What's Wrong With Madeline Hunter?

Madeline Hunter

The Hunter model is designed to guide behavior, predict outcomes, and stimulate research. Those who seek more may be expecting too much; those who find less may not be using the model appropriately.

What's wrong with Madeline Hunter? More specifically, what's wrong with a model of teaching that increases the probability of learning by (1) identifying professional decisions teachers must make; (2) supplying research-based cause-effect relationships to support those decisions; and (3) encouraging the teacher to use data emerging from students and classroom situations to augment or correct those decisions?

Doesn't knowing cause and most probable effect free teachers for artistic and successful teaching? I always thought so; in fact, I still do, although I now see that there are other factors that impinge on the correct use of my model.

My clinical theory of instruction is based on the premise that *the teacher is a decision maker*. Because no one can tell teachers what to *do*, my purpose is to tell teachers what to *consider* before deciding what to do and, as a result, to base their decisions on sound theory rather than on folklore and fantasy.

Teacher decisions in this model emerge from *propositional knowledge*: knowing what affects student learning. Propositions are generalizations, validated by psychological research, that identify behaviors affecting learning. Take these two principles, for instance: (1) massing practice increases speed of learning, and (2)

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distributing practice increases retention of what has been lerned. These are two generalizations that guide teachers' decisions about practice. The teacher should first be able to translate them into procedures so that massed practice remains meaningful and interesting, and then make decisions about scheduling distributed practice for maximum learning efficiency. Propositions are easy to learn; artistic performance procedures are much more difficult to attain. Failing to translate propositions into procedures results in the never-use-a-preposition-to-end-a-sentence-with syndrome. The proposition is correct, but the translation into procedure leaves something to be desired.

Finally, my model demands *conditional knowledge*: knowing *when* to use each proposition and *why* then; that is, knowing which conditions in content, student, teacher, and situation indicate that modifications are necessary. *Conditional knowledge is the essence of translating science into artistry in teaching.*

Known by several names (A Clinical Theory of Instruction, ITIP, Mastery Teaching, PET, Clinical Teaching, Target Teaching, the UCLA model, the Hunter model), the model identifies decisions all teachers must make *regardless* of content, age, or ethnicity of the learner, style of teacher, or mode of teaching. It is analogous to nutrition theory. Regardless of the menu, age of the eaters, type of meal, service, or preference of the cook, meals (to be nutritious) must incorporate those nutrients that promote health. Using nutrition theory, a skilled cook can produce a variety of meals, served in a variety of ways to accommodate the tastes of the eaters. In the same way, teachers can accommodate preferences of learners and their own teaching styles as long as those elements that promote learning[1] are incorporated in planning, teaching, and evaluating.

Myths About the Model

Let us examine some problems arising from misunderstandings and mutations that are *not* part of the basic model.

● *Myth: The model is rigid and stifles creativity.* On the contrary, this model should provide the launching pad from which creativity can soar. All creativity is based on a basic structure from which artistry and freedom emerge. The Taj Mahal is not a violation of the propositions of physics, engineering, and design, but a beautiful manifestation of an architect's inspired translation of those propositions into reality. The propositions of this teaching model are exquisitely used, never abused by the gifted teacher.

● *Myth: The model was created to evaluate teachers.* Not at all! It was created to increase teaching excellence. Using the model has changed many marginal teachers into effective ones and effective teachers into masters. An observer can pinpoint inappropriate teaching decisions and behaviors, then offer productive alternatives. Rather than general admonitions—"You need to tighten up your discipline, make your lessons more interesting, create more motivation in your students, develop better class routines"—the model equips observer and teacher with knowledge, skills, and the practical assistance to attain excellence. As one teacher so beautifully put it, "Today I got a glimpse of the teacher I have the potential for becoming."

This model cannot save all teachers; but when we accept defeat, it is not for want of research-based help that is so practical that the teacher must have been unwilling to use or incapable of using the assistance offered.

● *Myth: The model is great for direct teaching but does not apply to the arts, to discovery learning, or cooperative learning.* Not so! The model undergirds the decisions made in every mode of teaching. Teaching decisions may be delegated to the learner. Any style of teaching or learning may be used, but the teacher remains responsible for learning outcomes. The more skilled the teacher is in using the model, the more independent and successful learners can become and the greater the variety of teaching and learning styles that can be used.

● *Myth: The model applies only to elementary teaching.* The model is equally effective in elementary, secondary, and university teaching.[2] In fact, it applies to every human interaction that is conducted for the purpose of learning. Classrooms, faculty meetings, PTA meetings, school board meetings, Rotary Club meetings, Scout meetings, and grade-level meetings are all improved by conscious application of the principles of human learning. An educator who can artistically implement principles of learning will be more successful in any situation.

● *Myth: The model helps teachers who are having difficulty, but can contribute nothing to successful teachers.* A great many of the basic propositions in this model were identified from observations of successful teachers. Psychological research enabled me to label these generalizations and explain why they worked. As a result, teachers can move from intuitive to purposeful behavior. They can understand what they are doing and why they are doing it, and then do it on purpose. Students' learning becomes more predictable and successful. Teachers consistently express their gratitude for bringing this predictability to their planning and teaching. All professionals continue to grow as their knowledge, skills, and artistry increase. Teachers and administrators are no exception. In the same way that using this model speeds up learning for both slow and fast learners but does not make them equal, it also helps less able teachers to become more effective and expert teachers to become proficient educational artists.

● *Myth: The model expects the impossible of the typical teacher.* Not at all! Even student teachers can learn to use theory to make productive teaching decisions with results that are gratifying to them, their students, and their supervising teachers. The model results in more inspiration and less perspiration for all teachers. Knowledge and skill make all work easier to accomplish successfully and artistically. The model is not based on working harder but on working smarter.

● *Myth: There has been no research to support this model.* Every proposition of this model was derived from research in human learning. Any beginning psychology text identifies the research basis for most of the propositions. The model was originally validated in Project Linkage, which was funded by the California State Department of Education in a difficult Los Angeles inner-city school. Outside evaluation demonstrated substantial increases in student learning and teacher satisfaction, decreases in discipline problems and vandalism. Since then, major research studies (such as BTES and Effective Schools, the Napa County NIE project) plus dissertations have corroborated the propositions of this model. Unfortunately, many projects have attempted to evaluate results from one short training or exposure without checking whether the propositions were translated into procedural and conditional teacher behavior in the classroom.

● *Myth: The model consists of a limited set of learning principles.* A launching pad for excellence in teaching is built with motivation, reinforcement, and practice theory translated into lesson design. From there, people who use the model need to know transfer theory to encourage creativity, problem solving, and decision making. They also need to implement in their teaching those principles that accelerate learning (sequence theory, level of aspiration, and so forth) and promote a positive self-concept and a productive, contributing human being. Attribution theory, one of our most recent theories of human motivation, is also a part of this dynamic model, which continually adds new theory.

Misunderstandings That Lead to Abuse

Even though the model is sound, problems arise when it is misunderstood and therefore inappropriately or incorrectly applied.

● *Problem: Some administrators believe that teachers should try to use every element of effective instruction in every lesson.* That "white sauce recipe" for teaching was designed to help teachers plan. In no way can a teacher be judged by the inclusion of all those elements. In fact, many lessons will incorporate only a few elements as, over a period of time, students progress toward achievement of complex learning. *Any observer who uses a checklist to make sure a teacher is using all seven elements does not understand the model.*

● *Problem: Some teachers and administrators believe if a little is good, more is better.* Teachers over-reinforce or motivate when that is not needed. Students can practice beyond productivity and make decisions that do not facilitate their growth. Educators must develop *conditional* knowledge to determine under what conditions procedural skills should be used. For example, if students are fatigued or bored by practice, the practice should be changed or discontinued even though students have not mastered the skill.

Frequency counts are no more useful to teachers than to doctors. The number of times pills or surgery are prescribed cannot tell you if a doctor is making valid medical decisions. Awareness of medical propositions, procedures, and existing conditions enables a sophisticated observer to judge medical decisions and actions. In the same way, a sophisticated observer can judge teachers' decisons and actions.

● *Problem: Observers judge teachers' decisions without finding out the reasons for those decisions.* Checking the reasons for a teacher's decisions will often reveal excellent professional thought processes. On the other hand, an observer can frequently see what is not visible to the teacher who is busy teaching. (The general with binoculars

in the lookout can see more of what's happening on the battlefield than can the soldier in the trenches.) Communication between teacher and observer as to the basis for each one's thinking results in learning for both.

● *Problem: Too much is expected too soon.* This model is deceptively *simple* in conceptualization, incredibly *complex* in application. There is a quantum leap from knowing propositions to creating artistic procedures. Frequently, teachers are exposed in a workshop to sequence theory, practice theory, or whatever, and then naively expected to apply this theory magically and correctly in their practice. Artistic performance, whether in music, writing, physical skills, or teaching, results from countless hours of practice *with coaching* to increase productive responses, and remediate or eliminate unproductive ones. Too frequently, teachers are not observed or coached after inservice; consequently, they never translate the new learning into their teaching, or it appears in a form that is not as productive as it could be. Artistic and effective teaching results from a well-planned staff development program. (The stages necessary to translate knowledge into artistic practice have been described elsewhere.[3])

● *Problem: Promoters of the model want to begin with teachers.* Knowledge of effective teaching should first be learned by central administrators and principals, because these local leaders make the greatest difference in teaching excellence. The skills of administrators who do not engage in daily teaching tend to grow rusty. Also, many of their former teaching skills cannot be transmitted because they were intuitive rather than articulate and theory-based. As a result, administrators and supervisors attempt to clone themselves and get teachers to imitate the way they "used to do it." Instead, they need to become expert in translation of theory into practice in order to help teachers use their own styles to achieve excellence.

In addition, administrators need to internalize skills to become models for teachers. Otherwise, a do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do situation exists.

● *Problem: Districts provide a one-shot or one-year exposure, then move on to a new focus.* A major problem of inservice is the patchwork effect of a little of this and a little of that until the teacher can see no relationship between the patches. My model provides the foundation of cause-effect relationships to which each additional inservice focus can be added. These additions become a related extension or refinement of the undergirding propositions of effective teaching. Seeing the relationship between the three categories of decisions that all teachers must make enables teachers to assimilate, accommodate, and use new professional information, techniques, organizational schemes, methods, and discoveries. We can't just hope that professional integration of information will occur; we must provide for it.

● *Problem: Once teachers or administrators have been trained, they think they are finished.* A professional, whether doctor, architect, attorney, or teacher has never finished learning that which increases professional effectiveness.

Consequently, systematic and periodic renewal is essential for both teachers and administrators. In addition, even with coaching, undesirable mutations of practice emerge, old habits spontaneously recur, and some new learning is forgotten. For these reasons, all educators need scheduled renewal, and revitalization.

● *Problem: Leaders are not adequately trained.* Trainers take a quick crash course to acquire the propositional knowledge of the model and are then expected to teach it to others. When trainers have not had time to internalize procedural knowledge, they may not be able to translate propositions into their own teaching behaviors. In addition, they may lack the conditional knowledge of knowing when and under what conditions to use the generalizations. Frequently, trainers make an error by teaching rules to govern teachers rather than teaching generalizations on which teachers should base their decisions.

It is unfortunate that lack of understanding, misunderstanding, and misapplications have resulted in some rejection and misuse of a potentially powerful model for increasing success in teaching and learning.

What's Really Wrong with Madeline Hunter?

What is most regrettable is that I did not realize what was *really* wrong with Madeline Hunter. That is that she simply did not consider:

1. The quantum leap between knowing a psychological generalization and translating it into deliberate artistic practice.

2. The temptation to accept principles of learning as absolutes—without regard for teacher, student, and situation.

3. The blurring of incredibly complex and subtle interactions between teachers, students, and situations when psychological theory—which can be unintelligible because of its laboratory vocabulary—is translated into simpler language.

4. The seduction of users into believing that excellence in teaching can be mandated and that dramatic results will emerge quickly from the use of certain simple techniques.

5. The failure to provide coaching and feedback during inservice for teachers and administrators (a mortal sin for those of us who have preached the necessity for guided practice with feedback but have not done it).

Models are judged on their ability to guide behavior, predict outcomes, and stimulate research, not on their being *the* final answer. My model was developed to accomplish all three purposes. If it has contributed to educators' use of research-based knowledge to make and implement more successful professional decisions, if it encourages the constant addition of new research-based propositions to guide future actions of teachers and administrators, if it results in increased teacher and student success and satisfaction in schooling, then it will have served its purpose in spite of what is wrong with Madeline Hunter.□

[1]Madeline Hunter, "Teaching is Decision Making," *Educational Leadership* 37 (October 1979): 62–67.

[2]Madeline Hunter, *Mastery Teaching* (El Segundo, Calif.: Tip Publications, 1983).

[3]Madeline Hunter and D. Russell, "Critical Attributes of a Staff Development Program to Increase Instructional Effectiveness" (in press).