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

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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?

Here are the nine events Gagne says are present in learning: 1. Gain attention; 2. Provide a learning objective; 3. Stimulate recall of prior knowledge; 4. Present the material; 5. Provide guidance for learning; 6. Elicit performance; 7. Provide feedback; 8. Assess performance; and 9. Enhance retention and transfer.

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.



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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.

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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. I am reminded of the posters and castles and drawings and models that pile up outside my English Department colleague Jo Koster's door when she teaches Chaucer. (I applied her methods to my ENGL 200 course on *The Lord of the Rings*, and I was astonished by the creativity my students exhibited. I am sure some of them learned more through those creative projects than they did from my lectures and my leading of discussion of Tolkien's books.)

Step seven, “provide feedback,” can be a test, a quiz, or verbal comments, according to a website 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.

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, as well as a link to the way the University of Florida's Center for Instructional Training and Technology:

<http://tinyurl.com/m3tbmbo> for Marshall's preferred site and Florida's <http://tinyurl.com/l67f7vj>

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the kinds of professional and personal development that will make them better teachers, administrators, and employees.

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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.

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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