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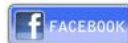
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Brunn, Peter (2010) *The Lesson Planning Handbook: Essential Strategies that Inspire Student Thinking & Learning*. NY: Scholastic.

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Reviewed by Stephanie Rosenblatt
California State University, Fullerton

Peter Brunn is currently the Director of Staff Development at the nonprofit Developmental Studies Center in Oakland, CA. He has also been an elementary teacher in the Bronx and a staff developer with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University. Brunn has worked with teachers and literacy coaches in classrooms across the country. His book, *The Lesson Planning Handbook: Essential Strategies that Inspire Student Thinking & Learning*, breaks down the processes successful teachers use to create “powerful lessons” that engage students and promote critical thinking.

When reading the book, it soon becomes obvious that Brunn is a protégé of Lucy Calkins (Calkins, 1986, 2001) and the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project’s

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workshop model of instruction (Teachers College, 2010). The book could easily serve as a how-to guide for those teachers who need help organizing their classtime in order to meet the needs of the workshop model, but the lesson planning process, techniques for facilitating lessons, and questioning strategies described by the author can also be used to maximize student engagement even when the teacher is using a scripted program or mandated curriculum that relies heavily on direct instruction.

Brunn describes his goals for the book in the introduction. They are to:

- share common qualities of successful reading and writing lessons
- offer a structure for organizing lessons across the school day that optimizes student thinking
- outline a process for planning, reviewing, and revising lessons that fosters student thinking and interaction
- provide techniques for facilitating rich and meaningful lessons with students (pp. 8-9).

The book is divided into three parts: “Part I: Teaching Essentials,” “Part II: Before We Teach,” and “Part III: As We Teach.” Throughout the book, Brunn gives examples of teaching activities, questioning strategies, and organizational structures that have worked in the classes he has taught or observed. He also mentions a number of books that inspired him or influenced his teaching and includes their details in his bibliography.

“Part I: Teaching Essentials” consists of a single chapter. In it, Brunn sets out the motivation for the book, starting with an anecdote about watching two teachers teach the exact same lesson with vastly different results:

One lesson was wonderfully successful, rich with student thinking and interaction. Students were engaged, they worked together, and they were involved in lively discussion and debate. The other lesson was dull and unsuccessful. The students said and did very little while the teacher talked a great deal and did lots of work. There was little evidence of student achievement or growth. . . This raised an essential question for our work. If the content of their lessons was the

same, what exactly were they doing that made such a difference in students' thinking? How could we identify for teachers the powerful moves that greatly affect the outcome of our teaching?

While there is no easy answer to this question, it is clear that successful lessons showcase teacher actions that set them apart from unsuccessful ones. As we learned from our work, these actions cannot be scripted in a program. It is the way in which the lesson is planned, structured, and facilitated that makes the difference. To find these qualities, we need to look between the lines of programs and written lesson plans, (Brunn, pp. 11-12).

Brunn then lists the "Ten Qualities of Successful Teachers." (p. 12). These qualities include being thoughtful and reflective before, during, and after the lesson; planning with the students' needs in mind instead of just considering the content that needs to be covered; using a predictable structure for every lesson; and listening to what students are saying and asking questions to unpack their thinking so the teacher can truly understand the processes the students used to get to their explanations.

Brunn considers listening to be one of the most important actions a successful teacher can take. For him, "listening" is more than paying attention when students are talking, it also involves collecting artifacts that document student thought processes such as entries in a student's writer's notebook and reader response journals, or a teacher's notes describing conversations students are having as they work collaboratively.

Brunn connects actions to each of the qualities he lists. For each action, he gives examples from the classroom of teacher practice and student behavior.

"Part II: Before We Teach" consists of two chapters. One focuses on creating an effective and predictable structure for lessons and the other is a description of a five-step planning process used to write, evaluate, and revise lessons.

Brunn begins by describing why structure is important:

The structures we use in our classrooms are much like our closets at home. Without a place to hang our jackets, shelve our shoes, and store our bags and umbrellas, we'd have a mess as soon as we walked into our home. . . In our teaching, the structure and procedures we use in our lesson serve the same function. The lesson's structure gives us a place to hang all of the important components of our teaching. It helps keep our lessons clean, clear, and organized. (pp. 29-30)

Brunn's ideas about lesson structure are informed by constructivist learning theory and the use of mini-lessons and other trappings of the workshop model. His structure of an effective lesson that meets all of his requirements for learning consists of four parts:

1. Preparation for work
2. Whole-class teaching time or the time period for the mini-lesson or other direct instruction. This section also includes what Brunn refers to as "student try-outs" (p. 36) but other teachers may be familiar with the term, "guided practice."
3. Independent work time
4. Reflection, which includes not only time for students to share what they have learning during the lesson but also includes time to discuss the social issues that can arise when students are required to collaborate and work with others.

For Brunn, a predictable lesson structure is vitally important, especially when teachers are working with English Language Learners or other students with special needs, "In my early teaching years, I initially struggled because my students had no idea what was going to happen from one day to the next. My lesson unfolded differently from day to day, depending on my planning.... One of the ways we can help decrease anxiety and increase participation by all students is by making our lessons follow a predictable structure," (p. 41).

At the end of this and every chapter, Brunn includes a "Try This" -- an activity that directs the reader to apply

the information from his book to a real-life problem or task. In this chapter, he notes that the lesson plans included in teachers' manuals rarely align to the lesson structure he has found so effective. He asks the reader to review the entire lesson, then mark the plan using a pencil or sticky note, identifying each of the four steps described in the chapter, and adding in time for each part if they haven't been included.

Brunn's five-step process for planning powerful lessons first requires teachers to ask themselves questions about their larger social and academic learning goals for their students. Brunn cautions teachers about having too many goals for one lesson or being overly concerned with covering every standard every lesson, "As teachers, we need to strike a balance between what our states require and what our students are ready for at the moment we are teaching. My not-so-simple advice is to know the grade-level standards well and to remember that we have an entire school year with many opportunities to cover them," (p. 51). Brunn also asks that teachers state the lesson goals in terms of questions in order to keep open-ended questions at the core of the lesson. For Brunn, the only ideas worth teaching or exploring with students are those that have more than one answer. He recommends that if a question has only one answer it is a waste of time to ask it and the information should be directly given to the students.

Second, teachers need to ensure students have enough context, background knowledge, and vocabulary to make the lesson meaningful. The trick is to do this without detracting from the lesson's goals. Brunn gives an example of deciding to go ahead and read a picture book that mentions segregation without taking time to explain it as his goal for the lesson is to get his students to understand how memoir writers use setting in their writing. An explanation of segregation would detract from this goal so he doesn't discuss it at this time.

Brunn continually emphasizes that teachers have to pay attention to their students' social development. In this step he also reminds teachers to make sure students have practiced the skills they need to work together so they can focus on accomplishing the lesson's learning tasks.

Step three requires the teacher to prioritize the content he/she will cover and to choose the methodology to use, including how to facilitate student conversations and transitions. He believes many teachers thoughtfully plan the directed portions of their lessons, but forget to think about how they will guide students while they are engaging with the content. Brunn reminds readers that learning is uncomfortable and requires work, “All students need to wrestle with their learning; indeed, such mental gymnastics –at times, a real struggle – is an essential part of the learning process,” (p. 61).

Step four is deciding how students will share and reflect on the academic and social aspects of their work, based on the goals of the lesson and the time allotted. This time includes a time for debriefing about what worked and what didn’t when students engaged in cooperative learning activities. Brunn believes that by modeling how to have these discussions and making them a priority, teachers will help create the positive classroom environment essential to learning.

In the last step, Brunn calls for “One Last Review” or a mental run-through of the lesson right before teaching the lesson. Are the students ready for the lesson as it is written? Have they gotten as far as planned in the curriculum? Do students have the materials or information they need in order to actively contribute? This run-through also includes teachers rehearsing what they will say during the lesson so they can explain what they mean as succinctly as possible and so they have already prepared open-ended questions that can guide student thinking.

The last section of the book, “Part III: As We Teach,” consists of two chapters that focus on the decisions successful teachers make while they are teaching.

Chapter four helps teachers develop the essential, open-ended questions that will serve as the goals of the lesson and will help guide students’ learning and self-exploration. This chapter introduces questioning strategies teachers can use to encourage students to explain the thought processes or understandings that informed their answers in order to help students engage more deeply with the lesson content and gain critical thinking skills.

Brunn uses this chapter to again remind teachers that powerful learning experiences happen when students don't know the "right" answer. Teachers need to prepare themselves to explore their students' thinking in order to help them learn, "It has been my experience that when we are confronted with challenges in life, it is not how much we know that helps us address our challenges, it is our creativity, mixed with lots of trial and error (in other words, our ability to think and learn), that helps us solve our problems. In fact, most of the problems we face in our work and in our personal lives have no clear 'right answer.' There are typically many paths we can take to solve them," (p. 73).

This chapter also provides teachers ways to develop their own listening skills in addition to those of their students. Brunn relates that teachers are often too quick to validate or correct a student's initial answer to a question when instead additional questions should be asked to further probe the thought process that led to the response. Brunn provides teachers with strategies that can encourage student thinking such as wait time, and examples of neutral follow-up questions. He also describes popular cooperative conversational structures such as "Turn to Your Partner" and "Think, Pair, Share" which allow students to engage with the questions and lesson content while working together. These activities are intended to improve critical thinking skills for struggling learners who can benefit when paired with a peer who models higher-order thinking skills or appropriate social behaviors.

In the final chapter, "Classroom Community: The Foundation of Successful Lessons," Brunn describes additional cooperative activities such as team builders that require students to ask questions and communicate with multiple members of the class in order to complete a task, class meetings, and read alouds. When teachers make time for these exercises, they are prioritizing the creation of a learning space in which students feel safe sharing their emotional life and taking risks.

The Lesson Planning Handbook will be useful for any teacher. The book provides beginning teachers or credential students with a lesson planning process and a lesson structure that emphasizes backwards planning, teacher reflection, and student-centered learning. Seasoned

practitioners will benefit from learning about, or remembering, tested strategies for facilitating student engagement and creating a positive classroom community. The handbook also reminds all of us that teaching isn't a performance or the completion of a set of tasks, it's a conversation between teacher and students and if we want students to learn, they need to be doing most of the talking.

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About the Reviewer

Stephanie Rosenblatt is the Education Librarian and Coordinator for the Learning Resources Display Center & Curriculum Materials Center at California State University, Fullerton. She has also worked as an elementary school teacher and teacher assigned to the library in Brooklyn, New York.

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Editors

Gene V Glass

glass@edrev.info

Gustavo Fischman

fischman@edrev.info

Melissa Cast-Brede

cast-brede@edrev.info
