

Reflections of a Classroom Teacher

Ingredient 1: Master the fundamentals before implementing complex techniques

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To become an accomplished chef, one must first master the fundamental skills of cooking, such as boiling pasta, roasting potatoes, and sautéing vegetables. Mastering these fundamentals provides chefs with the foundation to handle most recipes.

Just like new chefs, first-year teachers first need to hone their pedagogical skills (including aligning curricular standards with daily lesson plans, implementing data-driven instruction, and designing student-centered lessons) guided by their national (ACTFL) standards, state curriculum guide and insights from their pre-service training. Put another way, for new teachers, lesson planning is less like *creating new recipes from scratch* and more like *incorporating fundamental techniques* (i.e., best practices) into a lesson plan that meets the needs of the student population.

When I began teaching, I devoted too much time to creating new recipes from scratch. Given a lesson topic, I spent more time designing a lesson that was innovative and engaging and less time designing a lesson that was aligned with curricular standards and my students' needs. This deficit was pointed out by my administrator during my first classroom observation. Recognizing the need to correct this deficit, I created a personalized protocol to help focus my attention mastering fundamental pedagogical skills. (See Figure 1). At the end of each school day, I self-assessed my lesson by providing a rating for each component on a scale from 0 to 3. I would also record specific notes and observations to justify my rating.

Figure 1. Lesson Self-assessment

	Rating: 0 1 2 3	Notes
Curricular Alignment , or curricular mapping, includes alignment between curriculum and state standards, standardized tests and/or state tests, curriculum-embedded tests, student assignments, lesson plans, textbooks and instruction." The process prevents		

educators from overlapping or skipping content that is essential to meeting state and national standards.		
Data-driven Instruction includes integrating formative assessment techniques and interpreting the data to make instructional decisions that target the needs of individual students.		
Student-centeredness is measured by how engaged students are during instruction. In a student-centered classroom, the teacher is more of a class facilitator than a lecturer!		

After using this protocol for several weeks, it became second nature to include all of these components in my daily lesson. Admittedly, it seemed tedious and time consuming to review this checklist at the end of each lesson. However, taking the time to do so ensured that I developed the proficiency in including all of these components.

Have you used a similar strategy in your classroom? If so, what additional components have you included in your protocol? Send me an email at lillehoj@gwu.edu to let me know how you enhanced your practice.

Resources:

Image: <http://www.hookedonfitness.net/Cooking-Clip-Art.jpg>