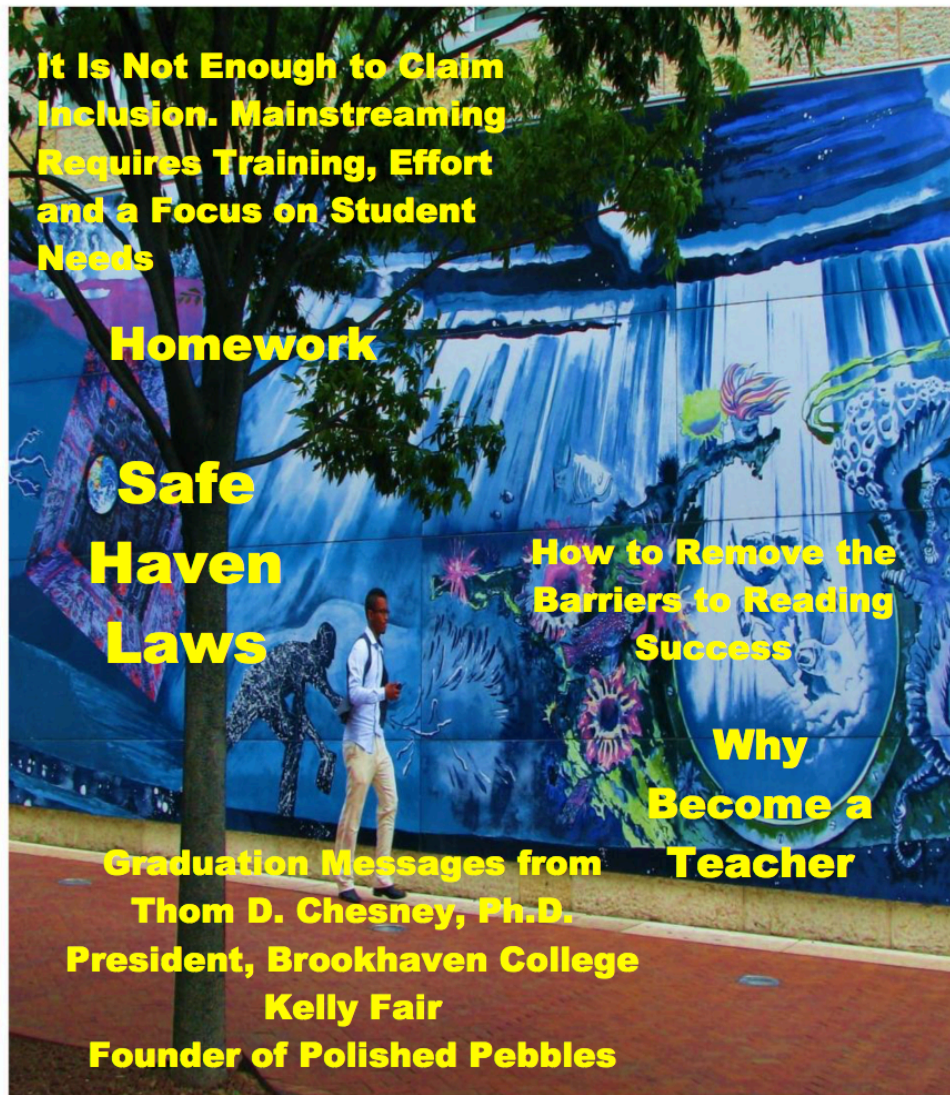


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[2017 Summer Edition of Living Education eMagazine](#)



The Top 5 Strategies Every Teacher Can Easily Use in Any Classroom

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Each day, we walk into our school, go inside our classroom, or arrive at our learning center - and face trying to simply keep our head above water. We all attempt to cover an incredible amount of information in an unrealistic (*often impossible*), limited amount of time. Instruction in today's educational system is typically delivered in days filled with multiple things to do and just not enough time in which to do them. But, most importantly, we show up each day *trying to make a difference* with the students we serve in education.

Education has become very complicated. We need to simplify, simplify, simplify. This will allow us to gain more control of our instruction, focus on doing a handful of meaningful things, and do them not only well, but *consistently* in our classrooms.

Scott Blood, K-12 principal, explains: "It is critical at this point in our education era that teachers have a strategic way to structure lesson planning. While attempting to deliver the best instruction and taking care of whole child supports, teachers need a system that is conducive to efficient output and effective outcomes."

This article highlights the top five strategies that every teacher could *easily* integrate into any classroom

on a regular basis, regardless of what subject or topic being taught. These proven strategies are aligned with the foundational principles of the research-based teaching framework, **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.**

(AboutTHEPACT.com), which is being used across the United States, in provinces of Canada, and in parts of Australia, Italy, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia.

1 Use Opening & Closing Lesson Ceremonies

What does this mean?

Oftentimes, the fast pace of our day - whether teaching children or adults - makes us feel like we are trying to beat the clock. Because of this, sometimes when we start to teach a lesson, we dive right into the middle of it to "get to business" to best use the limited amount of time we have to instruct, which results in us forgetting the importance of what we call, "**Opening and Closing Ceremonies.**"

When starting any instructional lesson, it is important to view it as a conversation: gain attention, start the conversation by introducing the topic, take turns on the topic, periodically review the topic you are talking about, and end the conversation.

2017 Summer Edition of Living Education eMagazine

As instructors, we need to make sure that we are "connecting the dots" to ensure that our students understand what the task, project, or activity is and why they are doing it. Introducing the subject area and topic, along with the lesson activity, is critical at the start of any instruction to make certain that all learners are "on the same page." This should then be followed by clear and coherent directions that are not only spoken, but also presented visually.

Here is a real-life example . . .

When teaching a book in language arts in a vocabulary lesson, an **opening ceremony** to the classroom vocabulary project was: "Time to learn about the book, *Gruffalo*. There are many characters in this book. Today, we are going to do a project and make one of the characters."

Then, there was a **review of the materials in the project** as part of the opening ceremony to the lesson: "One character in the book is a fox. Here are all the parts of the fox to put together..."

Throughout the activity, the staff referred back to the lesson topic or to what the students were doing: "We are making a character in the book, *Gruffalo*. It is a fox. Let's find it in the book." The students in this class made character puppet sticks to correspond with the book, which increased their participation and improved understanding.



"**WHAT**" do we want our students to learn and "**WHY**" is it important for them to learn it. This should be the basis of every lesson that we teach, as it lays the groundwork for an effective and rich lesson. By determining the "what" and "why" of our

Opening & Closing Ceremonies Reach Students at "Ideal" Learning Times

When the project was complete, it was put on the Learn About vocabulary board with the other characters and a **closing ceremony comment** served a wrap-up: "We are done creating our fox character in our book, *Gruffalo*. Let's review all of the characters we have made so far!" The class then moved on to the next part of the lesson or the

learners transitioned to their next activity.

Why is this important?

By giving students this type of structure and routine in a lesson, it helps them succeed. This is critical for students of all abilities, related to building comprehension, memory, and retention of information as documented in brain-based research. What the research shows is that students will learn the *most* during "prime times," which are at the beginning of the lesson and at the end of the lesson.

These, in fact, are the "**Opening and Closing Ceremonies**," which must be used consistently to take advantage of these ideal learning times. They are an essential lesson strategy when teaching any subject or topic: math, science, social studies, life skills, or social communication.

2 Teach Students the "What" and "Why" of Their Learning

What does this mean?

When planning a lesson, it is crucial that we establish the "what" and the "why" of the lesson:

lessons - otherwise known as a **learning intention** - we are planning for the outcomes we wish to see.

A learning intention should be linked to educational standards and should represent exactly what we want to see as a result of our instruction. Learning intentions keep our instruction focused, so that all activities are meaningful and linked. It is not only important for us to establish learning intentions for every lesson, but we must then take it one step further and teach them to our students.

Here is a real-life example . . .

2017 Summer Edition of Living Education eMagazine

When teaching a lesson, a sixth-grade teacher posts her learning intentions in the form of “I CAN” statements:

- I CAN multiply single digit numbers
- I CAN identify and/or write three key details in a paragraph

The “I CAN” statements are posted in plastic paper stands in the center of each table in the room. The teacher reviews the “I CAN” statement with the students at the beginning of each lesson during the Opening Ceremony. Then, the students reference the posted statements throughout the lesson. When asked by a classroom visitor, “What are you doing in class today?” the student easily references the “I CAN” statement and expands on how the task they are working on directly relates to the goals - the “I CAN” statement - of the lesson.

In a high school social studies class, the learning intentions are given to every student, along with the daily agenda and any necessary resources for the day, in the form of a handout. Anyone entering the room in the middle of the lesson is able to reference the handout and know exactly what the learning intentions are and the process by which they will be reached.

Why is this important?

When we have very clearly established **learning intentions** for every lesson, we are more likely to plan meaningful and focused lessons for our students that are directly linked to the outcomes we wish to see as a result of the lesson. Learners are more likely to be invested and engaged in the learning process if they understand “what” they are

learning (what the expected outcomes are of the activity) and “why” they need to learn it. Students also have a better understanding of how one lesson connects to the next, which again results in increased student engagement and buy-in.

Posting our learning intentions for lessons in the classroom is a simple way to make sure that our students have easy access to the “what” and “why” of the lesson. This also serves as a reminder to us to continually reference the learning intention throughout the lesson. It helps keep everyone on track and properly focused on the overall goals of the learning for the day.

3 Provide Vocabulary Reminders

What does this mean?

The brain can easily get bogged down with information, such as how the information is being presented and what the vocabulary means. If our students do not understand the vocabulary being used in the lesson, then they are lost before they even start. We should not take for granted that our students “know” the meaning of the words we use!

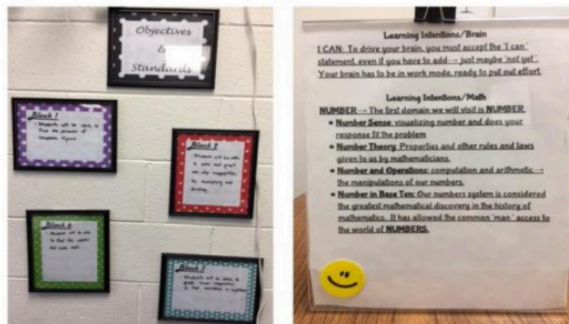
Vocabulary reminders are visual and auditory tips to review the definition of a word or key concept, and also to explain how the specific vocabulary item fits into the instructional lesson. Vocabulary reminders assure comprehension of the words that are being used in any instructional lesson.

Here is a real-life example . . .

An instructional technology specialist and math teacher was preparing to teach the Pythagorean Theorem to her eighth-grade students. She

developed her vocabulary resources for introducing this unit, but did not assume that all of her students had an understanding of some basic and crucial key concepts prior to diving in.

Vocabulary reminders were given for the math terms of “theorem,” “triangle,”



Using Creative Ways to Teach the “What” & “Why” of a Lesson

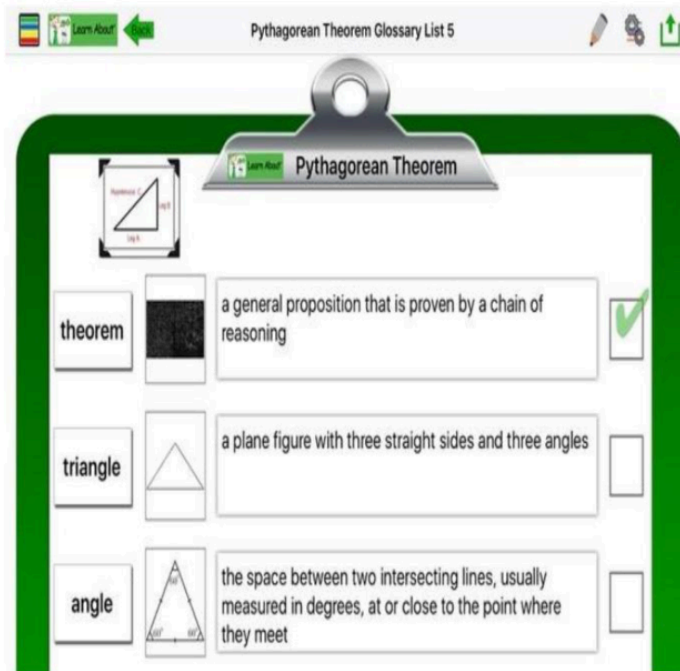
and “angle” in a mini-vocabulary lesson to ensure that all of her students (a total of 82 students across three math classes) had a solid understanding of these concepts for background knowledge. To her surprise, many of the students could not define these terms accurately. As a result, these vocabulary reminders were critical to the students’ future success in the upcoming math lessons.

Why is this important?

It is impossible to overstate the importance of building a solid foundation of word knowledge to be successful in life. Vocabulary knowledge is something that should expand and deepen over

time.

If our students do not know the meanings of the words they read about and hear, they will not have a full understanding of what they are listening to, reading about, or, even more abstractly, writing and talking about. By using **vocabulary reminders**, we can easily reach more of our students to guarantee more meaningful participation and deeper understanding of



Vocabulary Reminders Ensure a Deeper Understanding of Content

Classroom teachers at elementary, middle school, and high levels regularly engaged their students in creating “Lesson Boards.” in their classrooms. A lesson board is a visual display of information that students put together in a collaborative lesson that is explicitly taught by the teacher. Some examples include:

- Building vocabulary skills

4 Create a Bank of Classroom Visuals With Your Students

What does this mean?

Classroom visuals motivate students to interact with the content of curriculum and provide our students with essential and meaningful context. Using visuals in our lessons help students grasp a concept and remember it. Students say that having visuals around the classroom significantly help them remember key concepts.

Oftentimes, as teachers, we have our visuals “prepared and displayed” - thinking that this is the best strategy to be organized and ready to teach a lesson. We come in early, or leave very late, to create these visual anchors for our students. What we may not realize, however, is that by not involving our students in a “lesson” to create these visual displays, we are actually taking a critical language experience away from our students. When we involve our students in creating curriculum visuals, and teach the content as these visuals are being built by our students, we greatly increase opportunities for a better understanding and expression of the curriculum content.

Here is a real-life example . . .

- Previewing main ideas, details, and summary points
- Brainstorming ideas and composing writing prompts
- Sharing opinions supported by facts

The teachers in this school involved their students in the creation of visual content in the areas of language, reading informational text and literature, writing, and speaking and listening tasks. The students were highly engaged in the lesson board creation and had meaningful participation related to the curriculum content.

The teachers found that this strategy allowed them to teach from different parts of the classroom - not only the front of the room - and offered their students multiple opportunities to link ideas and initiate discussions about the classroom content that were student-led. In addition, this also helped the teachers, regardless of grade, with time management. In fact, this resulted in decreased lesson prep time, as the teachers reduced their own materials creation time by involving the students and making it a series of teachable moments.

Why is this important?

Continue on page 45

2017 Summer Edition of Living Education eMagazine

The Top 5 Strategies continued from page 36

Visual anchors in the classroom provide quick reference guides by using recognition strategies to decrease cognitive load for learning new material. Hands-on activities and experiential learning events foster more active learning for our students in a classroom lesson. When students participate in activities that involve them in the creation of **classroom visuals**, it expands their inquiry and problem-solving skills.

Employing inclusive teaching strategies, meaning teaching in ways that do not exclude students from opportunities to learn, increases the focus and attention of our students. In addition, it motivates them to practice higher-level critical thinking skills for a more meaningful learning experience. Our students end up becoming much more actively involved in our lessons and pose more relevant questions - not only to us as teachers, but also to each other.

5 Offer Consistent Opportunities for Self-Reflection

What does this mean?

Self-reflection is one of the most meaningful tools we can teach, model, and offer our students. It helps students move from merely “thinking” about their performance, achievement, or contribution to an actual “understanding” of it. Teaching our students that self-reflection is not only focusing on what they need to improve upon, but also identifying what they are doing well.

Setting goals, encouraging students to reflect on them, and adjusting their goals as needed encourages not only reflection, but also a growth mindset. Our students need to be taught how to select and draft their goals. They then can be guided on how to monitor and assess their progress. By giving students a structured method to self-reflect on a regular basis, we are actually giving them the opportunity to form the important habit of evaluation and, more importantly, to be honest with themselves.

Here is a real-life example . . .

At the beginning of a writing lesson during an opening ceremony, the teacher guided her kindergarten students in setting individualized goals for the week. The goals were written on a sticky note

and posted on a board in the front of the room. During the closing ceremony, the teacher asked each student to make a statement reflecting on the following three questions:

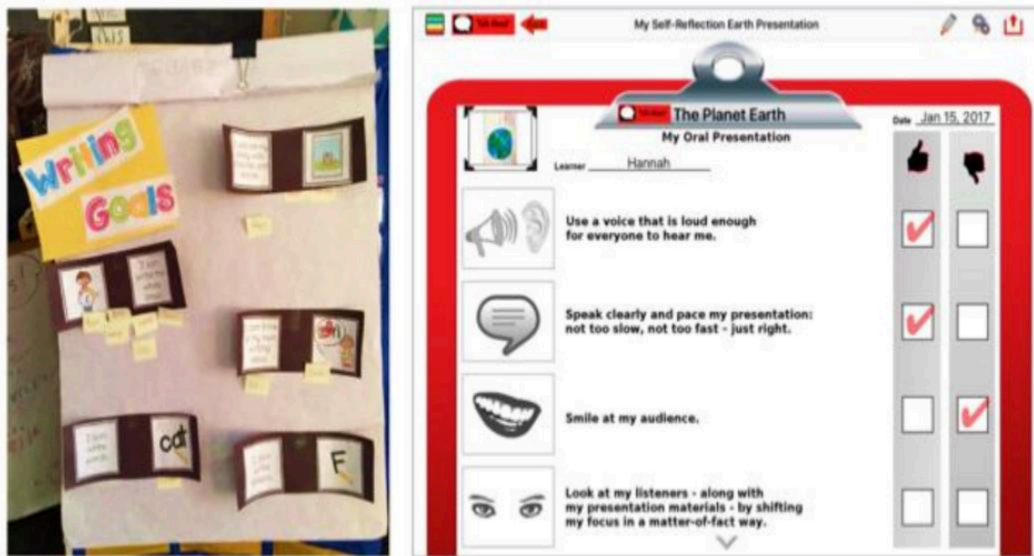
- What did they do to work on their goal that day?
- Did they achieve their goal that day?
- What will they do next time to work on their goal?

Monitoring progress is not only important for goal setting, but also for classroom performance. For example, after giving an oral presentation, students participate in what is called a “3/3 Exercise” - “Three things I did well” and “Three things I feel that I can improve on.” This helps students improve their self-evaluation skills.



Content Sticks When Students Help Create Classroom Visuals

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Students of Any Age Can Build Self-Reflection Skills

Why is this important?

It is crucial that we instill in our students, at a young age, a growth mindset by supporting them in learning how to reflect on their work and set goals for improvement. All too often we see students who are fearful to get something wrong, reflect, or take constructive feedback. Instead of looking at these as opportunities to grow and develop as a learner, many students recoil. Learning **self-reflection** strategies, and providing frequent opportunities for reflection, support students in recognizing themselves as lifelong learners and ensure the development of a growth mindset.

One important aspect of successful reflection is that the process must be meaningful to students. They must be invested in the process. The students should be involved in setting their goals and determining what it will take to achieve them. As teachers, we can facilitate learning and guide our students through the reflection and growth process, while the students learn to take more responsibility for reaching their goals.

Summary

It is important to remember that we should not cut corners in teaching due to

time constraints and schedule demands. We do not want to be engaging in “drive-by” lessons and assuming knowledge of language that students do not possess. As teachers, we sometimes need to be reminded of this, for we often know our content so well that we may forget what it is like to “not know it.”

Integrating these simple multisensory strategies into a system of instruction is essential when needing to reach students of all abilities in our classrooms. These “Top 5 Strategies” are doable, essential, and most importantly, sustainable, for any classroom teacher to implement during a jam-packed school day at any grade level.

As Curriculum Director, John Barone, describes: “Each of the strategies discussed in this article focus on clarity and relevance. When the *learning* is clear to students, the *purpose* of the learning is clear. In turn, the students understand the relevance of what they are learning. This results in greater engagement and, therefore, greater and deeper learning.”

For more information on **T.H.E. P.A.C.T.**, please go to: www.AboutTHEPACT.com.