Identifying Critical Content

Focus Statement:
The teacher continuously identifies accurate critical content during a lesson or part of a lesson that portrays a clear progression of information that leads to deeper understanding of the content.

Desired Effect:
Students know what content is important and what is not important.

Examples of teacher behaviors:
• Teacher highlights critical content that portrays a clear progression of information related to standards or goals
• Teacher identifies differences between the critical and non-critical content
• Teacher continuously calls students’ attention to accurate critical content
• Teacher integrates cross-curricular connections to critical content

Examples of student behaviors:
• Students can describe the level of importance of the critical content addressed in class
• Students can identify the critical content addressed in class
• Students can explain the difference between critical and non-critical content
• Formative data show students attend to the critical content (e.g., questioning, artifacts)
• Students can explain the progression of critical content

Instructional Techniques

1. Verbally cue critical content
   • State the important information directly succinctly, and assertively.
   • Raise or lower voice to indicate critical content.
   • Pause at key points during instruction.

2. Use explicit instruction to convey critical content
   • Explicitly identify the critical content for each chunk of information.
   • Demonstrate critical skills, strategies, and processes by modeling, “think aloud,” and showing student work exemplars.
   • Chunk critical content into “digestible bites”: one concept followed by student practice/questioning; handouts that fit on one page; distributing information in chunks.

3. Use dramatic instruction to convey critical content
   • Select and rehearse one type of dramatic instruction: role play, skits, dramatic reading, hand gestures, coordinated movement.
   • Allow student to summarize critical content.
   • Involve many students.

4. Provide advance organizers to cue critical content
   • Define the scope of the organizer by i.) giving students the big picture as a reference (day-by-day frames, construct concept map); ii.) build connections from past knowledge; iii.) metaphor

5. Visually cue critical content
   • Effective photos and short videos
   • Very short slide presentation
   • Word wall

6. Use storytelling to cue critical content
   • Connect a short (3-4 min), simple story to critical content
   • Begin with the end in mind (engage, not entertain)

7. Use what students already know to cue critical content
   • Ensure that students understand critical vocabulary and basic facts
   • Ensure that students understand basic relationships
   • Provide students with illustrative mental models/have them formulate their own