Later these pictures may not be needed every day. Early in the year we’re happy to finish one sentence each day, but by the end of the year we often write three or four sentences.

One of the things that showed us how the interactive calendar affected our teaching came just a week after we had started using it. In the lounge our first-grade teachers commented that every child (and these were children who came to us knowing few letters) could now spell the word we even though they knew very few other high-frequency words. It had to be because they were starting every sentence with the word we. Soon after that we told them that we were no longer “allowed” to start the first sentence with the word we, and many of them quickly learned to spell our class or all of us.

Benefits of using the interactive calendar

By having the children come together at the end of each day to talk about what we’ve done, we hope that they will remember something that was different, so they won’t go home and say “Nothing” when their parents ask what they did.

We encourage the children to think of something different we have done that day, so that every page doesn’t say, “We went outside.” They comment all day about possible writing topics and deliberate on what was most special. The result is a good record of visitors, class projects, favorite books, enjoyable activities, accomplishments, and funny stories—things that are important to the children (Calkins, 1986).

Another bonus is that the bulletin board/calendar looks great. It is the children’s work, visitors love to read it, and the teacher doesn’t have to wonder, “What will I put up this month?”

We urge every primary teacher to learn about interactive writing as an effective method of teaching letters and sounds, concepts about print and language, negotiating a text, writing for a purpose, and connections between reading and writing (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). This calendar offers another opportunity to use interactive writing in the classroom.

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Implementing Graphic Organizer Notebooks: The art and science of teaching content

Andrea L. Fisher

Here’s an approach that is sure to improve content area test scores as well as students’ essay-writing skills. A Graphic Organizer Notebook is a collection of teacher-developed blank webs and organizers for a student to complete after reading chunks of content material taught in a unit. Each blank graphic organizer form in the notebook is tailored to the text material to be studied. The organizer notebook is designed to provide students with meaningful frameworks for taking notes, illustrating concepts and key words, and organizing ideas for writing paragraphs and essays. The teacher’s effectiveness in using this tool depends on the “science” of understanding various text structures and the “art” of implementing various reading, writing, and study strategies.

Historical perspective

For decades, researchers have recognized that poor comprehension and writing skills are often due to an individual’s inability to understand various text structures (Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980). In 1982, Olson and Longnion introduced “pattern guides” as organizational strategies to assist students in learning content material. Aaronson (1985) recommended “study mapping” in lieu of conventional notetaking and mnemonotechnics to aid students in the recall of information. Horowitz (1985) identified five organizational patterns found in expository text and presented
Implementing Graphic Organizer Notebooks

To complement a science chapter entitled "Changes in Landforms" in a fourth-grade text, I created a Graphic Organizer Notebook. Following a classroom teacher's science lessons, I conducted reviews by modeling and guiding the students through completion of an appropriate graphic organizer. This approach enabled me to model a think-aloud process for notetaking, as well as to encourage student discussion of the process.

To customize each graphic layout, it was necessary to (a) know the specific science content students were expected to learn, and (b) discover the author's organizational pattern found in the text. I then had to decide what type of visual organizer would best reflect the text pattern and plan for the amount of space needed for students to record the information. In some instances, I included additional lines or space for recording miscellaneous notes. The layouts were easily designed using Print Shop Deluxe III software (1997, Broderbund). All the organizers for a particular unit were then copied and bound into student notebooks.

Initially, developing an appropriate graphic organizer may require approximately 20 minutes. It is very important to plan each layout carefully. It might be helpful to work with a resource person or a grade-level teaching partner as you begin to explore layout possibilities. With practice in creating different layouts, the task becomes much easier. Once completed, a unit organizer notebook can be reused in years to come, as it is designed to supplement a specific topic.

The first graphic organizer was developed for a section entitled "Landforms." This section briefly discussed mountains, plains, and plateaus. Because the organizational pattern in this text is a listing of ideas, a simple three-part layout was used. In Figure 1, a completed graphic organizer of this type is shown. Three large boxes provide equal but separate space to label, illustrate, and define each of the three landforms mentioned in the text.

Another simple organizer (Figure 2) shows how we recorded information on visual layouts to illustrate them. These text patterns are listings (main ideas or topics with supporting details), time order, compare-contrast, cause-effect, and problem-solution passages.

Results of Kinney's (1985) study indicated that students at the elementary levels were able to understand and apply knowledge of expository text structures through Language Experience Approach activities. Another instructional approach for teaching text structure at the elementary levels was provided by McGuie and Richgels (1985). Their comprehensive plan included building a three-dimensional model to show text structure. It also provided systematic teacher-directed instruction for using graphic organizers to create written summaries of text types.

More recent research conducted by Horton, Lovitt, and Bergerud (1990) supported the use of custom-designed organizers to complement segments of high school science material. Their findings indicated significant improvement in student quiz scores after graphic organizers had been implemented with teacher guidance. Furthermore, dramatic improvement was noted with students who had learning disabilities. Lovitt and Horton (1994) recommended the use of graphic organizers as one of four strategies for adapting science textbooks for low-achieving students and general education students as well.

Additional studies support the use of graphic organizers in other content areas. In her recommendation to integrate language and content instruction for English as a Second Language students, Crandall (1994) suggested the use of graphic organizers as a teaching method for both content area teachers and language teachers. Ritchie and Gimenez (1995/1996) reported the enhancement of short-term and long-term recall of fourth-grade, dominant English- and dominant Spanish-speaking students when graphic organizers were embedded in computer-based science programs. Their study also revealed that dominant language differences do not have a significant impact on the effectiveness of programs with embedded graphic organizers.

According to Robinson and Kiewra's (1995) research, graphic organizers are more efficient than outlines because their visual format shows relationships between and among concepts. For this reason, students are better able to learn and apply information and write more integrated essays.

Graphic organizers offer exciting classroom possibilities for integrating strategy instruction with content instruction. Ellis (1994a) explained how to structure activities to improve "cognitive literacy" in adolescents with mild learning handicaps. After initial teacher-directed instruction with graphic organizers, Ellis facilitated student-directed instruction, which included a variety of cooperative learning activities. He promoted activities that were "rich with teacher-student dialogue that serves as a basis for teacher modeling of the thinking processes that are used in the construction of the organizers" (p. 178). Once students were familiar with the organizational patterns of text, Ellis (1994b) provided students with writing strategy instruction using his Integrated Strategies Instruction model. Vallecorsa and deBettencourt's (1997) findings hinted that when "students with learning disabilities are provided with an explicit cognitive strategy procedure for use in both reading and writing, a reciprocal training effect begins to occur" (p. 186).

In the quest to facilitate student awareness of relational patterns found within content area materials, teachers are encouraged to address text structure through a wide variety of literature. According to Kane (1998), "Discourse knowledge can be taught and nurtured from the earliest grades using authentic contexts and quality children's literature as well as children's own writing" (p. 182). Kane provided literature titles for addressing time order, cause-effect, and comparison/contrast passages and suggested that students discuss and create visuals that reflect organizational patterns found within the text.

Egan (1999) advocated the use of graphic organizers to motivate students and promote learning in meaningful ways. She also addressed a serious concern that teachers consider their own preparedness and personal experience with graphic organizers, and provide clear instructional modeling before assigning them to students.
"Earthquakes." It is designed to show the topic and important details found in the section. Because the author shares four main (but discrete) points about the movement at a fault line, the organizer provides four extending lines from the topic for recording this information. The central portion was designed to provide room for the students to illustrate a fault and record the author's example of a well-known fault.

As I guided the class through completion of the Graphic Organizer Notebook, I discovered many opportunities to demonstrate how visualization strategies can improve reading comprehension. When confronted with complicated concepts in the text, I modeled how slow reading and rereading to visualize can improve comprehension. In many instances, this involved illustrating one sentence of text at a time in a chalkboard drawing. For example, consider the difficulty in visualizing the sequence of events encountered in the following description of erosion of rock by rain. Then refer to Figure 3, which shows a student's visual image of the concept described.

Water and ice weather rocks over thousands of years. Water seeps into tiny cracks in the rocks. When the weather gets cold, the water freezes inside the cracks. The ice presses against the sides of the cracks and pushes the rocks apart. When the ice melts, the rocks move back. Each time the water freezes, it pushes against the rocks. After many years, the rocks break apart. Mountains slowly crumble away. (Scott, Foresman, 1991, p. 252)

I heard comments of "Ahhhh! Now I get it!" as the students joined me in creating an illustration of this portion of the text. Implementing this approach improves metacognition as students begin to understand that even experienced readers need to ponder text, reread, and implement various strategies in order to comprehend material.

Implementing the Graphic Organizer Notebook also enables teachers to accommodate students with various learning strengths. Furthermore, it provides for review that many students require. Both auditory and visual learners are provided with strategies for content retention and recall. Within minutes of completing a web on "Predicting Earthquakes" (Figure 4) the students were easily able to memorize the four main ideas presented in the text. Some students admitted that it was the pictures they drew that jogged their memory of the four signs for predicting earthquakes. Some students recalled key words.

During a study session prior to a test, a student who generally scored poorly on tests asked, "How did we say volcanoes are formed?" I suggested that she recall the page in our Graphic Organizer Notebook. She replied, "Oh, yes," and proceeded to describe the two types of volcanoes on the compare-contrast
layout, recalling the information we had learned as well as the key words lava and magma (Figure 5). This student was actually surprised that she was able to recall the information after all.

Graphic Organizer Notebooks serve as manageable and motivating tools for studying. The students have their papers secured and organized in booklet form, giving them a sense of accomplishment and ownership. Most students have been motivated to color their illustrations and take pride in their work.

The notebooks also provide students with a clear understanding of what they need to know for the test. After our first test, I asked one student how she thought she did. She nodded and said, “I think I did pretty good. The test definitely tested what we were taught.”

Perhaps the most exciting teaching advantage that I have found in using the Graphic Organizer Notebook is the variety of material available for preparing students to write essays. After our class completed the unit, it was time to model how to write an essay. While viewing the organizer entitled “Landforms,” the students watched me think aloud and model writing a topic sentence and supporting sentences. Along with the content, the students were directed to observe how paragraphs were indented and the transitional words were used, such as “One type of landform...” “Another type of landform...” and “Finally....” Because our students needed practice in composing an essay, we provided them with several opportunities to write an essay using their Graphic Organizer Notebooks before expecting them to write their own essay as part of the test. The organizers served as excellent outlines.

The Graphic Organizer Notebook provides students with frequent opportunities to practice notetaking. After much practice, students are better prepared to understand the structural patterns found within the text of content material. Students learn to differentiate between main ideas and details and also discover other relationships embedded in the text. They pay attention to bold-faced words and definitions, key words, and highlighted concepts as well as other visuals on the page.

On occasion, we challenge the students to create their own organizers for a section of text. With beginners, it is necessary to choose a clearly organized text for students to examine. We discuss layouts and delight in the creative frameworks devised by the students. As students acquire more experience, they become accomplished in designing their own organizers and recording the important information.

Implementing the Graphic Organizer Notebook in a content area unit truly enables teachers to teach reading, writing, and study skill strategies in a way that meets the needs of all students. This “artistic” approach based on the “scientific” study of text is an effective way to generate discussion, promote active learning, and facilitate improvement of student achievement. The Graphic Organizer Notebook is a tool for implementing an approach that focuses not on
the “what to do” but rather the “how to do it”—which is teaching at its finest.

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References

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Figure 5
Graphic organizer for "Volcanoes"

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The nuts and bolts of teaching first-grade writing through a journal workshop

Lyn Wagner
Jennifer Grogan Nott
Ann T. Agnew

Dear Aunt Jenny,

I've just signed my first contract to teach! I'll be working with first graders. I'm excited, but also scared. At college, I had practicum experiences at several grade levels, but I student taught in fourth grade. I know I want to use process writing, but I'm not sure how to do that at first-grade level.

I know you have used process writing in your first-grade classroom for several years. I hope you'll share some words of wisdom with an eager but unsure beginner.

Love, Amy

Dear Amy,

I'm so pleased that you are about to launch your teaching career. You are just the kind of inquiring person our profession needs! Indeed, first graders can participate in a process writing program. Perhaps the most useful way for me to explain how I implement process writing is to describe in detail how I conduct a daily writing workshop as my first graders participate in my journal writing program. Under separate cover, I am sending you a "nuts and bolts" description of my journal writing workshop. I'm excited to see what you will do with it!

Love, Aunt Jenny

This article is the result of a collaboration of three experienced teachers. We came together as teachers and students in graduate courses in the pursuit of improved teaching. We chose to write this article in the voice of one teacher for clarity. The journal-writing workshop described was successfully implemented in a first-grade classroom, in which the children became an enthusiastic and effective community of writers.

The timeframe for the daily journal-writing workshop appears in Figure 1. The structure of the workshop is based on the work of Donald Graves (1983) and Lucy Calkins (1986).