

The Lesson Organizer Routine

— Improving Performance in Academically Diverse Classes —

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KU-CRL

Over the past several years, *Strategram* has included several articles on specific teaching routines related to how to teach content in regular classroom settings characterized by academic diversity among students. These teaching routines are the products of a line of research that scientists at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning have called Content Enhancement.

One of the newest Content Enhancement teaching routines is called **The Lesson Organizer Routine**. The Lesson Organizer Routine focuses on how teachers can "frame" a lesson for students. By framing a lesson with the Lesson Organizer Routine, teachers help students see the "big picture" of the lesson. Specifically, the Lesson Organizer Routine is used to:

- (a) understand the main idea of the lesson;
- (b) relate the lesson to students' background knowledge;
- (c) understand how the lesson is structured and the information is organized;
- (d) distinguish the most important parts of the lesson content from the less important; and
- (e) understand the tasks and expectations associated with lessons.

The Lesson Organizer Routine is launched at the beginning of the lesson and then is used throughout and at the end of the lesson. There are three components that are incorporated into The Lesson Organizer Routine and contribute to its success with an academically diverse

group of students. First, a visual device, called the **Lesson Organizer**, is drafted by the teacher before class begins and a blank copy is presented to students. This device is jointly completed by the teacher and students to chart the direction of the lesson. The teacher uses the draft that has been prepared ahead of time as a guide, but allows student experiences, interests, skills, and knowledge to shape the ultimate direction of the lesson. Second, a set of **Linking Steps** are used by the teacher to help students understand important aspects of the lesson. Third, a **Cue-Do-Review Sequence** provides an overall structure for how the Lesson Organizer and Linking Steps are embedded in the lesson. Each of these components of the Lesson Organizer Routine are described in the following sections.

The Lesson Organizer. Each section of the Lesson Organizer is designed to contain specific types of information. The Lesson Organizer graphically presents: (1) the lesson topic; (2) a paraphrase of the main idea of the Lesson Topic; (3) important lesson relationships; (4) important task-related strategies that might be used to learn the content of the lesson; (5) unit or general background information that might serve as a backdrop for comprehension; (6) a simple map showing one way of representing the important parts of the lesson's content; (7) questions that each student should be asking to check comprehension throughout the lesson; (8) the tasks that will be required to learn the content of the lesson; and (9) a challenge question. An example of a completed Lesson Organizer is presented in Figure 1 on Page 2.

(continued on page 3)

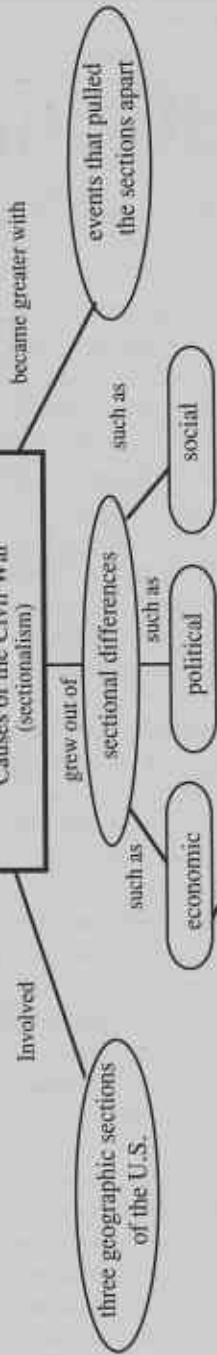
"By framing a lesson with the Lesson Organizer Routine, teachers help students see the 'big picture' of the lesson."

Figure 1

Lesson Organizer

UNIT or BACKGROUND DATE: 11/21 NAME: Ms. Mendez

5



3 Relationships

1 LESSON TOPIC

4 Task-Related Strategies

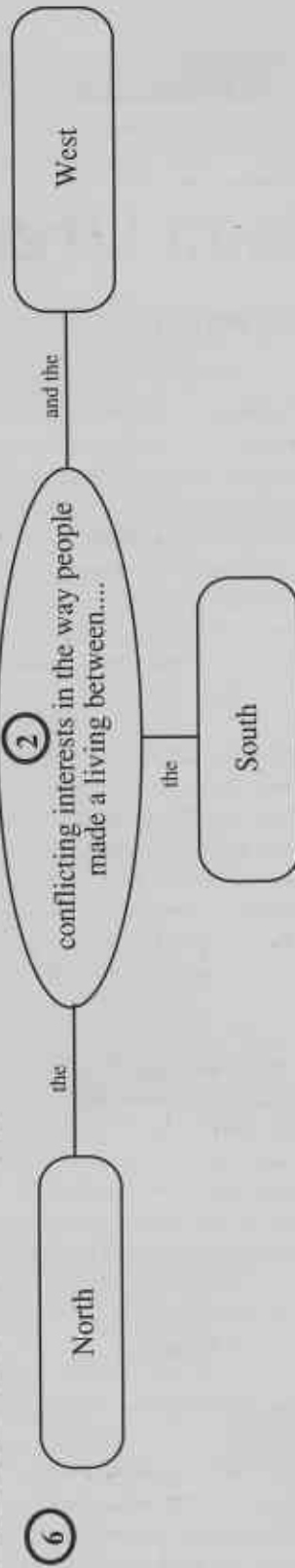
compare / contrast

Economic Differences

self-questioning

Lesson Content Map

is about



6

2

9 What are the types of economic differences that appear between groups of people in a community? Can tension exist?

Self-test Questions 7

Tasks: 8

1. What were the economic characteristics of the three sections?
 2. How did the economic similarities and differences fuel the fires of war?
1. First half of class, discuss as group the economic differences.
 2. Second half of class, work in groups to answer the challenge question on page 213 of the text.

(continued from page 1)

The Linking Steps. The Linking Steps are procedures a teacher uses to present the Lesson Organizer to students. The steps listed below are described in the order that several teachers have found to be effective. However, the order in which the steps are completed may vary.

Consolidate Goals involves completing sections 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Lesson Organizer. Students are encouraged to predict the lesson topic, contribute to the creation of the Lesson Topic paraphrase, and predict the types of relationships and learning strategies that might be important in this lesson.

Review Knowledge involves a classroom discussion. None of the sections on the Lesson Organizer are completed during this step. Students are encouraged to suggest topics and experiences that they believe relate to the Lesson Topic.

Assemble Anchors involves completing section 5 of the Lesson Organizer by making a visual map of the critical information generated during the Review Knowledge step. In this step, the teacher sorts through the information that students have generated and visually depicts this information through the construction of a simplified content map with key content-area words. Instead of a content map, the teacher can list key words related to student experiences or stories. Even pictures can be drawn to represent prior knowledge.

Describe & Map the Content involves completing section 6 of the Lesson Organizer. At this point, the content of the lesson is briefly described, and a simple map of the content is provided. Additional information is added to this map as the lesson evolves.

Link to Anchors involves having a class discussion and writing a challenge question at the bottom of section 6. The class discussion focuses on how the content represented in the map is related to the background knowledge visually represented in section 5. A challenge question that helps students link the lesson's content to their lives is posed by the teacher or generated as part of the class discussion. This question is represented in section 9 of the Lesson Organizer in Figure 1 on Page 2. The answer to this question may be discussed at this time in the lesson, during the lesson, or at the end of the lesson.

Explore Questions and Tasks involves completing sections 7 and 8 of the Lesson Organizer. In this step, the teacher either poses a set of questions or helps the class construct critical questions about the content. Students can then monitor their progress in learning by asking themselves these questions. Finally, required tasks that will enable students to answer these questions are listed by the teacher.

The Cue-Do-Review Sequence

The Cue-Do-Review Sequence is the overall structure that is used to introduce the Lesson Organizer Routine, implement the Linking Steps, and check students' understanding of the information presented. In other words, this sequence is used to **CUE** (draw student's attention to the use of the Lesson Organizer), **DO** (involve students in the process of using the Lesson Organizer to target and structure critical information at the beginning of and during the lesson), and **REVIEW** (check the effectiveness of the Lesson Organizer Routine throughout the lesson). The table represented in Figure 2 on pages 4 and 5 illustrates how all of the components of the Lesson Organizer Routine might be integrated as part of a lesson on the Causes of the Civil War.

Conclusion

Experience with the Lesson Organizer Routine has indicated that the following factors are important for improving the performance of students in academically diverse classes:

- a. The routine is explicitly introduced to the whole class in a separate

(continued on page 8)

Strategram

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Figure 2

FRAMEWORK FOR LESSON ORGANIZER ROUTINE

CUE

*"Today we're going to begin with a Lesson Organizer to help you understand how today's lesson is related to our unit on the Causes of the Civil War. You will need to construct several parts of your own organizers, and you will need to participate actively in the discussion."
(The teacher distributes Lesson Organizers with the Unit or Background Section filled in.)*

DO

<p>Step #1:</p> <p>Consolidate Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Name the topic.• Paraphrase the topic.• Target key relationships.• Identify task-related strategies.	<p><i>"We're going to be looking today at the economic differences between the three sections of the United States as one of the causes of the Civil War. (Section 1 is filled in.) As you will see, the differences in the ways people made a living in the three sections caused a great deal of conflict. (Section 2 is filled in.) As we talk about these differences, you will need to think about how the ways people made a living in the three sections are the same and how they are different. You will need to compare and contrast them. (Section 3 is filled in.) You will need to continually ask yourself questions to compare and contrast the sections." (Section 4 is filled in.)</i></p>
<p>Step #2:</p> <p>Review Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review topics of previous lessons or experiences.• Check understanding of course, unit, and chapter concepts.• Construct stories and expectations to firm up poor background knowledge and correct misunderstandings.	<p><i>"Let's check to make sure we're all together. The major cause of the Civil War was sectionalism. What were the sections? What were the Characteristics of the North? Of the South? Of the West?" (Teacher continues to ask questions, elicit answers, and clarify any misunderstandings.)</i></p>
<p>Step #3:</p> <p>Assemble Anchors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visually show organization of previously learned knowledge.• Visually link lesson topic to reviewed knowledge.	<p><i>"As you can see, I've already put the Unit Map on your organizers. (Teacher points to Section 5.) We finished the portion of the map yesterday where we talked about the general characteristics of the three sections. From what you know, which part of the Unit Map are we focusing on today? Right, we'll be focusing on this area on the sectional differences, and more specifically on the economic differences. This arrow shows where our lesson fits in the bigger picture of our unit." (Arrow is drawn.)</i></p>

Figure 2 (cont.)

DO

<p>Step #4:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Describe and Map the Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name the basic parts of the lesson. • Explain and clarify concepts and terms. • Visually show how the parts connect. 	<p><i>"Let's map the content of today's lesson. We're going to talk about how the way people made a living in a section conflicted with the interests of the people in the other sections. We are going to look at the North, the South, and the West. (Section 6 is filled in) In each section we'll talk about how people made a living and what their interests were."</i></p>
<p>Step #5:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Link to Anchors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link new information to background knowledge through analogies and examples. • Explain the benefits of understanding the information. 	<p><i>"Let's think for a minute about how this lesson might relate to our lives today. What kinds of differences do we see in communities in terms of the ways people make a living? Yes, we see some people who are farmers, some people who operate big factories, and some people who sell things. The different interests of these people cause tension among them. For example, the big factories pollute our air, water, and earth. These are all things that are important for farmers to do their job well. Thus, we see tensions between these people today. Understanding today's lesson and how these kinds of tensions created a war might help us to understand how to prevent war in the future."</i></p>
<p>Step #6:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Explore Questions and Tasks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List self-test questions for targeted relationships. • Describe and list task and work experiences. 	<p><i>"What questions would you like to be able to answer at the end of today's lesson? (Teacher elicits questions and writes them in Section 7.) These are all good questions. I think we can cover this information during the first half of class; then, we'll discuss the economic differences. During the second half of class, you will work in your cooperative groups to answer the challenge question on page 213 of your textbooks. (Sections 8 & 9 are filled in.) I'll expect you to work the question through as a group, but each of you will need to put the answer into your own words and hand in a paragraph to me at the end of class."</i></p>

REVIEW

"So, who can tell me what today's lesson was about? How does it relate to the unit we've been studying? How does it relate to our concept of sectionalism? Why is this important to understand? As we proceed through the rest of the lesson, take notes on your Lesson Organizers. For each section, list the ways people made a living and their interests. Keep your Lesson Organizer in your notebook behind the Unit Organizer for this unit."

SIM - PROFILES IN AMERICA

EL PASO HIGH SCHOOL - EL PASO , TEXAS

A unique program to teach learning strategies is being conducted at El Paso High School in El Paso, Texas. In order to understand the rationale of the current program, it is necessary to understand the community and the history of the SIM experience at this unique high school.

EL Paso Profile

El Paso is the largest minority community in the United States with approximately eighty percent Hispanic population. El Paso has a population of over .5 million. The sister city of Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico has a population of over 1.5 million. The educational impact of living this close to a third world country is hard for most Americans to fathom. Perhaps the following facts will promote understanding:

Approximately eighty percent of El Paso High's student body have failed at least one class and/or some portion of the state exit exam.

Close to sixty percent of the student body are on free or reduced lunch programs.

A large number of the students live in Mexico and walk to the high school each day.

The second poorest zip code in the United States is in El Paso.

El Paso has the highest percentage of citizens under the age of twenty-five than any city in the United States.

The ability to speak Spanish is a job requirement for ninety percent of the jobs available in El Paso.

SIM 1992-93 Profile

During the summer of 1992, Liz Dominquez and Lee Daniell, teachers at El Paso High School, were sent by their school district to the Center for Research on Learning for initial Learning Strategies training. Liz is a speech/drama/English teacher. Lee is a special education teacher. The two teachers teamed together to work on an inclusion project during the 1993 school year. Approximately nine tenth-grade special education students were placed in Liz's regular education English II class. None of the students had ever been mainstreamed for English. All students were learning disabled. Liz primarily was the the contact teacher and Lee was the methods instructor. Since both teachers has attended an SIM workshop, they had agreed to "take turns" teaching content and strategies. The class was conducted as a pilot project for a year. The following observations were noted at the end of the first year.

1. All students benefited from having two teachers in the classroom.
2. All students benefited from direct strategies instruction.
3. Strategies should be taught in a separate class. Only three of the five strategies were covered and English content suffered in an effort to teach strategies to mastery.

When the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (high school exit exam) test scores were compared, increases were noted in scores achieved after strategies instruction. For the first time, a special education student receiving special education services passed all three sections of the test. Additionally, many students who previously failed classes experienced a high degree of academic success.

While Lee and Liz were doing their thing out in Portable #1, the Campus Improvement Team was investigating a grant for a special program for '93-'94 ninth graders. For several years, the staff had been discussing the possibility of "podding" all ninth graders and mandating an elective in the study skills area. Ninth grade faculty felt that even honors students were ill prepared for instruction. They were not organized, had few academic goals, could not take notes, and seemed to miss a lot of information in lectures. As the news of the success of the pilot project spread, Lee and Liz were approached by the Campus Improvement Team for their assistance in designing the ninth-grade program.

A new mandatory class called Strategies for Academic Success (SAS) resulted. It was the intent of the planning team to require every ninth-grade student to take SAS. In preparation for this, another teacher, Joan Huseth, was trained in

(continued on page 7)

SIM - PROFILES IN AMERICA

(continued from page 6)

Mississippi during the summer of 1993, while Lee and Liz returned to Kansas for advanced training. Because of the size of the ninth-grade enrollment, most of the honors students were taken out of the course for the first semester. This lowered the class size to an average of twenty-three per class assigned to the ninth-grade.

Additionally, the entire class was assigned to two pods. Pod teachers meet at least three times a week to discuss progress and plan instruction. The SAS (SIM) teachers assumed the role of pod facilitators. Collaboration between the strategies teachers and content teachers was terrific. Lee and Liz provide some insight into their venture.

How are we doing? We're treading water at this point. Theoretically, the program should be dynamite! Actually there have been some barriers and road blocks.

1. We're ready to say it is impossible to teach strategies to mastery with twenty-five students in a class. Time constraints do not allow us to do the individual feedback properly. The very students who need the strategies the most were not learning them well enough to generalize. The Obtaining Commitment Stage went out the window with the large classes. There was no choice. They all have to learn it and they don't all want to learn the strategies.
2. Many of our students have experienced an increase in academic success this year due to SAS and the pod. Many of them have habitualized strategic behavior.
3. Mixing special and regular education students for strategies instruction has been wonderful. Peer tutoring does help and pairing for modeling has been a life-saver. Inclusion works for most students. (You may have noticed that we avoided an absolute!)
4. The pod time demands in addition to the strategy time demands were overwhelming to us. The administration has been very supportive and hopes to build a common preparation period for pod teachers as well as individual preparation time.
5. We need more time, more strategies teachers, and/or more paraprofessional help. This becomes expensive. We are a poor school district and our high school is an inner city school. Money is definitely a problem.
6. We want to offer SAS II for those students who need more help. Hopefully, we'll be able to do that.
7. We want to offer SAS Honors for our super scholars. We could probably teach several strategies to mastery with honors students, and we feel it would not be wasting their time.

Although the problems at this point almost overwhelm us, we still feel strategies instruction is an answer to many of our educational problems. We are not going to give up. We're going back to the drawing board. We'll keep you posted.

"Strategies"

A Rhythmic Poem

by

Liz Dominquez, Lee Daniell, and their students at El Paso High School

Strategies, Strategies, that's our game.
Since we've learned strategies
We'll never be the same.

RAP has given us paraphrasing skills.
We'll find the main idea
And eliminate the frills.

SLANT has taught us to participate.
We're better learners now.
Ain't that great!

With tape recorders, it's easy as can be.
We'll analyze our textbooks
One-two-three.

Our posture is awesome, our eye contact too.
We're answering questions
and asking a few.

For writing better, PENS is the trick.
From 14 formulas
We can pick.

PIRATES helps us to take our tests.
Our scores are higher
Better than the rest!

Explore the words, then note them down.
This writing strategy
Is really sound!

Read, remember, abandon, turn back.
Guessing with ACE
Keeps us on track.

Strategies, Strategies, that's our game.
Since we've learned strategies
We'll never be the same.

(continued from page 3)

- lesson, so students can understand how the teacher's use of the routine and their own participation in the routine can markedly improve academic performance;
- b. The routine is used regularly so both the teacher and the students have ample opportunity to become comfortable with it as a learning tool;
 - c. The routine is adapted to meet the unique needs of the students, the personality and teaching style of the teacher, and the content of the course;
 - d. The use of the routine is varied to enhance student motivation;
 - e. The routine is integrated, over time, with the other Content Enhancement routines to create a powerful synergy; and
 - f. Students become actively involved in the routine as partners with the teacher for the purpose of improving learning for all the students in the class.

An important goal associated with the use of the Lesson Organizer Routine and the other Content Enhancement Routines is that students become strategic learners capable of creatively and effectively processing information. In our world of "information explosion," this approach to learning and teaching helps to turn teachers' and students' attention away from what must be *given* to students and helps them realize that students' futures depend on what they can independently learn about the world, now, and in the years ahead. ■

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