Using Mnemonics to Teach Social Studies Vocabulary

What is the evidence base?

- This is a Promising Practice based on one acceptable group study and six studies with strong research designs.

Where is the best place to find out how to do this practice?

The best place to find out how to implement using mnemonics to teach vocabulary is through the following research to practice lesson plan starters:

- Using Mnemonics to Teach Social Studies Vocabulary

With who was it implemented?

- Students with
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder (1 study, n=5)
  - Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (1 study, n=4)
  - Learning Disability (6 studies, n=195)
  - Mild Intellectual Disability (1 study, n=3)
  - Other Health Impairment (1 study, n=14)
  - Speech/Language Impairment (1 study, n=1)
- Ages ranged from 11 years – 16 years
- Males (n=235), females (n=91), not specified (n=42)
- Ethnicity
  - African American (n=19)
  - Asian/Pacific Islander (n=4)
  - Caucasian (n=164)
  - Hispanic/Latino (n=19)
  - Multiracial (n=1)
  - Native American (n=2)
  - Not specified (n=59)
  - None reported (n=46)

What is the practice?

“Memory-enhancing or mnemonic strategies refer to ‘specific reconstruction of target content intended to tie new information more closely to the learners’ existing knowledge base and, therefore, facilitate retrieval’” (Fontana, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2007).
In the studies used to establish the evidence base for using mnemonics to teach Social Studies vocabulary included using:

- Keyword-pegword mnemonics to teach junior high students with learning disabilities the chronological order of 32 U.S. presidents (Mastropieri, Scruggs, & Whedon, 1997).
- Mnemonic pictures to teach 14 students in 3rd – 7th grade with learning disabilities and three students with a mild intellectual disability relevant information from a social studies textbook (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1989).
- Classwide peer tutoring with embedded mnemonic strategies to teach 7th grade social studies content to 42 students with mild disabilities (Marshak, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2011).
- Mnemonic strategies and direct instruction to teach social studies vocabulary to high school students with learning disabilities (Fontana, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2007).

Where has it been implemented?

- 13 inclusive classrooms (3 studies)
- 2 resource rooms (2 studies)
- 3 special education classrooms (1 study)

How does this practice relate to Common Core Standards?

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science. NOTE: This is the same as the first CCSS – but, it’s for a different grade level

How does this practice relate to the Common Career Technical Core?

- Apply appropriate academic and technical skills. Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.
- A/V Technology & Film Career Pathway (AR-AV) 1. Describe the history, terminology, occupations and value of audio, video and film technology.
- Telecommunications Career Pathway (AR-TEL) 1. Demonstrate the use of telecommunications terminology, tools and test equipment.
- Travel & Tourism Career Pathway (HT-TT) 6. Use common travel and tourism terminology used to communicate within the industry.
- Legal Services Career Pathway (LW-LEG) 6. Use legal terminology to communicate within the legal services community.

References used to establish this evidence base:


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