

What the "Seven-Step Lesson Plan" Isn't!

It's not a rigid formula but a set of useful elements.

The instructional practices espoused by Madeline Hunter have gained such wide acceptance over the past 20 years that one begins to believe they may escape the "this too shall pass" syndrome that has plagued so many educational innovations. However, as is often the case with popular concepts, Hunter's practices have suffered abuses as well as successes. Perhaps the most misunderstood component of her work is one that has been labeled the "Seven-Step Lesson Plan," a term that Hunter has never used.

The "trouble" began in 1976 when Hunter and Doug Russell, the lead teacher at University Elementary School, UCLA, wrote an article called *Planning for Effective Instruction: Lesson Design*, in which they described seven elements that should be *considered* when designing a lesson. They wrote that the following elements, if used appropriately, will increase the probability of student success in reaching the lesson objective: anticipatory set, objective, input, modeling, checking for understanding, guided practice, and independent practice. Hunter and Russell do not list them as steps, nor do they indicate that the elements are to be carried out in order. In the article they state their belief "that a systematic consideration of seven elements, which research has shown to be influential in learning and which therefore should be *deliberately included or excluded* in planning instruction, will make the difference in learners' success or lack of it" (Russell and Hunter 1976). Taken separately,

each of these elements is a sensible instructional practice with which few would disagree. However, on the way to implementation, something happened that has caused their efficacy to be questioned.

It could be that educators are fascinated with numbers or that overworked teachers were looking for an all-purpose lesson plan. Or it may have been the fault of staff developers who did not completely understand what Hunter and Russell were saying. Whatever its origin, the "Seven-Step

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Lesson Plan" soon became a common phrase in schools all over the United States. Teachers began to try to fit all elements of the "plan" into every lesson they taught. Administrators who were newly trained in clinical supervision began to look for all seven "steps" as they observed in classrooms, often faulting teachers if a step was missing. Behind the scenes, a few rumblings began to be heard. Social studies teachers in secondary schools felt that the "Seven-Step Lesson Plan" as they understood it, didn't work well for a discussion of democracy. Elementary teachers began to complain that there were times when one or more of the steps didn't seem appropriate.

The "dissidents" are right! Those seven instructional elements are not a recipe to be followed step by step in every lesson; they are elements to be *considered* when planning instruction, regardless of what form that instruction takes. If we agree with Hunter that *teaching is decision making*, use of the elements becomes much clearer. As teachers prepare to instruct, they need to consider many factors: the content, their students' previous knowledge and learning styles, their own teaching styles, and so on. A thorough understanding of anticipatory set, of modeling, or of any of the other elements allows the teacher to select those strategies that will best enable students to reach the objective of the lesson.

At times all seven elements might be used in order in a single period or session, but on other occasions it would be appropriate to reorder the

elements or to omit certain elements altogether. For example, if students are having difficulty with a learning task and it might interfere with their learning if they know they are to work on it again, the teacher might decide not to tell them the objective at the beginning of the lesson. During another lesson, the teacher might determine that the students need additional input and would therefore postpone guided and independent practice. There are no absolutes in the complex world of teaching.

The key to using the elements of instruction appropriately is a deep rather than superficial understanding of each one. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1983) call this kind of understanding "executive control." What appears to have happened in many cases is that the training in these instructional practices has not included sufficient practice for educators to obtain such control; to know when the use of an element is indicated and how to adapt it to specific situations and students.

The elements of effective instruction (including the use of motivation, reinforcement, transfer, rate and degree of learning, hemisphericity, and retention) generally contained in training in Hunter's practices might be better understood as "generic" instructional processes that underlie effective teaching and whose use needs to be *considered* in every teaching situation. With this understanding, we could eliminate the terms "Seven-Step Lesson Plan" and "Hunter Model" and see these instructional elements as they were intended: as research-validated practices to be applied at the discretion of teachers and administrators who understand their use to promote student learning. □

References

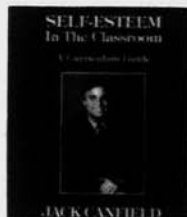
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