Learning Something New Every Day—and Today, Thanks to Marshall Jones (and Robert Gagne...)

The old adage says you learn something new each day. I have days that I don’t think I learn anything new, but maybe I am just not being aware. When you reach a somewhat advanced age, the opportunities for learning something completely new get slimmer. So a day in which you truly learn something new is a memorable day. I learned something new today, from a colleague, which makes it even better. I went to Marshall Jones’s TLC session today, “Technology You Should Be Using.” I learned several new technologies, of course, including signupgenius.com, a website I am going to use for upcoming academic advising. But the new thing I learned today that most interested me is actually something old: Robert Gagne’s “Nine Events of Instruction.”

Gagne first published this concept in 1965—how is it I never encountered this useful sequence before today?


Gagne was a cognitive psychologist, and much of his early work was in training the military. As he evolved his model, he recognized its flexibility and adaptability: the process does not always work in exactly this order, and all nine events do not have to be present in every learning event.

If you do a Google search on “Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction,” you will find multiple sites that have adapted his model to a number of different teaching and learning environments, from elementary school to college, as well as business and organizations. I found a number of templates for lesson planning, which I am sure I will find helpful.

What Marshall pointed out today, and what I thought was the most cogent point, was that the fourth item, “present the material,” is what many people focus on, solely and mistakenly. What is clearly the center of the learning event is clearly not the only event.

We have probably all followed some or all of these steps unconsciously, but having a framework as a guideline helps us focus on what we are doing and keeps us from leaving out crucial steps in the rush to cover the material.

I was observing a new faculty member recently. Thinking back on her very good class, I recall that she started out class with some comic book figures that related to the content of the course (1—Gain attention). Then she told the class what the topic would be for that day and the two main activities the
Step six, “elicit performance,” involves both modeling and practice. We should model a skill, a concept, or content, but it is vital that we let students practice what we are teaching, what we are learning. This step is vital to our courses that involve hands-on learning, like painting, sculpture, ballet, and piano. I would imagine that we could all learn from our colleagues in the College of Visual and Performing Arts—although they do not have a monopoly on this kind of learning.

Marshall Jones pointed to steps five, six, and seven as really important and often overlooked. Number five, “provide guidance for learning,” includes providing coaching on how to learn the skill or master the material. Giving students this metacognitive step will help make their learning quicker and deeper.

Step six, “elicit performance,” involves both modeling and practice. We should model a skill, a concept, or content, but it is vital that we let students practice what we are teaching, what we are learning. This step is vital to our courses that involve hands-on learning, like painting, sculpture, ballet, and piano. I would imagine that we could all learn from our colleagues in the College of Visual and Performing Arts—although they do not have a monopoly on this kind of learning.

We focus a good bit of our attention to the eighth step, “assess performance.” Such assessment can be formal or informal—but “the test” should not be and is not the end of learning, no matter how often our students approach our classes this way. I long ago changed my tests into learning opportunities rather than mere testing of content: a test can be an assimilation of learning, the point at which students finally put all the pieces together.

And the ninth and last step, “enhance retention and transfer,” is one I too often skip in the rush to get to the next chapter. What are similar problems or situations? What additional practice can I give my students? What opportunities can I give them to transfer their learning?

Thanks, Marshall Jones, for showing me something I should have known a long time ago. Here is the link to the site Marshall uses to introduce his students to Gagne. As that site says, “The feedback needs to be specific, not, ‘you are doing a good job.’ Tell them why they are doing a good job and/or provide specific guidance.” Such feedback needs to be ongoing, and I can see how it must be used throughout the learning process.

http://tinyurl.com/m3tbmbo for Marshall’s preferred site and Florida’s http://tinyurl.com/167f7vj for a link to the site Marshall uses to introduce his students to Gagne.

---

Continued from page 1

class would engage in (2—Provide a learning objective). After that, she asked students what they knew about the topic (3—Stimulate recall of prior knowledge). Then she moved to step four and began presenting the material. (This beginning teacher told me she was worried because her PhD training was only in content and research, and none in teaching. I could tell from her teaching that she doesn’t have to worry about that, and comparing her methods to Gagne’s model shows me even more about the ways she has internalized good teaching.)

Marshall Jones pointed to steps five, six, and seven as really important and often overlooked. Number five, “provide guidance for learning,” includes providing coaching on how to learn the skill or master the material. Giving students this metacognitive step will help make their learning quicker and deeper.

Step six, “elicit performance,” involves both modeling and practice. We should model a skill, a concept, or content, but it is vital that we let students practice what we are teaching, what we are learning. This step is vital to our courses that involve hands-on learning, like painting, sculpture, ballet, and piano. I would imagine that we could all learn from our colleagues in the College of Visual and Performing Arts—although they do not have a monopoly on this kind of learning.

We focus a good bit of our attention to the eighth step, “assess performance.” Such assessment can be formal or informal—but “the test” should not be and is not the end of learning, no matter how often our students approach our classes this way. I long ago changed my tests into learning opportunities rather than mere testing of content: a test can be an assimilation of learning, the point at which students finally put all the pieces together.

And the ninth and last step, “enhance retention and transfer,” is one I too often skip in the rush to get to the next chapter. What are similar problems or situations? What additional practice can I give my students? What opportunities can I give them to transfer their learning?

Thanks, Marshall Jones, for showing me something I should have known a long time ago. Here is the link to the site Marshall uses to introduce his students to Gagne. As that site says, “The feedback needs to be specific, not, ‘you are doing a good job.’ Tell them why they are doing a good job and/or provide specific guidance.” Such feedback needs to be ongoing, and I can see how it must be used throughout the learning process.

http://tinyurl.com/m3tbmbo for Marshall’s preferred site and Florida’s http://tinyurl.com/167f7vj for a link to the site Marshall uses to introduce his students to Gagne.
Thanks For Helping Make the Teaching and Learning Center Work!

Winthrop’s Teaching and Learning Center offers a wide variety of sessions each year for faculty and staff, on teaching, technology, professional development, and personal development. From leading class discussion to mastering the Smart podium to tenure and promotion to cooking soufflés, the TLC tries to make sure that all faculty and staff receive the kinds of professional and personal development that will make them better teachers, administrators, and employees.

To offer this programming, the TLC depends on the talent, expertise, and generosity of our faculty and staff. We do not have a big budget to bring in outside speakers and experts. Even so, we are able to offer engaging, timely, and valuable sessions every year on a variety of topics. We thank those who have offered their time and talent in past years.

We also thank those of you who have attended TLC sessions. Your time is valuable, and we appreciate you taking some of it to enrich yourself through professional and personal development.

A Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The TLC for several years has been offering a service: teaching consultation. At the instructor’s request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don’t want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology, and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don’t have the time or they can’t at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop
See you there!

Thought For the Week

“It is good to obey all the rules when you’re young, so you’ll have the strength to break them when you’re old.”
--Mark Twain