



Sept. 12, 2013

Department: Teacher's Corner



Jeff Danielian, NAGC Teacher Resource Specialist and editor, *Teaching for High Potential* The Lesson Plan: What to Leave In? What to Leave Out?

During a short conversation recently with friend of mine who just began his teaching career, I reflected on my first days of teaching, some 15 years ago. I had everything planned out. Five to ten minutes for the introduction, seven minutes for the first activity, nine minutes for this, fifteen minutes for that, and so on. The end of each lesson always contained a “wrap-up” questioning time and assigning of homework. Each lesson of my unit was neat and organized. I was ready!

In truth, the written plan looked more like a schedule of events than a class. More often than not, student questions, ideas, and answers led the class in a different direction, and I rarely kept to my anticipated time blocks. My planned classes were certainly not going as planned! I was afraid to stray from the prescriptive nature of the lessons, thinking that my students should be taught the same way, receive the same information, and work at the same pace. I was wrong.

I sought the counsel of a veteran teacher (great advice generally) and received some constructive guidance. “Use the plan as a guide, make sure you cover only what is absolutely crucial, prepare options, and most importantly, let the student’s questions dictate the flow.”

It took time, more advice and support, and an increase in patience before I began to feel at ease with this new framework, but it worked. Even though it has been 15 years, the unit and lesson plans I continually write in preparation for classes still serve as a way for me to get motivated for the quarter or semester ahead. My three-step process, shared below, has become inherently simple, given the complexity and differentiation that I am trying to accomplish in the classroom. I hope that they spark

some of your own creative ideas, for one thing I have undoubtedly learned is that you must put “yourself” into the lesson and its plans.

Find Out What Students Know

Armed with the knowledge that my students have different interests and understandings, I begin each unit with a short survey intended to capture an overall snapshot of the needs of the class, both in content and delivery. The results help guide the planning of introductory activities and discussions and ensure that each student feels connected to the lessons.

Divide and Conquer

I typically divide lessons into three parts. This triad serves as the foundation for my daily, multi-day, or weekly plan and allows for issues such as loss of class time due to distractions or interruptions, off-topic discussions, and questions that need to be addressed. The introduction contains a few guiding questions, a demonstration, or the presentation of general ideas and facts. A major activity follows, ensuring a hands-on approach to the topic at hand. Lastly, I close with a conclusion and homework assignment, leaving at least five minutes for the students to write down the correct assignment and ask related questions. I also plan a collection of secondary activities, all intended to solidify the theme or purpose. If time is lost or the class gets off track, at least I know that I have covered the main point of the lesson. I can also use the activities with the entire class, split them out among groups, or offer them to a select group of more advanced students.

Evaluate and Assess

Student understanding can be assessed in multiple ways, and so I continually utilize a variety of evaluative methods. Mixing it up between quizzes and tests, creative projects, class presentations and discussions, and one-on-one consultations is a must. Careful record keeping and documentation of individual progress is the goal. I also apply this to myself, making notes on what works and what doesn't, keeping in mind that not every class will be a success.

Each moment spent in the classroom provides the opportunity for growth, for the student and the educator, so make the most of the time spent together. NAGC has many useful links for lesson planning. Visit the [Content Connections](#) and [Hot Topic: Differentiation](#) web pages for specific strategies and ideas and don't forget about the assessment standard in [NAGC's PreK-Grade 12 Gifted Programming Standards](#).

Have a great start to the year!