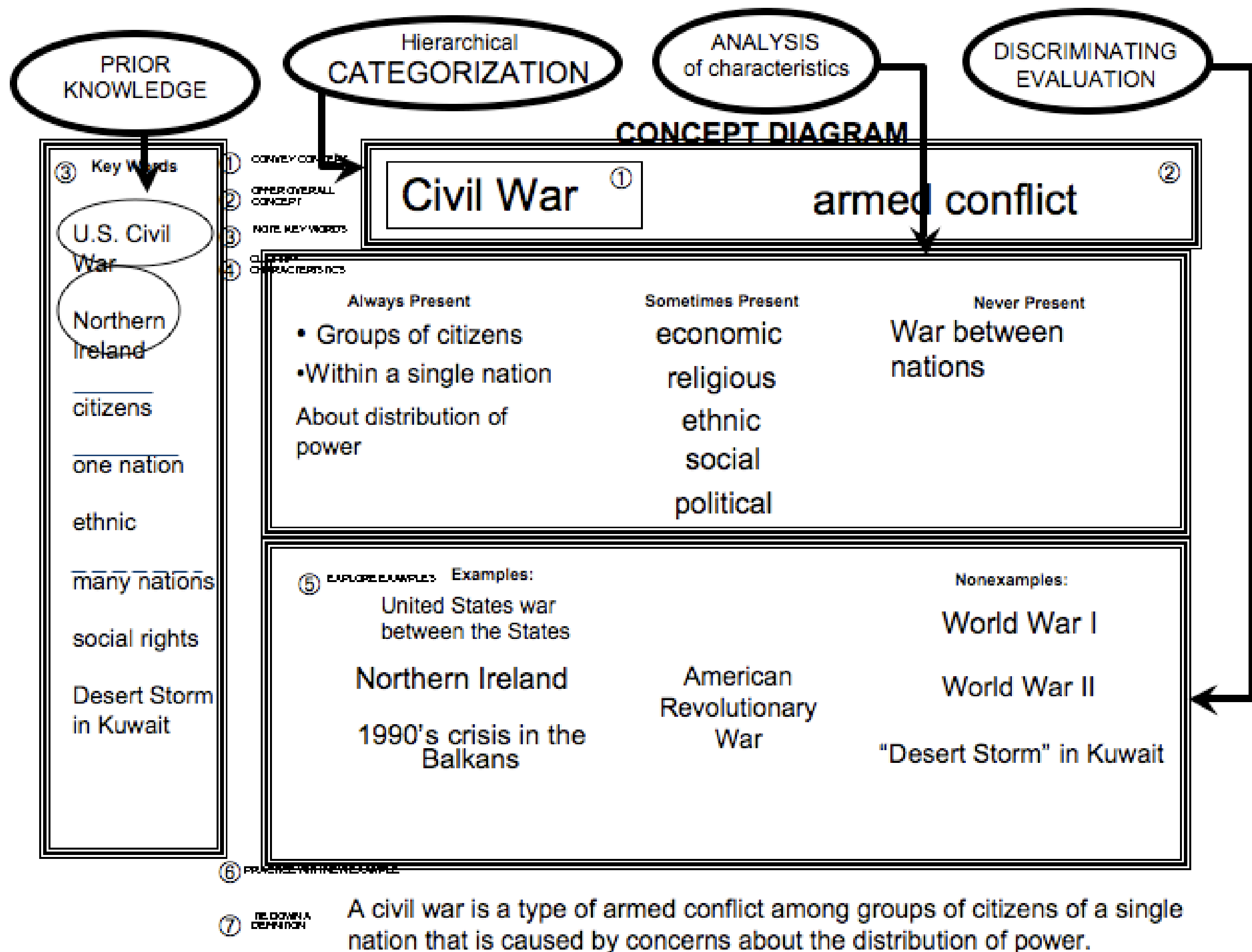
Skills and Strategies

Proficient readers process words fluently and quickly, they know and use a variety of learning strategies, and they use their understanding of the structure of knowlege and text to aid their comprehension. Nearly every academic setting, however, includes some students who do not have the skills or have not developed the strategies necessary to be proficient readers. Content Enhancement Routines provide a way to compensate when students lack skills and strategies while helping students develop the missing skills. The Concept Diagram (figure 2) prompts students to consider hierarchical categorization in the Targeted Concept Name and Overall Concept Name sections. All of the devices encourage students to summarize what they have learned in sections such as Main Idea Answer or Tie Down a Definition. The routines also can reinforce strategy lessons—such as paraphrasing—that students may be learning in other places.

Subject Matter

Proficient readers bring a rich trove of background knowledge to their reading. Students achieve understanding of reading material by integrating what they know with new information presented in a text passage. Content Enhancement Routines help them articulate what they already know. The Key Words list on a Concept Diagram helps students explore prior knowledge. The Anchoring Table's

Figure 2



analogies are effective because students develop an understanding of a new concept based on something they already know and understand.

Higher Order

Beyond the components of proficient reading we've already examined, most school leaders will agree that students are expected to master higher-order literacy demands. Students must be able to analyze and evaluate information, justify a conclusion, and solve problems. Further, these demands are not content-specific. A look at state standards will uncover terms such as "compare," "contrast," and "reasoning" common to all subject areas.

Here, too, Content Enhancement Routines provide support and guidance that can help students strengthen these skills. The Question Exploration Guide's Problem-Solution-Effect section builds comprehension of critical ideas and patterns through problem analysis. The Examples and Nonexamples sections of the Concept Diagram prompt discriminating evaluation.

A FRAMEWORK FOR LITERACY IMPROVEMENT

Clearly, content-area instruction plays a significant role in improving literacy levels of students. Effective content instruction builds critical background knowledge and vocabulary, compensates for limited literacy levels, supports and guides students as they apply literacy skills to content, and provides structural supports for emerging literacy strategies. Content Enhancement can be one part of this picture. In our work, we paint the broader picture as a framework called the Content Literacy Continuum™ (CLC), a tiered system spanning lesser to greater intensity of instruction and involving many teachers in different roles.

Content Enhancement fits at the broadest, least intense CLC level, where the goal is to ensure that students pick up critical knowledge despite their literacy levels. Teachers identify the most important content and, especially when the material is difficult, "dress it up" in a way that's easier to learn.

The remaining levels of the continuum provide increasingly intense instruction and support for students who still struggle. At level 2, teachers embed strategies in content classes. Level 3 becomes much more intense in terms of strategy instruction, and instructional methodology becomes more direct and more explicit. Some students receive intensive skill instruction at level 4, and a few need therapeutic instruction, perhaps with a speech-language pathologist, at level 5.

CLC closely correlates with the building blocks of academic competency:

CLC Level 1 = Subject Matter

CLC Level 2 and 3 = Strategies

CLC Level 4 = Skills

CLC Level 5 = Language

If those levels and building blocks are integrated successfully—and if attention to developing and reinforcing language runs throughout—we can put students in a position to successfully demonstrate their abilities to think, evaluate, compare, contrast, analyze, and meet requirements of their state standards.

A key point illustrated throughout this article—from the building blocks for academic competency to the role of Content Enhancement to the levels of the CLC—is that responsibility for successfully addressing literacy needs of struggling readers is not limited to the reading teacher. If we're going to successfully respond to the problems of adolescent literacy, we need to have all teachers—and all the different areas of expertise they represent—involved and emphasizing different elements of language acquisition in an orchestrated and coordinated way.

To the general education teachers who protest that they have no interest in teaching decoding, we say: We want you to remain immersed in the academic domain of your choice. We also want you to teach in such a way that students build background knowledge, vocabulary, and understanding of the structure of knowledge and information. When you're teaching students to compare and contrast in your science class—and so are the social studies and math teachers in their subject-specific ways—you're making a huge contribution to the development of proficient readers. Content Enhancement is our way of helping you do this successfully.

Diagrams to help students understand verbs

Bonita Cox, a SIM Professional Developer from North Carolina, has developed a series of verb "family" diagrams to help students understand how irregular verbs work.

The diagrams have been a hit with students and teachers alike. Students who have been introduced to these diagrams have seen improvements in their writing. Bonita gives the completed diagram to students as depicted here or provides a blank grid (verbs removed) that she and the students then fill in together. "To make the learning more fun," Bonita says, "I like to substitute specific names for the pronouns used." The students love using their names, schools, colleges, and places they enjoy eating.

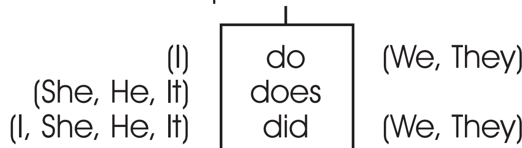
"I usually use the 'I do,' 'we do,' and 'you do' method," she says. "Generating sentences given these sorts of examples makes the practice more fun."

Bonita's students share the sentences they create on a whiteboard or Smartboard. She has them identify the nouns and verbs, and the class checks for accuracy.

Bonita used these diagrams when teaching the *Sentence Writing Strategy* in a 10th-grade English class. The classroom teacher is convinced that the combination led directly to improved scores for ESL and at-risk students on a mandatory state writing assessment. Bonita also has shared these with elementary teachers and with general education teachers whose students she works with individually on reading.

Here, Bonita shares diagrams for "to do," "to have," and "to be."

The "to do" verb family



those that are singular-----------------and---------------- **those that are plural**

(I) do
(She, He, It) does
(I, She, He, It) did

(We, They) do
(We, They) did

and can further be divided into

those that are present tense ---- and ------**that which is past tense**

(I) do
(She, He, It) does

(I, She, He, It) did

and can further be divided into

that which is present tense ------ and ------**that which is past tense**

(We, They) do

(We, They) did

Developed by Bonita Cox, 2005; Revised 2007

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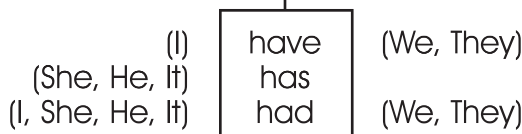
Got a SIM tip, activity, or suggestion for the classroom?
E-mail jtollefson@ku.edu

The "to have" verb family

is made up of these members



which can be divided into

those that are singular-----------------and---------------- **those that are plural**

(I) have
(She, He, It) has
(I, She, He, It) had

and can further be divided into

those that are ---- and ------**that which is**
present tense **past tense**
(I) have
(She, He, It) has
(I, She, He, It) had

(We, They) have
(We, They) had

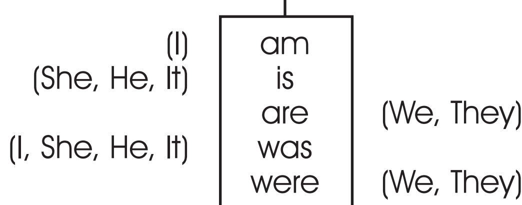
and can further be divided into

that which is ------ and ------**that which is**
present tense **past tense**
(We, They) have
(We, They) had

Developed by Bonita Cox, 2005; Revised 2007

The "to be" verb family

is made up of these members



which can be divided into

those that are singular-----------------and---------------- **those that are plural**

(I) am
(She, He, It) is
(I, She, He, It) was

and can further be divided into

those that are ---- and ------**that which is**
present tense **past tense**
(I) am
(She, He, It) is
(I, She, He, It) was

(We, They) are
(We, They) were

and can further be divided into

that which is ------ and ------**that which is**
present tense **past tense**
(We, They) are
(We, They) were

Developed by Bonita Cox, 2005; Revised 2007

Learn more about Content Enhancement and Literacy

Keith Lenz, Janis Bulgren, Don Deshler, and Barb Ehren presented "The Link Between Content Enhancement and Literacy" during the 2007 International SIM Conference. You may purchase a DVD of their presentation. Complete this form and send it with your payment information to KU-CRL, 1122 West Campus Road, Room 517, Joseph R. Pearson Hall, Lawrence, KS 66045-3101.

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❍ Content Enhancement & Literacy DVD: $10 (includes shipping & handling)

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❍ Check (payable to KU-CRL; enclosed)

❍ Purchase Order #: ______________________

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❍ Personal Card ❍ Business Card

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E-mail your suggestions for improving this site to jtollefson@ku.edu.

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January 17-18, 2008
Florida PD Update
Altamonte Springs, Fla.
Contact: Mary Little
(projcentral@mail.ucf.edu)

January 31-February 2, 2008
Instructional Coaching Institute
University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kan.
Contact: crl@ku.edu

February 4-6, 2008
Coaching Classroom Management
Eldridge Hotel, Lawrence, Kan.
Contact: crl@ku.edu

February 21-23, 2008
SIM SE Conference
Francis Marion Hotel, Historic District, Charleston, SC
Reservations: 843.722.0600 or 877.756.2121 by January 20, 2008
Contact: Jerri Neduchal
(jerrinsisinc@aol.com)

June 18-21, 2008
SIM Institute: SIM Reading & Writing Strategies
Burge Union, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kan.
Contact: crl@ku.edu

www.kucrl.org/institutes

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New online

Virtual Conference

More videos from the most recent Instructional Coaching Conference have been added to the "virtual conference" page of instructionalcoach.com/conference.

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