

# Teaching: A Very Special Profession

## Bright Moments in Professional life

**Don Deshler**  
KU-CRL

Some of the greatest moments in my professional life have been spent in master teachers' classrooms watching them orchestrate the process of learning. There appears to be something almost magical in the manner in which these masters work with students. More often than not, they seem to weave into their teaching a perfect blend between demanding students to stretch and go beyond what they have previously done and providing the necessary support and encouragement when progress falters. They know their subject matter so well that they can reconstruct and transform it in a way that can be readily understood by all students in the class, the brightest to the most challenged. They recognize the importance of adjusting their instructional time to teach students *both* important curriculum concepts as well as the processes and strategies for thinking about and learning related concepts independent of the teacher. They strive to understand those factors that are unique to each class of students that they teach as well as to *each* student within the class — regardless of the fact that they often are responsible for teaching over 150 students every day.

Clearly, *effective* teaching is one of the most challenging and demanding undertakings known to mankind. What works on one day with one student will totally miss the mark on the next day with a different student, or even the same student! The complex interplay between who we are teaching, what we are teaching, and our skills and sensitivities to the dynamics of our environment greatly influence student growth and motivation, not just for performance on the task at hand, but often for how that student will approach and view

learning and performance in future years.

Since its inception, the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning (KU-CRL) has recognized that regardless of how well a particular learning strategy or other instructional procedure or material is designed or packaged, unless it is in the hands of a teacher who tailors it to meet the unique needs of the students being taught, very little, if any, learning occurs. Thus, central to significant student growth and an enthusiasm for learning is a teacher who understands the teaching process and the important role that a teacher plays in helping students along the path of

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setting and working toward goals. In short, one of the most powerful factors in determining student success is how teachers think about and carry out their role as teacher.

Given the central role that the KU-CRL sees teachers playing in student success, we asked an artist to try to capture the essence of our notions of a master strategy teacher. After CRL staff provided detailed descriptions of successful strategy instruction to artist Michael Bingham, he created a sequence of sketches to reflect what he heard us describe. When he showed us the final product, we felt he had

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effectively depicted, in six simple graphics, many important dimensions of a teacher's role in empowering students to become strategic learners and performers.

**Encourage students to dream and set goals.** It is very important for students to dream and to set their sights on achieving important goals.



Unfortunately, many students who struggle in school, including those with disabilities, often expect very little of themselves and after only a couple of years in school stop dreaming and setting goals. They only see the obstacles and their shortcomings and lose sight of the fact that they *do* have strengths and abilities to learn and are capable of accomplishing important and meaningful things. One of the most important things that teachers can do for their students is to encourage them to dream and set goals that can be achieved through hard and smart (or strategic!) work. Master teachers also are careful not to allow a student's current level of performance or learning problems color their (i.e., the teacher's) impressions of what that student can accomplish. They know that through encouragement, high expectations, and good instruction all students can accomplish significant things. Learning and growth is a long-term process. Hence, it is important for teachers to keep students' attention focused on their goals and to encourage them during difficult times. Master teachers know how important goals are in the learning process. They also know that *all* students can set and reach

meaningful goals and in the process become an independent and productive individuals. They expect that of the students with whom they work, and they see their role in helping students set and work toward goals as one of the most important parts of their role as teacher. An effective way to help students understand the importance of goals is for teachers to share some of their personal or professional goals with students as well as explain how they are working to achieve them. *A model is worth a thousand words!*

**Paint pictures showing how students can be successful.** Master teachers are "picture painters!" They recognize the importance of conveying a clear picture to students



of different tools to use and ways to reach their goals. While students may set goals and very much want to reach them, if they do not have the means to get to their goals, frustration generally results. As teachers size up the goals students have set and their strengths and weaknesses as learners, they attempt to paint a clear picture for students as to a way (or ways) that they can reach their goals. The best pictures are explicit, attractive, and realistic (in terms of time and effort). The intention during this phase of instruction is not to have teachers be totally directive of the ways or tools that students should use, but rather, given the fact that teachers are experienced learners themselves who have an understanding of the learning process for less seasoned students, teachers draw upon this prior knowledge and experience to

get students launched in a productive fashion.

**Show students how to use tools.** While it would be easy for teachers to do the work for students (and often times we do!), it is clearly in the students' best interest for teachers to give them the tools to be successful and to encourage the student to do the work. While this process may not be the most efficient in the short run, it *definitely*



pays the greatest dividends in the long run. During this phase of instruction, teachers take an active role in the learning process by showing students how to use the tools. This may include describing the reason for each tool and why and how it should be used. Initially, instruction tends to be more teacher-mediated but it is definitely done in a partnership with the students because the overriding goal is to have students pick up the majority of the responsibility for the work as quickly as possible. Optimal growth occurs when the teacher achieves a delicate balance between clearly modeling how to use the tools and gradually engaging the student in the process of trying to do so, even if the student's initial attempts are awkward and unpolished. It is through the process of the student engaging in an apprenticeship with the teacher that insights and growth occur.

**Encourage student responsibility for production.** As quickly as possible, master teachers transfer the major responsibility for completing work to students. The instructional goal during this phase is for the learning process to become more student-mediated as opposed to the heavier emphasis on teacher-mediated learning during the previous stage.

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While work still progresses in a partnership between the teacher and students, the intent is to optimize the number of opportunities that students



have to engage in independent practice. The teacher is present to provide encouragement and instructive feedback as students grow toward independence.

**Have students go for their goals.**

As students become more empowered as learners and performers, it is important that they use their new skills and strategies to aggressively pursue their goals. However, when at-risk students have spent a good part of their life believing that they are incapable of reaching goals, they often continue to hold to those beliefs in spite of their new capacity to perform. Teachers need to encourage students to take some risks and use the new tools they have acquired to increase their success. At this point in the learning process, the teachers assumes what has frequently been referred to as the “guide on the side”



role in which they encourage students to be reflective of their own performance, to critically think of ways to improve their work, and to offer encouragement. Overall, however, teachers look for ways to

build independence into students for all aspects of the performance process. *Remember, the overriding goal is creating independent learners and performers.*

**Celebrate successes together.**

Master teachers who have guided students to a point of successful goal achievement make certain that students not only get the rewards for the work done but take time to point

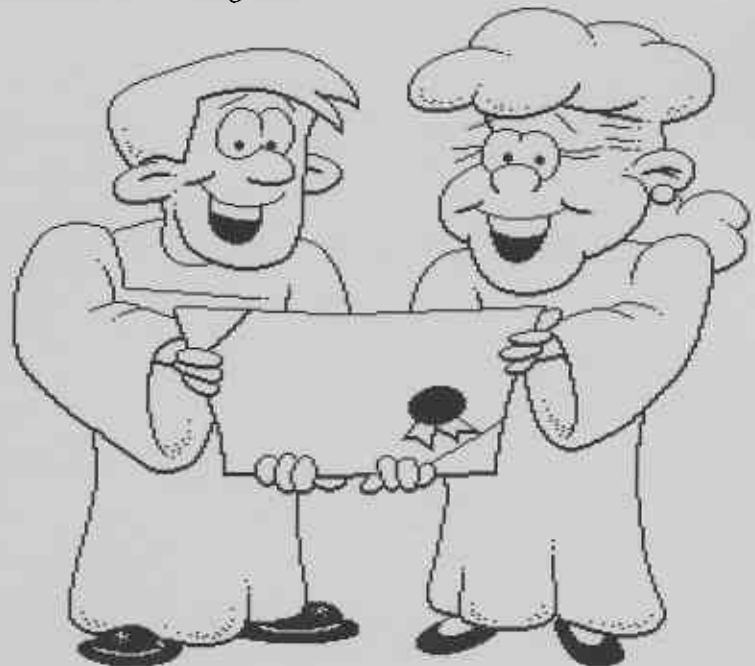


out to the student that the goal was achieved for the following reasons: a goal was set, an intelligent approach (that is, the appropriate strategy or fool) was used in working toward the goal, hard work was done, and a partner (in this case a teacher) was used as a resource during the learning process. It is important that students become aware of the reasons for their success so they will generalize the use of these factors to achieving new

goals or solving other problems in the future. Frequently, at-risk students attribute success to luck or some other outside factor rather than their effective problem solving approach and hard work.

The craft of teaching requires a lifetime of study and refinement. One of the most significant things that all teachers can do in the process of becoming a better teacher is to seriously contemplate the role of teacher. The posture of the KU-CRL has been that one of the major components of a teacher’s role is that of providing an apprenticeship to students. The six sketches above\* capture some of the things that an effective mentor does during the process of apprenticing a student to become an independent learner and performer. When students discover that they can reach meaningful goals they have set, through factors other than luck, a whole new view of the world and their relationship to it opens up to them. To be a part of that process explains why teaching is a very special profession, indeed!

\* These six sketches will now appear on the covers of all new learning strategy manuals that are published by the KU-CRL or Edge Enterprises.

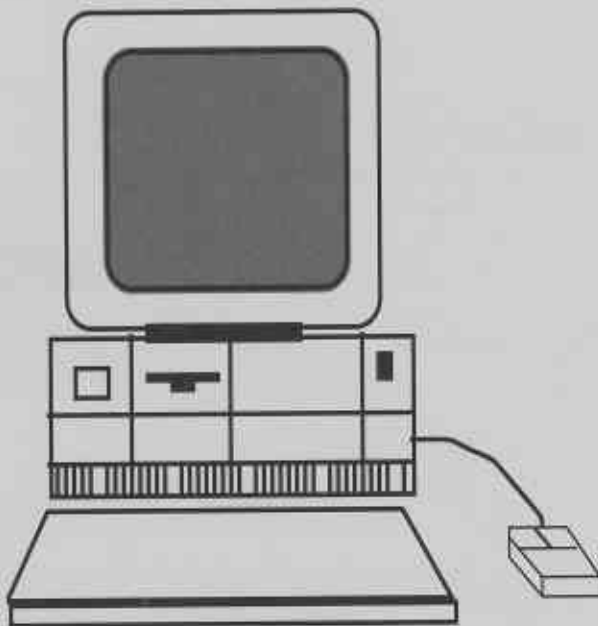


# Using Persuasion To Present the Paraphrasing Strategy

By Emmet C. Murray

Emmett C. Murray, Instructor at St. Croix Camp School for Girls, Sandstone, Minnesota, used the Aldus Persuasion Version 2.1 and 3.0 for the Macintosh computer to provide a new method of presenting the *Paraphrasing Strategy* to small groups of children in a Title 1 Program. Emmett put the cue cards from the manual onto individual slides so that students could view relevant material on either a computer screen or large monitor. Emmett uses a 16-inch monitor, but by increasing the slides size, his method can be used with the new computer projectors as well.

Emmett found that this method allows for



more freedom in the classroom. The teacher is not restricted to the immediate area of the monitor or overhead projector. A remote mouse permits the instructor to walk around the

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classroom, continue his presentation, and at the same time, allows him to proceed to the next slide to consider the next concept or retreat to previous slides to review subject matter already presented. Students can also be put in charge of the mouse and advance the slides, thereby freeing the teacher to help other students.

This is especially helpful to teachers who work in small classrooms where overhead projector images are frequently too large for the screen and bleed from the screen to the wall. Also, teachers at the overhead projector frequently miss some of what is going on in the classroom. This method allows them to circulate as well as keep their attention focused on the students. The remote mouse also helps the teacher to move anywhere in the classroom to provide redirection or reminders to refocus students' attention to the lesson.

Aldus Persuasion also enables the user to sequentially number the slides. When a slide is added to or deleted from the file, the slide numbers in that file are automatically adjusted. This numbering system is especially beneficial

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when there are several groups all starting or stopping in different places each day. The completed slide number can be recorded in the lesson plan each day, thereby providing a complete record of where the students are in the

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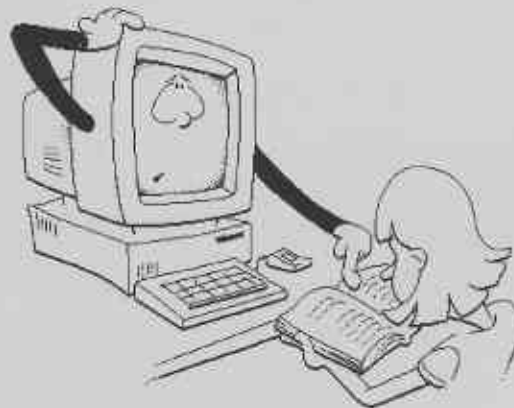
continuum of instruction. There is no longer time wasted looking for the correct transparency.

Emmet teaches the elements of *Paraphrasing Strategy* and the *Self-Questioning Strategy* using the slides during Verbal Practice Stage of instruction. The size of the cue cards can be increased by forty percent so that visibility can be increased. The font, size, background and print background color as well as contrasting colors can be changed to provide organization and variety. For instance, the cue card slides for one day may be created with a yellow background so that the teacher can select all the yellow slides and know that he has all the material for that day's presentation. The background color of the slides can be changed at unspecified intervals so that different contrasting colors could be used to highlight important concepts for the students and to serve as a reminder to the teacher that previous students tended to have difficulty with particular parts of the strategy, or to create special emphasis on particular points. As previously stated the cue cards are numbered so that they are presented in

order. In Emmet's case special effort was made to place one concept on each slide. Teachers know all too well what happens when students have more than one concept available to them at one time. While the teacher is explaining concept one, they are looking at concept two, etc. The Persuasion program helps teachers avoid this problem.

Aldus Persuasion permits flexibility to make modest changes or to correct errors which would not be possible with printed slides. As the teacher uses the slide format he/she becomes more familiar and confident with it. The program also provides the opportunity make some of the word choices that are more familiar to the students' background.

**If there are any further questions you may contact Emmett C. Murray, 503 Washington Street, Sandstone, Minnesota, 55072.**



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## USING *ERROR MONITORING* WITH COMPUTERS

Barb Glaeser, Doctoral student at the Center for Research on Learning, has found that during Writers Workshop activities the *Error Monitoring Strategy* and computers work well together in inclusive classrooms. First, the students were told to compose their writing directly into a word processing program on the computer. They were encouraged to not concern themselves with spacing and spelling. This allowed thoughts to flow easily. Students with very poor psychomotor skills were allowed to dictate their stories to someone who typed their words for them. Then they were responsible for all other steps. After the students completed a first draft, they were taught to use the "Layout function to change the line spacing to 2.0. This allowed them to complete the first step of WRITER: **Write on every other line.** Next, the students were asked to **Read the paper for meaning.** To complete this step of the Strategy, they conferenced with each other and provided input to



improve the piece. Some chose to copy the piece to allow others to write suggestions directly on the text. The students then revised the first draft, making any changes in content needed. The next *Error Monitoring* step, **Interrogate yourself using the COPS Questions**, was done using the *Spell Check function*, and then checking carefully for punctuation and capitalization errors. To make sure the overall look was appropriate, students made sure they had tabbed in each paragraph and checked the margins under the *Layout* function. Once the layout was checked, each student printed two copies, one for himself/herself, and one for a peer or the teacher to edit. The students were instructed to **Take the paper to someone** and ask for feedback. Suggestions were then incorporated

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into the text for the **Execute the final copy** step of the strategy. Last but not least, the students did a final spell check, **Reread the paper**, and printed the final copy.

Whether in a lab or a classroom *Error Monitoring* is perfect for use with computers. Here are some pointers to give to students.

- A. Write your story first without worrying about spelling, editing, or line spacing. Be sure to put your name and date on the paper. Now begin the steps of **WRITER**.
- B. **Write on every other line.**  
Use your software commands to double-space the type. The document should now be spaced correctly.
- C. **Reread your story for meaning.** Check to make sure you have used a variety of sentences using *PENS*. Conference with other students, and use their input.
- D. **Interrogate yourself using the "COPS" Questions.** This is called a "Self-edit."
  1. Use the "Spell Check" to correct as many spelling errors as possible.
  2. Print a copy for yourself for editing. Use a pencil to correct the "COP" errors.
- E. **Take the paper to someone for help.** This is called a Peer edit. Someone else can often find mistakes the author has missed. Ask the peer to use a different colored pencil so that the corrections can be seen easily. Once the self-edit and at least one peer edit are done:
  1. Turn the paper in for a teacher edit, or
  2. Correct as many mistakes as possible, reprint the article or story, and turn it in for a teacher edit.
- F. **Execute the final changes after the paper is returned.** Print out a final copy.
- G. **Reread the paper one more time before turning it in on or before the due date.**

### Strategram

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## A Personal Investment in Learning

Emmett C. Murray

Sandstone, Minnesota

Two years ago, I was teaching the *Paraphrasing Strategy*, and I was working with an at-risk young lady who was experiencing great difficulty learning the elements of a good paraphrase. As I was trying to come up with a way for her to learn the elements of a good paraphrase, I recalled what one of my professors in my graduate school had suggested. He said that if you want your students to become interested in what you are teaching, than give them an investment in that learning. I followed this advice. The next morning I asked this young lady to re-order the elements of good paraphrasing in a way that would make learning easier for her. She did, and the following is what she developed:

**C = Complete thought/Subject and Verb**

**I = In Your Own Words**

**A = Accurate Information**

**O = One General Statement per Paragraph**

**N = New Information**

**U = Useful Information**

**M = Must Make Sense**

This young lady quickly learned the elements of a good paraphrase without difficulty because she had developed a new mnemonic for learning which was meaningful to her. Since that time, many similar young men and ladies have followed her lead and have learned these elements without difficulty. When I tell new students at the beginning of the class, that a former student developed this mnemonic device for learning, they appear to have a new and greater interest in learning the elements of a good paraphrase.

I hope that my sharing this experience will help some of you who may have students who are struggling with learning the elements of a good paraphrase. You can help your students remember the mnemonic letters using the sentence, "Can I Owe yoU Money?" Good Luck!

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