

THE DANIELSON FRAMEWORK

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This is an excerpt from my book, [*Essential Learning theories and their applications*](#). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield (Johnson, 2019).

76 Tiny Elements

Like the Hunter lesson plan described in the last chapter, the Danielson Framework has also been converted into a teaching algorithm and used to evaluate teachers.

A Conversation Stopper

The Danielson Framework (1996) has been around for over 20 years. It is still being used in various forms, in many schools and teacher preparation programs. Charlotte Danielson attempted to deconstruct what she perceived as professional teaching practice by breaking it down into four domains: (a) planning and preparation, (b) classroom environment, (c) instruction, and (d) professional responsibilities. These four domains were then broken into 22 components and then into 76 tiny elements. Danielson included a rubric for each of the 76 elements that described four levels of teacher performance: unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, and distinguished levels.

In designing this framework, Danielson defined what she considered to be effective teaching and then selected elements that she decided were important for being and becoming a professional educator. Like Madeline Hunter, her goal initially was to use the framework to create conversations about the elements of good teaching. In reviewing the 76 tiny elements, there are indeed many that can contribute to important educational conversations. (There are also some elements that are highly subjective with supporting research that is, at best, peripheral.) However, conversation implies a two-way flow of ideas. When rubrics are created and levels of performance are described, there is little, if any, room for conversation. What is created instead is an evaluation tool, variations of which are being used today in teacher preparation programs and public schools in an attempt to create a certain type of teacher with a set of values and teaching philosophy that somebody other than the teacher being evaluated has determined to be appropriate.

A Subjective Examination of Research

Although the framework might be perceived by some to be an objective examination and application of empirical research, Danielson's description of professional practice is highly subjective in terms of the elements that were selected for consideration and the limited depth and breadth of research that was examined. This resulted in a fairly narrow, theoretical perspective related to teaching.

If instead a more expansive set of data were examined from a wider variety of fields related to human learning, and if a more inclusive lens were used to interpret this data, it is highly likely that a much different set of domains, components, and elements would be included. It is doubtful that the state of being and becoming an effective educator would be reduced to 76 elements. It is doubtful as well that these 76 elements would be put on four-point scales and used to evaluate teachers.

Danielson claims that her framework is research-based (Danielson, 2007); however, just like Madeline Hunter's lesson plan, this is also a bit misleading. While research can be found to support many (but not all) of Danielson's 76 elements, putting these elements together in a single

framework does not mean that the framework itself is supported by research. It just means that it is a list of 76 elements, some of which are supported by research and some of which are not.

There is also no comparative research suggesting that the Danielson framework is any more effective for enhancing the professional practice of preservice and practicing teachers than other frameworks, checklists, rubrics, models, sets of dispositions, standards, assessment devices, professional development strategies, or reflective practices. There is no research to support the idea that using these 76 tiny elements is a more effective means of teacher assessment and evaluation than other methods.

As well, there should be no doubt that the current unstated purpose of the Danielson Framework is to enable the educational industrial complex to generate greater profits (Brightman & Gutmore, 2002). If instead the purpose of the framework was to actually improve education, a set of domains and components would be included for principals and administrators, schoolboard members, legislators, professors at teacher preparation institutions, scholars, and anybody else making decisions or recommendations about schools and classrooms.

Such domains, uniformly applied, would invite all to begin to explore a wider range of research and ideas related to education and human learning. This type of application would have the potential to evolve our current educational system and be of benefit to those other than a few financial stakeholders. However, since the framework was introduced in 1996, additional domains and components have not been included.

Creating Another Teaching Algorithm

The Danielson Framework has also been used to design new teaching algorithms based on her Instruction Plan for a Single Lesson. Whereas Madeline Hunter included seven elements, teachers using this lesson plan format are asked to include and describe 10 elements when preparing a lesson:

1. Goals for the lesson
2. Importance of lesson goals
3. Relationship of lesson goals to:
 - a. *content standards, CCSS or state standards*
 - b. *broader curriculum goals*
4. Plan for student engagement
 - a. *teacher strategies*
 - b. *student activities*
 - c. *approximate time.*
5. Description of students with special needs
6. Common student difficulties:
 - a. *common difficulties*
 - b. *how they be addressed*
7. Students with special needs
 - a. *struggling learnings, gifted learning, other.*
8. Materials and other resources:
9. Plan for assessment:
 - a. *goals and criteria*
 - b. *assessment procedures*
 - c. *tests, performances, rubrics, or checklists used (include)*
10. Plan for using assessment data

This new teaching algorithm is even more cumbersome than Hunter's lesson plan format.

Being and Becoming a Master Teacher

You cannot deconstruct the complex process of being and becoming a master teacher into 76 tiny elements and expect to create a finished teaching product by putting all the pieces back together again. This Humpty-Dumpty approach is what Danielson has tried to do with her framework.

Instead, being and becoming a master teacher occurs over time and involves four components: knowing, planning, doing, and reflecting.

- **Knowing.** Teachers need to have an organized body of knowledge related to teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Sternberg & Williams, 2010). This organized body of knowledge will enable you to align the approaches and strategies you use with a body of research and to make decisions that are more likely to enhance your students' learning. As stated in Chapter 1, there are four areas of knowledge that are necessary to become an expert teacher (Eggen & Kauchak, 2007): (a) content knowledge, (b) pedagogical knowledge, (c) pedagogical content, and (d) knowledge of learners and the learning process. Each of these is described below.

- **Planning.** Good teaching does not happen by accident. Effective teachers plan their learning experiences (Hay/McBer, 2000). They decide exactly what they want students to learn, the teaching strategies they will use, the questions they may ask students, and related activities and assignments. In your future classrooms, planning will enable you to create more purposeful and effective instruction and results in fewer behavior management issues.

- **Doing.** This third element is where you actually teach the lesson. Here you present the material to be learned using a variety of research-based methodologies and teaching strategies (Johnson, 2017). However, the first two elements (knowing and planning) need to be addressed before you can function well here

- **Reflecting.** What separates effective teachers from ineffective teachers is the propensity to reflect (Zeichner & Liston, 2014). Being an effective teacher does not mean that you do not make mistakes or have bad lessons. (If you never make mistakes it probably means that you have not experimented or tried enough new things.) The difference is that effective teachers think about those mistakes and bad lessons so that they can figure out what went wrong and how they might change the lesson. Ineffective teachers do not do this.

Videos

[Problems with the Danielson/Hunter Lesson Plan Formats](#)

[Basic Schema-Building Lesson Plan Format](#)

References

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