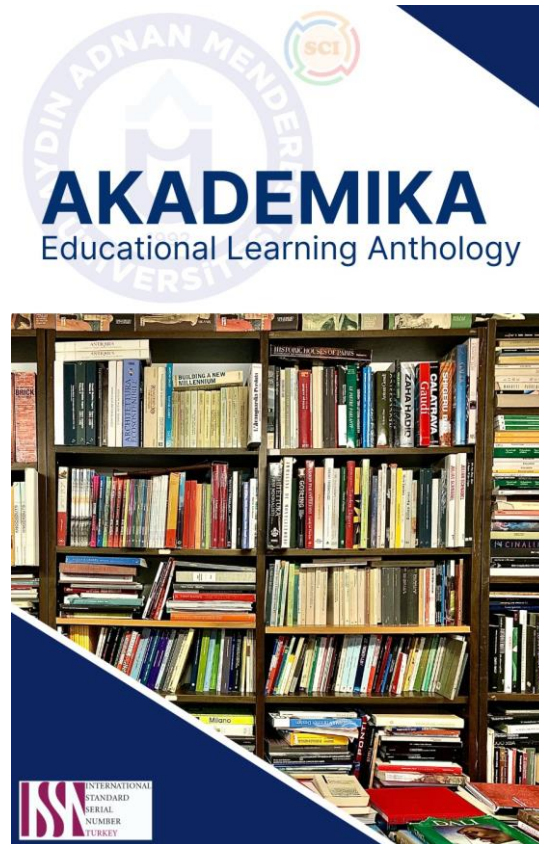


THE FUNDAMENTAL 5



AKADEMIKA: EDUCATIONAL LEARNING ANTHOLOGY

Volume: 1

Issue 1

Pages: 56-58

Document ID: 2024AELA0014

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13154991

Manuscript Accepted: July 2024

The Fundamental 5: Book Review

Mary Grace B. Esteron*

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

"To teach is to touch lives forever." These are the words of my first-ever principal, Dr. Marlyn R. Quiming. At first, I didn't know how it was possible. I taught in the Philippines for eight years and challenged myself to teach abroad, specifically in Bahrain, for 6 years. I am in my third year as an English teacher here in the US. As usual, everything is new, but the thing is, I have my instructional coaches, Laura Kirkpatrick and Sarah Johnston, and my principals, Dr. Whitney Anderson and April Shay, who made my life easier.

In my first year, Sarah Johnston gave me the book *The Fundamental 5: The Formula for Quality Instruction* written by Sean Cain and Mike Laird. This book introduces five principles, known as 'The Fundamental 5', which are crucial to effective instruction. It was mentioned that we will for certainly recognize similar practices and strategies when observing teachers, it is one-on-one instruction or regular classroom instruction. The concept is easy to understand, but it is difficult to accomplish without self-discipline.

When attending seminars and workshops, I always apply things I learned in my classroom. Upon reading the book, I found out that even if we love to improve our classroom instruction, we may fail due to the following reasons:

- a. Not having a good plan
- b. Not having the desire
- c. Procrastination
- d. Not recognizing the opportunity loss
- e. Not having support
- f. Not having a way to regularly and accurately gauge progress

As educators, we often ask ourselves, 'Is there a straightforward plan to enhance the effectiveness of our classroom instruction?' The authors, Sean Cain and Mike Laird, both experienced educators and researchers, provide a resounding yes to this question with their Fundamental 5 principles:

1. Frame the Lesson
2. Work in the Power Zone
3. Engage in Frequent, Small Group, Purposeful Talk about Learning
4. Recognize and Reinforce
5. Write critically.

These principles are not just theoretical concepts, but practical tools that can empower us to improve our teaching. They remind us of the importance of recognizing and reinforcing our students' efforts, making them feel appreciated and supported in their learning journey.

One of the weaknesses of the current instructional practice is that the teacher views that poor performance as the fault of the students, while the root of excellent performance is the teacher. Another is time on task. Time is something that a teacher cannot control because they need to follow specific schedules- I personally had this struggle up to this day- during my first year, we followed the block schedule, and last school year, we switched to a seven-period day schedule. The authors pointed out a disadvantage of this, this is when we provide teachers with additional instruction time, it creates more "fundamentally flawed instruction. Cain and Laird involved themselves in educational research with the aim to rapidly improve student achievement. They have observed that the current practice is simultaneously both ahead and behind the current state of academic research. I, for one, strongly believe that as teachers, we need to conduct research to have data as a basis for whatever we want to find out about problems and data-based solutions.

The Fundamental Five

1. **Framing the Lesson:** In its simplest explanation, this represents the start and end of a lesson. The first part will always be the learning objectives. This statement of what the students can expect to learn for the day must be shared with the students at the start of the lesson. I will often refer to Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide in constructing my daily lesson objectives. The second part is the closing. It can be a question, a product, or a task

to demonstrate their understanding of the learning objective set. Both my objective and closure are written on my board every day. This structured approach to lesson framing has significantly improved my students' engagement and understanding.

Example of English Secondary Lesson Frame:

Objective: We will identify and discuss the themes of Hamlet.

Closing task: I will share with my elbow partner which of Hamlet's themes apply in my life and why.

2. **Work in the Power Zone:** There are three locations where a teacher can conduct their craft, ranked from least effective to most effective.

a. The teacher's work area is typically the teacher's desk or computer nook. When the teacher is in her work area, her first activity is "administrivia," which includes checking attendance, entering lunch counts, grading assignments, entering grades, checking emails, etc. The second activity in the work area is no activity; this is when she is just observing her students. The third activity done in the work area is lesson delivery, which authors believed was the least effective. According to them, it is an unfortunate reality that in many secondary schools, more instruction is delivered from the teacher work area (Cain, unpublished research, 2009)

b. The Lecture Position - The teacher is occupying when standing at the front, side of the room, or back. The critical distinguishing factor that identifies the lecture position is a purposeful space between the teacher and the students. There must be a professional distance between them. The students are the adoring audience who receive information and take notes- who can react differently; they might be bored or pretending to be interested. Comparing the teacher's work area and the lecture position, the lecture position is more effective but still needs to be more effective.

Therefore, we need to have the power zone considered the most effective place for a teacher to conduct their craft. When a teacher occupies proximity to one student, a small group, or the entire class, this proximity teaching is called "working in the power zone." It is said that when a teacher engages in this practice, all instructional practice will be enhanced and made more powerful. When a teacher is working in a power zone, significant changes happen as on-task behaviors increase, discipline issues decrease, and student retention of the content increases, and all these will generally contribute to improving student achievement

3. **Engage in Frequent, Small Group, Purposeful Talk about Learning:** This aspect of Fundamental 5 seems simple, yet effective implementation requires deliberate planning, execution, and reflection on the part of the teacher.

As a teacher of senior high school students, I know how hard it is to motivate students to engage in group discussions. Still, with continued encouragement, they get used to it and look forward to exciting thoughts and ideas from their classmates. When we do this in class, we also develop and improve our students' social skills. They learn along the process that we have different ideas on specific issues. There might be disagreements, but they know how to deal with each other in a respectful manner.

In addition, the development of practical seed questions requires planning. When done haphazardly, a teacher might throw closed questions (a question that can be answered with a single word or a short phrase), low rigor (knowledge or comprehension), or both. They might be under stress because of a lack of preparation. A teacher's day-to-day life includes instructing a class, managing a class, and providing meaningful questions, which causes stress. There is a way to counter this stress- a "question stem wall," a bulletin board, or a designated space with open-ended question stems posted to provide thought and reflection or make the learners connect.

Smart question (Knowledge and Comprehension): Tell why...?

Smarter question (Application and Analysis): How is this similar to...?

Smartest question (Synthesis and Evaluation): Develop a plan to...?

4. **Recognize and Reinforce:** Recognition and reinforcement address two sides of the learning coin- one side is academic issues. The other side of the coin is related to social and behavioral problems.

When conducting presentations and training, the authors poll their audiences on which practice they believe the

most, and in almost every case, recognition and reinforcement receive the most votes. Unfortunately, these two practices are the most difficult of the Fundamental Five to implement.

The authors, Cain and Laird, pointed out two possible reasons for this. First, to successfully implement this, the adult's attitudes and personality must be aligned with it. This can be solved if the teacher remains in the power zone, resulting in positive behavior, performance, and attitude. The second reason is the problem of managing a classroom. Most of the teacher's primary concern is classroom management, which causes stress. That is why implementing rules and being consistent about them is a must.

To increase the pace of implementation of recognition and reinforcement, many teachers suggested the following:

- a. teachers create a list of two or five targeted student behaviors or accomplishments that they want to encourage.
- b. it's not just about recognizing students who have earned high grades. Teachers are encouraged to identify and appreciate students' efforts and improvement. This not only motivates students but also fosters a positive learning environment. Teachers are encouraged to rely on and support their peers.

At the end of each quarter, I give my students who got A certificates of achievement. Also, we play Kahoot or Quizizz, and I give them either candies or stickers. When students make an effort or complete all the requirements, I talk to them and email or call their parents and inform them about their performance.

As stated in the conclusion of Recognition and Reinforcement, 'Great teachers realize that students are motivated to work for a variety of reasons and work to identify and provide those motivators.' This insight into students' motivations and needs makes educators feel more understanding and insightful in their teaching approach.

5. Write Critically: Critical writing is not just a tool, it's a necessity in the classroom. It is defined as writing to organize, clarify, defend, refute, analyze, dissect, connect, and expand on ideas or concepts. It is currently the least frequently used of the Fundamental Five, but its importance cannot be overstated.

It's a rare sight in classrooms. In his book *Results Now* (2006), Mike Schmoker reveals a shocking statistic: out of 1,500 classroom observations, not a single one involved students writing or using rubrics, which are tools that outline the criteria for a particular assignment. This finding was not a one-off but a consistent outcome from hundreds of initial classroom observations. The authors attribute this scarcity to teachers' misconceptions about critical writing.

"Everything we write is a potential learning experience. Writing is a systematic process for learning essential meanings." (Paul and Elder 2007, 8) When one views "critical writing" as a process instead of an end product, the time spent, weight, and perfection are no longer critical variables.

Upon reading the book, I realized that there was nothing new about it. I already practice these practices, and I am sure most teachers do. But a better understanding of their individual power, such as their ability to foster critical thinking and improve student engagement, and how they should be done properly will really help educators like me be more effective in our respective classes.

Now, I know how the formula $2+2$ equals 4 works, "To teach is To touch lives FORever!"

Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Mary Grace B. Esteron, PhD(c)
Alamogordo High School
Alamogordo, New Mexico, USA