

Thomas N. Gellert – The School Music News Editor



Here We Go Again. It's About Lesson Planning and Delivery!

Repeat after me: "student engagement!" For someone who's been writing, teaching, observing, and evaluating lesson plans for more than 40+ years, it seems that there is still a lot of confusion from many in our profession about what a good lesson plan should be in design, unpacking (teaching) and follow-up.

There are more textbooks, teaching method explanations, evaluation models and folks who run workshops and seminars on lesson planning than I could ever, ever manage to touch upon in a single lifetime in education. That said, why then do so many well-intentioned lesson plans on paper not succeed in delivery? Here, are but a few thoughts:

10 important reasons why some lesson plans flop (There are more not listed here.)

1. Not knowing your audience (age and level appropriateness) and how your lesson connects to scope and sequence of what has been learned before the lesson, how it relates, and your failure to "connect the dots" to what kids will learn.
2. Overall teacher apprehension and anxiety.
3. Failure to motivate, engage and get students to focus from the very start of the lesson. You need to take your class's "temperature." (Do I have your attention, yet?)
4. The lesson is too much teacher-led and not enough student-centered with activities.
5. Too many goals built into the lesson plan and not enough time for delivery.
6. Not planning adequately for a variety of learning styles and abilities in the classroom.
7. Failure to carefully assess/reinforce student understanding before moving on in the lesson plan.
8. Forgetting to have a "bag of tricks" at the ready (ideas to extend your lesson) should you under-plan or just because your lesson is "tanking." (Let the tap dance begin.)
9. Unprepared issues with the implementation of technology that bring your lesson to a standstill. (Causes students to drift away.)
10. Forgetting that every lesson/rehearsal plan must involve closure in order to assess student understanding and your own success in the delivery of a highly effective lesson.

There have been all manner of articles appearing in the *School Music NEWS* and other music education journals that have addressed how students learn and retain what they are taught, the challenges of designing lessons that appeal to a wide array of learners in the classroom, student assessment, and on and on.

You will also find a great wealth of information all over the Internet that can help you to better understand how to be a more effective teacher. Fortunately, many colleagues also routinely interact in school settings, in online chats and through the sharing of ideas. Many of us also pick up the phone (You remember the phone, right?) and have been known to call a cherished mentor for suggestions and ideas. This is a good thing, folks!

Why your lessons should be all about student engagement! (You read it here.)

The most important aspect of lesson planning and the unpacking of your lesson is the simple reality that to be successful you must engage your students from the start to the finish of your lesson.

Simply because a goal was touched upon in your written lesson plan and covered briefly during the delivery of your lesson does not prove that you accomplished that objective. Sure, you

may have announced that to the class but where's the proof they learned something? What did your students take away from your lesson/rehearsal and what proof do you have? How and where was student engagement throughout the lesson and especially during closure? Inquiring minds want to know!

Here's another important question to ponder: how do you as the teacher provide evidence that kids actually learned something and have "ownership" of an objective embedded in your lesson plan to a non-music administrator who drops into your class/rehearsal for a walkthrough observation? *Answer: student engagement.*

For years, educational and psychological study after study has pointed to the value of student engagement in learning and how it increases student focus and motivation to engage in higher-level critical thinking. Bingo!

One outstanding example of student engagement can be seen when students take turns teaching a learned musical concept to one another. Don't believe me? Try it sometime and you will be impressed with how elements of a lesson can be enhanced when one student teaches another. This is a very powerful technique that will provide a wonderful example of highly effective teaching and student engagement to any administrator (music or not) observing you teaching.

One last thought: long, overstuffed lesson plans that include everything but the kitchen sink do not impress or show that you are a highly effective teacher. Often they are bloated and not realistic. Learn to streamline your lesson plans and be sure to build in lots of student engagement and that oft forgotten and/or missed final task: closure! Now, you've come full circle.

Happy MIOS (every day)! ||