



Artisan teacher NOTES

Delight

Need students to remember something? Wrap it up in Delight.

A delight is a positive surprise. When something happens that benefits us and we were not expecting it to happen, we experience the sensation of delight. We usually respond to a delight with an exclamation of “oh my” or “wow,” or at least a broad smile. Recently I pulled on a pair of old jeans that I had not worn in quite a while. I was delighted to find a crumpled five dollar bill in the pocket... “sweet!” I said to myself. The essence of delight is surprise.

Surprise enhances memory (Fletcher, Anderson, Shanks, Honey, Carpenter, Donovan, Papadakis & Bullmore, 2001). The human brain is oriented toward survival. We like crossword puzzles, music, and stimulating conversations, but the primary function of our brain, from an evolutionary perspective, is the survival of our physical bodies in the current environment (Schoen, 2013). One of the ways the brain works for our survival is to predict the near future. When the brain successfully predicts what will happen next, we are prepared for it and this increases our chances of surviving it. So, in an operational sense, the brain does not like surprises. A surprise is a failure to predict the immediate future. As such, the brain pays especially close attention to surprises, so as to not be fooled again. If a disembodied brain could talk, it might say, after encountering a surprise, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”

For the record, negative surprises enhance recall too (D'Argembeau, Comblain & Ven der Linden, 2002). I remember gathering some firewood from a stack one day and uncovering a snake coiled up between the logs. Fortunately, it was cold outside and the snake didn't move. Still, from that moment on, every time I approach a stack of firewood, my brain instantly recalls the image of the coiled snake. Since they are linked to our survival, surprises are extra-memorable. We are designed to remember well things that surprise us.

When we survive an occurrence that was not predicted, we experience a moment of relief that the occurrence didn't harm us. "Whew, that was a close one." When the occurrence turns out to be pleasant, and not just a near miss of something unpleasant, we experience an acute double sensation. We find ourselves not only surviving an unpredicted occurrence, but benefiting from it as well. This sense of "Whew" plus "Oh my" is one way of understanding the sensation of delight.

Delights, being surprises, create strong memories. These "delight memories" can serve as navigation aids (signposts, waypoints, memory markers) in a student's memory. This allows faster and truer navigation back to the memory when recall is initiated (Fletcher, et al. 2001).

Types of delight.

Random act of positivity delight. We tend to remember extraordinarily positive events (D'Archembeau, et al. 2002). I was in the drive-through lane at a fast food restaurant a few days before Christmas one year. When I reached the window, the young server said, "The car ahead of you paid for your food. He said to tell you Merry Christmas." I'll never forget that.

A fourth grade teacher was working individually with a struggling student on converting fractions to decimals. After the student got a few problems in a row just right, the teacher said, "Wow, Carl, you've got it now, good work." Carl said, "Yeah, I think your calculator is lucky for me. I was getting them all wrong on mine." The teacher took a sharpie pen and wrote Carl's name on the back of her calculator and gave it to him. "Don't tell anyone I gave you this," she said. "Whenever you use it, remember how you learned to convert fractions to decimals on it." "Wow, thanks," said Carl as he grinned from ear to ear.

Suspense-resolution delight. We tend to remember how things begin and end (Sousa, 1995). The seventh-grade math teacher placed a huge glass jar of jelly beans on the front table. Students, as part of their probability and estimation unit, were asked to examine the jar all week and be ready to estimate the number of jelly beans on Friday. Throughout the week, the teacher introduced various ways to estimate the total - by volume, by weight, by appearance, and so on. On Friday the teacher asked the students to play a drum roll on their desks before revealing the true number of jelly beans... 1,458! Three months later, while reviewing for end of year exams, the teacher asked "How many of you remember the jar of jelly beans and the ways we estimated their number?" Every hand was raised.

Preparation delight. The 11th graders were expecting a typical day of teaching and learning in Mrs. Sullivan's Business Education class Wednesday afternoon. They were surprised and amazed at the scene as they entered the room. The tables were set with linen and fine china, flowers were at each table, classical music played in the background, and each student's name was carefully engraved on place cards. "Ooohs and Ahhhs" filled the classroom as students entered to begin their unit on business etiquette. Ten years later, at an important business dinner with key clients, Marion still remembers that day as she confidently selects the shrimp fork for the next course.

Twist of plot delight. We remember times that we were fooled (Schoen, 2013). A writer weaves an interesting and entertaining plot, then delivers a delightful twist at the end taking the story in a completely unexpected direction. The reader immediately re-reads the chapter and smiles.

The fifth graders were seated on the carpet, ready to listen in as their teacher read a few key passages from *Tears of a Tiger*, by Sharon M. Draper, one of their favorite authors. In addition to enjoying the story, the students were working on understanding how the author's purpose influences a piece of writing. The teacher reads a few paragraphs and stops. "Wouldn't it be great if we could really ask the author what her purpose was in writing this book?" "What do you think she would say?" At that moment, Sharon Draper walks out from behind a curtain and says to the class, "Well, let's talk about that." Unbeknownst to the class, Sharon Draper and the teacher were sorority sisters in college. Sharon often drops in to surprise students and answer their questions. They will never forget that day's discussion of author's purpose.

Exceeds expectations delight. We remember when things turn out better than we thought they would (D'Archembeau, et al. 2002). A business traveler enters the department store at 8:55 pm looking for a clean shirt to wear the next day. "How late do you stay open?" he asks the salesperson. "As long as you need us," the salesperson replies. As the traveler hurries to make his purchase, he thinks how unexpected that response was and how he'll remember to shop here more often (Rutherford, 2009, p. 4).

Jasmine, a 2nd grader, had been absent for two days. The note from the office said that she had the flu. On the evening of the second day, Jasmine's teacher called her home to check on her, ask if there was anything she needed from school, and just to express to Jasmine's mother how she and the class missed Jasmine and hoped she would return soon. The young mother was delighted at the call. "It was more than I expected" she said to at least a dozen other parents over the next two weeks.

Design delight. It is memorable whenever we encounter something that is particularly well-made or well-designed for its purpose. A great design often catches us by surprise and we remember our first experience with it (Fletcher, et al. 2001). A new car model has designed all the key controls for audio, navigation, and climate control into the steering wheel, just inches from the driver's fingertips. As the driver changes radio stations while keeping her eyes on the road, she thinks how cool that is... a grin appears on her face.

Fourth graders are examining a multiplication table that arranges factors and products as a grid. The teacher shows them how they can use the table to check their multiplication facts up through $12 \times 12 = 144$. "Not bad" the students say as they get accustomed to using the table. Then, the teacher shows them how they can place two fingers on any two numbers that are vertically adjacent and trace a line straight back to the left side of the table to show any fraction's simplified form. "Wow, said one student. Can I take this home?"

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