Power Thinking

✓ *Visualizing/Organizing* essential information

Purpose

A variation of traditional outline formats, this strategy helps students take notes as they actively read the textbook, classify information, and understand main ideas and details. In Power Thinking, each concept gets a number. The number 1s are the main ideas, the number 2s are the details for the number1s, the number 3s are the details for the number 2s, and so on. It is important that the numbers keep the same relationship to one another. Students learn to apply Power Thinking as they read their textbooks in order to help sort the main ideas from details.

Procedure

1. Start teaching Power Thinking by modeling the strategy and using categories that are familiar to your students. One example of Power Thinking might look like this:

    Power 1. Sports
        Power 2. Football
          Power 3. Bills
          Power 3. Cowboys
        Power 2. Baseball
          Power 3. Cardinals
          Power 3. Giants
          Power 3. Astros

2. Ask students to practice Power Thinking using material from their textbooks. Put a variety of Power 1, 2, and 3 terms and ideas on index cards--one per card but without the power number. Give the cards to a small group of students. Ask them to figure out what power each item represents and then to arrange the cards to reflect their Power Thinking.

3. When students read the chapter or section of text, they can write down terms and ideas on index cards, and then work in small groups or pairs to arrange the index cards to reflect power thinking. They can also complete Power Thinking individually.

Discussion Question #2: Why is it important for students to summarize what they read and learn? What are some of the pits into which students fall when they write summaries?

Writing summaries is much harder than it seems. Most of us have had this experience: we ask student to write a summary of a text passage, and we get either a single (usually short) sentence or every detail in the text connected by "and then…". Neither one gets to the real idea of what summary is all about. Oddly, students summarize effectively all the time. Ask them what they did over the weekend, and they automatically pick out the highlights; they don't tell you every single thing they did. Translating this into writing, however, proves quite difficult.

For students to write a quality summary, they must engage in a very high level of thinking. Since a good summary does not include each and every detail from the text, students need to make judgments about the relevancy and importance of the information they read. Many struggling readers find this a very hard task. One student complained to me that he couldn't tell what was important and what wasn't. He assumed that since the writer put it in the text, it had to be important, so he had to include it.

Teaching students to use summary frames is a great way to scaffold the learning of summary writing. The frames build off of text pattern guides (see page 70). A summary frame is a series of questions that help students pick out the important elements typically found within a particular text pattern. The questions help focus students on the crucial information.