



Just for the ASKing!

by Bruce Oliver

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Finishing Touches



Bruce facilitating the **Leading the Learning**® workshop

Imagine that you finally get to see the movie you have read so much about, the one with the surprise twist at the end. As the movie concludes, the equipment malfunctions and you do not see the ending. Or, suppose that you finally get to take your son to a baseball game. It is the top of the ninth inning and the score is tied. Suddenly your son gets sick and you have to leave not knowing the final score. Still yet, picture yourself dining at a celebrated restaurant and you especially anticipate your favorite dessert only to learn that the restaurant has run out of that option.

Too often, classroom lessons are similar to the three scenarios described above in that they simply come to a halt when the learning segment or period is over with little or no resolution. Students might experience a feeling of incompleteness or even confusion as they shut their books and pack up their belongings and head for the door. From the teacher's perspective, although the lesson may have "felt" like it was successful, the teacher has no substantive data to show that learning occurred. Because the use of summarizing can have such a profound effect on academic achievement, it is essential that practitioners understand its importance and its benefits, develop a repertoire of strategies from which they can choose to allow students to summarize their learning, and include summarizing as consistent parts of their lesson design.

Defining the Concept

Summarizing is any learning strategy that requires students to consolidate their thinking and capture the essential ideas of a lesson in a concise manner or in a new way. The purpose is to help teachers gather evidence of learning as well as allow students to self-assess their own learning. Summarizations can be written or spoken, include graphic representations or kinesthetic activities, be completed individually, or in pairs or groups. All students are expected to participate in a summarizing activity. As a result of completing a summarization, students can improve their thinking skills, learn to state and defend a conclusion, make connections between past learning and new learning, participate in constructive conversations with their peers, or clarify misconceptions/misunderstandings. Summarizations may be distributed throughout a lesson or occur at the end of a class or teaching segment.

Understanding Its Significance

Research since the 1800s indicates that providing opportunities for students to pull their thoughts together at the end of a lesson has a resounding positive effect on their understanding of academic content as well as on retention and transfer. More recently, in his book *Classroom Instruction That Works*, Robert Marzano asserts, "Although the process of comprehension is complex, at its core, comprehension is based on summarizing – restating content in a succinct manner that highlights the most crucial information." Similarly, Rick Wormeli, in his book

Summarizing in Any Subject: 50 Techniques to Improve Student Learning, writes, “Educators agree that the ability to summarize to identify salient information and structure it for meaning, long-term retention, and successful application is an essential academic skill.” He continues, “Effective summarizing leads to an increase in student learning. Helping students recognize how information is structured will help them summarize what they read or hear. Summarizing is a real-world skill.”

History teacher Tyler Reese has written in a recent edition of ASCD’s **Education Update**, “How a lesson ends can affect a learner’s ability to organize, evaluate, and store information presented in class. Although we give emphasis to hooking students’ interest at the start of instruction, the end is often hurried and overlooked.” Reese further emphasizes that when teachers do not consciously include a lesson closure or summarizing activity, they miss out on the opportunity to gather important student data on the lesson’s effectiveness.

It is important to remember that summarizing is only one component of the learning process that helps educators harness the power of student engagement. Any time teachers move from being the focus of learning to allowing students to make their own meaning, there is a much greater likelihood that learners will be able to retain what they have learned and even transfer it to new learning situations.

Developing a Repertoire

Not only is it important for teachers to include summarizing as an essential part of their practice, but they should likewise select from a wide repertoire of potential strategies. When teachers employ only a few strategies again and again, student interest may lag as they experience the “been there, done that” feeling. **Just ASK Publications** prides itself on including ways to capture and maintain student involvement in lessons in all of its publications. Below are book titles that are excellent resources for a wide range of strategies that will “keep students in the game:”

- **Instruction for All Students** and **Why Didn’t I Learn This in College?** each devote an entire chapter to the use of active learning strategies. Directions for using the strategies are accompanied by clearly articulated purposes, many focused on having students summarize their learning.
- **Active Learning and Engagement Strategies** includes over 75 techniques, including summarizing, that will add to a teacher’s ability to involve students more fully in classroom activities. Along with each strategy is an explanation of its purpose, the process practitioners can take to bring the strategy to life, and ways to implement each approach to promote greater student learning.
- **Strategies in Action Volumes I and II** feature practitioners telling their own stories about how they have used active learning and engagement strategies in their K-12 instructional programs.

Sharing Best Practices

A web search on summarizing lessons or lesson closure provides multiple results. The three sites listed below offer comprehensive lists of strategies; many are quite short and all focus on having students, not the teacher, summarize.

- Access a list of 54 ways to have students summarize their learning at <http://washingtonmathcoaches.pbworks.com/w/page/30859690/Lesson%20Closure%20-%2054%20Ways%20to%20Leave%20a%20Lesson?mode=embedded>
- Access 40 lesson closure strategies compiled by Bruce DePlanty from unknown contributors at <http://k12edresources.com/?p=229>
- Access reading comprehension and summarizing strategies at <http://www.readingquest.org/strat/home.html>. On this site, Raymond Jones, professor at the University of Virginia, provides the names of the researchers/source, description and directions for use, rationale for using, templates to download, and the name of the researcher who developed the strategy. Although Jones explicitly identifies seven of the 28 strategies as summarizers, many of the others can also be used for lesson closure.

As a middle school principal and during my consulting work over the past decade, I have had many opportunities to

model and to see firsthand the use of summarizing strategies. Below are some of the most popular techniques along with ways that practitioners have applied them in their classrooms:

3-2-1

The stems for **3-2-1** can be created to match the thinking the teacher wants students to do with regard to the material being studied. Examples of the **3-2-1** technique:

When students are studying an important person:

- **3** most important events in a person's life
- **2** questions you would ask this person if you could talk to him/her
- **1** way in which I am like this person

When students are learning about a new topic:

- **3** things that really interested me
- **2** things I would like to know more about
- **1** idea I will write about tonight in my journal

After viewing a film or video:

- **3** important facts or events I will remember
- **2** questions that come to mind
- **1** event shown here that is similar to an event I have experienced or have read about

The Important Thing (Saphier and Haley)

In this strategy, based on *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown, each student begins a summary paragraph with the sentence stem, "The important thing about _____ is _____. The student fills in the blank with a supporting detail and repeats the process for a total of three times with a new supporting detail in each sentence. The concluding sentence should begin with "But the most important thing about _____ is _____."

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/schools/ritchieparkes/staff/The%20Important%20Thing%20Summarizer.pdf

Ticket to Leave

The teacher poses summarizing questions/problems at the end of a lesson. On a card or piece of paper, each student writes his response/answer to the questions. The students turn in their responses to the teacher as they leave class. The teacher reads through the student submissions and identifies patterns and trends which are reported to the students the next day and used for instructional planning for the future.

Learning Logs

Students make journal entries during the last few minutes of class responding to the following types of questions:

- What did I learn today?
- What puzzled me?
- What did I enjoy, not enjoy, accomplish in class today?
- How did I learn from the discussion or lesson?
- How was my performance in class?

Graffiti (Oakes)

The teacher writes problems, formulas, ideas to brainstorm, etc. at the top of pieces of large chart paper and posts the charts around the room. In groups of three or four, students move from chart to chart writing their responses (graffiti) on each chart. Answers can be words, phrases or graphics. Students continue to rotate from chart to chart until all student groups have the opportunity to respond to all charts. The teacher can use the student work as teaching tools in future lessons.

10-2 Theory (Rowe)

Throughout a lesson, the teacher pauses after meaningful chunks of information to give students the opportunity to process with either a partner or small group. The guideline is for every ten minutes of teacher talk, video, or appropriate reading tasks students process for two minutes.

We have all heard the adage, “Knowledge is power.” It can be applied to so many aspects of education including the best way to ensure good teaching and thus, improve student learning. As educators grapple with ways to translate the words in new state documents to practices in the classroom, it is essential that we focus not only on more rigorous standards but ways to bring those standards to life by improving our pedagogy. Increasing our knowledge of how to better engage students in the learning process, including ways to put the finishing touches on the lessons we present, is one way to ensure that our efforts will be fulfilled.

Resources and References

www.teachingchannel.org/videos/tips-on-closing-a-lesson

A four-minute clip from the Classroom Around the World Collection. The teacher trainer, with a wonderful British accent, provides some clever ideas for plenaries or lesson closures.

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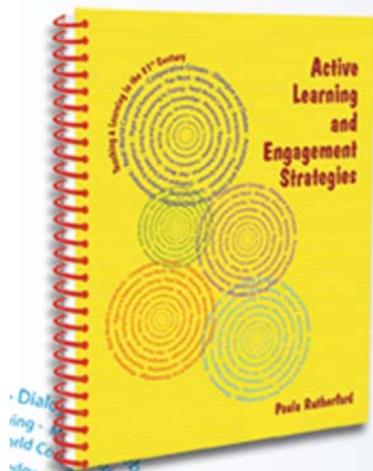
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