Module Three Teacher Tip

Clarity

“...a state in which a teacher who is in command of the subject matter to be transmitted is able to do that which is required to communicate with learners successfully” (Hines, 1981)

“Clear teaching refers to the ability of the teacher to provide instruction, expositional or otherwise, which helps students come to a clear understanding of the material. Thus clarity is something achieved by the student, not by the teacher. However, 20 years of research have identified specific behaviors that are characteristics of teachers who consistently help students achieve this clarity of understanding.” Metcalf (1992)

Clarity of instruction has consistently been linked with increases in student achievement. Some research indicates that instructional clarity, in fact, may cause increases in student achievement. Teacher clarity is a vital key to helping students understand the relationships between topics and make connections between what is taught and their own experiences. Clarity about expectations, formats, and other aspects of direction greatly impact students completing classroom assignments, participating in the classroom discussions and questioning, and completing homework.

Important to the concept of clarity is the identification of clear teaching behaviors. Clear teaching behaviors, including many variables, such as communication skills, accommodating learner differences, clarity of explanations, and assessment procedures all impact student achievement.

Some examples of teacher behaviors that assist students in making sense of information are:

- Explaining things simply
- Providing explanations the students can understand
- Teaching at a pace appropriate to the topic and students
- Staying with a topic until students understand
- Trying to find out if students don’t understand
- Teaching step-by-step
- Describing the work to be done and how to do it
- Asking questions to see if students know what to do and how to do it
- Repeating things when students don’t understand
- Explaining and modeling/using examples

Teachers need to have a repertoire of explanatory devices to assist in providing clarity. These help teachers to explain. These include:

- **Mental Imagery** – making pictures in your head, visualizing
- **Modeling Thinking Aloud** – role playing, teachers go through the thinking step by step, as a student would
• **Cues and Progressive Minimal Cues** – teachers give students just enough cues to get them looking at what they need to, but not enough to prevent the student from thinking out their error
• **Graphic Organizers** – a diagram with words, whose shape forms the relationship of the words to one another

Other explanatory devices, that teachers more often use include:
• **Analogies**
• **Physical Models**
• **Media/Technology**
• **Charts**
• **Blackboard**

A teacher behavior that helps students place current information in a larger framework of meaning is to provide students with the “Big Picture.” This helps students frame the learning by knowing what will happen, how new information connects to what they have already learned, and what they will know or be able to do as a result of a lesson.