Running Head: SEVEN STEPS TO HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Seven Steps to Highly Effective Teaching: TIP Your CAP

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Abstract

Today's educators receive continued professional development on "best practices" that they are expected to implement. Nevertheless, given the many demands on educators' time, it is easy for themto become overwhelmed in regard to how to implement these practices in their classrooms. Further, thereis no simple, yet robust, framework to incorporate these trainings into daily practice, and there is a considerable gap in the research that connects lesson planning and implementation to unit design. This article presents a framework, *Seven Steps to Highly Effective Teaching: TIP your CAP*, for educators to use when planning lessons and units of study. The seven steps are outlined in this article, with a focus on lesson planning. The lesson is described in Steps 5 to 7, the TIP of the CAP: T (together to launch the lesson), I (interactive activities), P (pulling back together to summarize).

Keywords: lesson planning, instructional practices, teacher education, unit planning

Teaching is difficult, and research indicates that good teaching really does matter (Heck, 2007; Rivkin, Hanushek,& Kain, 2005; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss,& Shapley, 2007), a fact that has been obvious for years to educators who work in schools. Notably, for over a decade, research has documented continually that teachers are the single most important factor that influences student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003; Rivkin et al., 2000; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). For example, low-income students who have had "very good" teachers for three consecutive years in elementary school

earned test scores that, on average, were similar to those of middle-class students(National Academy of Education, 2009, p.1).The converse, however, is also noteworthy.

Unfortunately, all students can regress academically or, at best, remain stagnant, as a result of poor teaching (Chetty, Friedman,& Rockoff, 2011; National Academy of Education, 2009; Nye, Konstantopoulos,& Hedges, 2004). Research has shown that student achievement is inferior in the classrooms of first-year teachers prior to its rising in teachers' second and third years of practice (Rivkin et al., 2005). The growing area of research on the effect of teacher quality on student learning has critical implications for educators. The message is clear: Good teachers really do matter. Thus, the question for educators becomes:What do good teachers do? (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2014).

Unit and lesson planning are at the core of teaching. It is easy for teachers, however, to lose sight of this, given the many demands placed on their time. There is no such thing as a "usual"day for a teacher. Any day could bring, for example, a fire drill, an unexpected visit from a parent or administrator, an assembly, a sick,defiant, or hungry student, or the need to scrap a well-planned, technologically sophisticated lesson because the Smartboard or the clickers are not working. This gap between lesson plans and actions is well documented in educational research (Lee & Takahashi, 2011).

Despite these many challenges, good teachers continue to develop in their ability to plan. They learn to use backward design effectively when planning units of study (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005); they learn to differentiate the curriculum (Tomlinson & Lou, 2012); they learn how to work with multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011); and they learn to integrate the artsand the growing body of learning from mind-brain research into their lessons (Rinne, Gregory, Yarmolinskaya & Hardiman, 2011). While the lists and the trainings are often modified each year, effective unit and lesson planning remain a cornerstone of good teaching.

The importance of well-designed unit and lesson planning cannot be understated and is highly supported in educational research. A major goal of teaching is to enable students to remember critical knowledge; however, fewer than 30% of students retain new or difficult information by listening or reading printed text, which is a common practice in schools (Dunn & Dunn, 2005). The importance of effective unit and lesson planning is so pronounced that some school districts have come to recognize that beginning teachers need scaffolds. One supportive measure cited in the research was the creation of binders of model lesson plans developed by veteran teachers for novice teachers to reference (Chenoweth, 2009).

There is a large body of research on the critical contents of optimal unit and lesson plans. Effective unit development and lesson plans contain many agreed-upon features. One is the need for clearly articulated objectives (deFrece, 2010; Ediger, 2004), which are often a struggle for beginning teachers to develop (Jones, Jones, & Vermette, 2011). Currently, most teachers begin with the common core standards for planning

purposes (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). Another feature is the need for unit and lesson plans to contain only salient or relevant knowledge for students to acquire (Ediger, 2004). The lessons also should be interesting and engaging (Cadenas, 1999). In regard to engagement, some teachers used a flipped classroom model of instruction whereby they record their lessons for students to view online before and after a lesson and then reserve the face-to-face class time for hands-on learning (Kovach, 2014). Finally, all units and lesson plans should differentiate the ways they engage students, be cognizant of individual student's learning preferences and interests, and be innovative, for example, allowing choice in some assignments (Dunn et al., 2010). In this regard, many teachers plan their lessons and units based on universal designs for learning (UDL; CAST, Inc., 1999-2013) and incorporate brain-targeted teaching strategies (Hardiman, 2012).

One important challenge for educators is how to integrate the unit design into daily lessons. To date, there is a considerable gap in the research on the "how" to do this, and there are only a few studies in this regard. For example, Jones et al. (2011) discussed the gap between unit design and lesson planning and proposed to bridge the gap through the integration of backward design unit planning (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) and the "two-step" model of Flynn, Mesibov, Vermette, and Smith (2004). Flynn et al.'s approach emphasizes the need for establishing the unit's essential questions first and then planning mini lessons that reflect the unit's goals and that include a discovery phase, middle-of-the-lesson activities, and an ending to the lesson. Another gap for educators is the often-inevitable disconnect between what is planned and what actually happens in the classroom because lesson plans often lack an evolving contingency (Lee & Takahashi, 2011). As such, on a daily basis, teachers plan and implement tasks to support units of study without much guidance from the literature as to "how" to connect the two in a fluid manner.

The literature continues to include a gap in the research that links unit development and lesson plans that take into account the fluidity that is often needed in practice. What continues to be missing is a frameworkthatprovides a means to incorporate this knowledge into daily practice. The model outlined in the *Seven Steps to Highly Effective Teaching* was developed to address this gap.

The Framework: Seven Steps to Highly Effective Teaching

The proposed framework for effective teaching was developed and used by both in-service and pre-service teachers for over a decade. The framework is an executive summary for planning lessons and units, the heart of teaching (Appendix A).

Remembering the Framework: A Visualizing Activity

Imagine that you are wearing your favorite hat, which will be referred to as your CAP. This CAP could be a favorite hat from your childhood, a favorite sports team CAP, or a ski CAP. Be sure to pause, close your eyes, if needed, and create a good visual of yourself wearing this CAP. Make sure that you picture your CAP in color. Now, picture yourself TIPping your CAP. If you are able, describe your CAP to someone. If not, continue picturing yourself wearing this CAP as you complete some of your favorite activities. Finally, stop, then take one step, your first step toward effective lesson and unit design, all the while TIPping your CAP.

The CAP is your unit, and the TIP of your CAP is a lesson. The three components of a unit are Content, Activities, and Products (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001). The three components of a lesson, TIP, are Together (to launch a lesson), Interactive Activities (to make sense of the information), and Pulling Back Together (to summarize). These six components comprise Steps 2–7 of highly effective teaching; Step 1 is the preassessment of the unit of study. The focus of this article is on the TIP, or the daily lesson.

Lesson Planning: The TIP of the CAP

Each day, teachers plan and teach lessons, which can vary in length and duration. What is important to rememberis that the daily lesson should have a distinguishable beginning, middle, and ending. These three parts, as noted, are termed the TIP: Together, Interactive Activities, and Pulling Back Together.

Together (T): Step 5

The beginning of a lesson plays a critical role in learning. As early as 1957, primacy studies documented that information presented earlier in a presentation, or lesson, are remembered better than is information presented later (Hovland et al., 1957; Nicolucci, 2010). Students need to be "grabbed" into the learning from the minute they step into a classroom. Effective teachers understand this phenomenon and plan accordingly.

What can teachers do?Effective teachers launch a class with a thoughtful activity. For example, students may enter the classroom and immediately continue work on a group project, and then, once they are settled and the teacher has completed some routine tasks such as attendance, a question may be posed for discussion. Subsequent to the discussion, the students continue their work. Or a teacher might post a discussion question or a "Do Now"(Teaching Channel, 2014),and, as students enter the classroom after watching a video from the previous night's assignment (e.g., flipped classroom), the students may individually or in small groups jot down three relevant facts to be shared later in the lesson. Another teacher might launch a math lesson by posting a math problem for students to solve collaboratively. What is most important is that elements that occur at the beginning of a lesson sequence are most easily recalled because the brain is relatively uncluttered at the start of the task (Nicolucci, 2010).

Interactive Activities (I): Step 6

The rationale for interactive activities during the lesson is the same as that for unit planning—to enable students to make sense of the information and to retain key pieces of information in their memory. In general, interactive activities increase information retention during the least remembered timeframe, or the middle, of a sequence (Unsworth, Brewer,& Spillers, 2011). Interactive activities should consume the greatest amount of time in any lesson.

What can teachers do?Teachers are encouraged to first reflect on what they typically do during this portion of their lessons and then plan other varied activities to complement those already used. For example, if a teacher typically lectures during this time and has the students write notes, he or she can try using another type ofintelligence by showing a video snippet or having students work in small groups on a project, peer edit, or use the computer/iPad. Notably, the importance of allowing students time to reflect and understand in a variety of ways must be taken into account.

Pulling Back Together (P): Step 7

In psychology, the term *recency* refers to the effect of better recall of the most recent information, or,for our purposes, the ending of a lesson (Gupta, 2005; Nicolucci, 2010). It is critical, therefore, to plan lessons accordingly. Teachers typically want to teach to the end of the lesson and not stop to review or summarize. Effective teachers understand that every class ending is critical to retaining information and, therefore, use various reflection activities as powerful closing activities.

What can teachers do? Lesson endings may include several individuals' or groups' sharing their progress on an activity or students receiving an exit ticket on which they write a question about the topic of study. A teacher might also have students create individual or group word splashes or visual mindmaps to summarize their work; then, the teacher could post them in the classroom as a reminder of the lesson.In essence, a teacher's explicit focus on the ending of a lesson, or therecency effect, results in greater recall of information. Teachers must, therefore, carefully plan for each lesson's ending as a means to ensure student learning.

Summary

There is no one right way to teach, just as there is no one right way to learn. A great deal of research is now available about how students learn and how teachers teach, but the need for more "usable knowledge" remains (Stein & Fischer, 2011). Today, more than ever, with the heightened focus on student performance and teacher training, educators have an opportunity to inform the practice of teaching. Until now, what has been most critically missing to guide daily practices is a template to help teachers organize the vast amount of information about "best practices."

Seven Steps to Highly Effective Teaching: TIP your CAP provides a framework that allows teachers to effectively plan lessons and units of study that integrate all of the "best practices" that they have learned. Once teachers retain these seven steps, they will

be more prepared to ensure that critical information is incorporated into the long-term memories of their students, thereby promoting student achievement. So, as you finish this article, close your eyes, TIP your CAP, and visualize yourself expanding your lesson planning practices. One possible place to start is to complete a self-reflection of your current practices (Appendix B). Remember that, if you expand your lessons to include more purposeful Together time, Interactive Activities time, and Pulling Back Together time (TIP), you and your students will continue to enjoy the process of learning together.

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Appendix A

Seven Steps to Highly Effective Teaching: TIP your CAP

Step	Name
Step 1	Pre-assessment
Steps 2–4	Unit planning (CAP)
	C: Content
	A: Activities
	P: Product (long-term assignments; assessments)
Steps 5–8	Lesson Planning (TIP)
	T: Together (to launch the lesson)
	I: Interactive Activities
	P: Pull back together (to summarize)

Appendix B

Teacher Self-Assessment

7 Steps to Highly Effective Teaching: TIP your CAP

The Lesson

What Do I Do Now?	What Would I Like To Try?
T (TOGETHER) Beginning of the Lesson	T (TOGETHER) Beginning of the Lesson
I (INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES) During the Lesson	I (INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES) During the Lesson
P (PULLING BACK TOGETHER) Ending of the Lesson	P (PULLING BACK TOGETHER) Ending of the Lesson