

# Using the 7C Framework for Teaching & Learning Health Education & Promotion

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Health Professionals are needed to address and improve health status. This paper presents a teaching technique that will help students acquire and develop applied health education and promotion skills. This paper introduces a 7C Framework to encourage teachers to use Challenge, Courage, Commitment, Competence, Connection, Contribution, and Consequences. The results of three innovative student initiated health promotion projects, provoked by these methods, are provided as evidence of its effectiveness. The innovative 7C framework provides a preparatory framework educators can use to help future health professionals not just meet, but exceed expectations.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Scholarship, Teaching, Learning, Pedagogy*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Educators preparing the next generation of health educators should continually update teaching methods to ensure students are prepared for the tasks and skills needed to be successful practitioners in the field. In comparison to the wealth of information and research available on health issues and effective

strategies for improving the quality of life of individuals in communities, there is limited research on evidence-based approaches for teaching and preparing entry-level and advanced level professionals to be effective practitioners in public health (Becker, Johnson, Warren & Barber, 2007; Becker & Loy, 2004; Becker, Rager, & Wright, 2013). Until recently, the professional literature in the field was

relatively absent of articles related to pedagogical practices for training health professionals.

Rapid societal changes and the developing state of health education and promotion result in the need to frequently examine professional preparation techniques to ensure students are not only being challenged to develop needed skills, such as critical thinking skills, but are also prepared to adapt, meet, and possibly exceed the ever changing future needs of the field. Therefore, the primary purpose of this article is to describe how to use an innovative 7C framework for teaching so the learning of information is retained and absorbed by students in a public health education professional preparation program.

Health is an enabling capacity and health professionals positively impact society by developing potential to reach desired goals, improving health status, and by helping to resolve preventable problems (Thacker et al., 2006). New knowledge is essential in creating a positive societal impact. As suggested by McDonough and Braungart (2010; 2013), learning new knowledge has become more difficult. They explain this learning difficulty using an underground water replenishment analogy. Both underground water replenishment and learning take time and require the right conditions. They describe how modern society has replaced the natural terrain with concrete and that this created a societal design that causes water to move faster than natural. They then describe how this quickened speed of water movement disrupts the underground water absorption and replenishment cycle. Relatedly, modern society moves so fast and fills our world with new information so quickly, it disrupts the retention and learning cycle. This quickened pace, they suggest, compromises the learning process that requires absorption and translation of new information into knowledge. Just as water needs time to absorb into underground aquifers, students need time to absorb and translate new information into knowledge and possibly wisdom.

Given the time constraints within academic programs to train students to be proficient in the knowledge, skills, and processes necessary to be an effective practitioner, academicians need efficient and innovative approaches that encourage, support and enhance learning and absorption of new information. This article

prescribes an innovative 7C Framework for enhancing information retention and absorption by students. A framework, rather than pedagogical rules that require discipline, is offered to inspire innovative and creative adaptation of these techniques (Sinek, 2009). Specifically, the 7C Framework, developed from research and practice, instigates students to become actively involved in issues, as experiences to be described document. The framework excites students by challenging them to courageously become better versions of themselves by gaining competencies through connections with involved groups and taking actions that exceed expectations. With adaptation, health educators at all levels can use the 7C Framework to help students learn how to apply health promotion concepts. The examples provided in this article resulted from a professor teaching a capstone class for a cohort of senior students earning a Public Health Studies degree in a Department of Health Education and Promotion. The setting was a large Division 1, 27,000 plus student South East University in the U.S.

## TEACHING METHOD AND RESULTS

Desirable outcomes evolving from students exposed to this technique suggest it is effective in helping students meet and exceed expectations of future health professionals. Noted results occurred during times when class projects expanded beyond the classroom and into the community through student initiatives, though the professor encouraged. While experiences resemble service-learning initiatives, these projects came about through student-driven initiatives that were above and beyond any class assignments. The examples include: (1) an after school health promotion initiative that led to healthier snack choices for participants; (2) a collaboration project with a local city council to expand walking trails, and (3) a project that developed health promoting university policy for on-campus vendors.

The empirically derived systematic 7C Framework for teaching health education and promotion uses the connected and overlapping foci of Challenge, Courage, Competence, Commitment, Connection, Contributions and Consequences.

### Challenge

Health promotion challenges the profession to improve health by using science and art to

help people engage in actions that enable and promote better health (O'Donnell, 1989). As a business leader and entrepreneur, Simon Sinek proclaims, "If the challenge we face doesn't scare us, then it's probably not that important" (2009). Experience with students indicates that real projects, with actual outcomes possible, help students overcome loss aversion by inspiring them to accept a challenge and engage more fully.

### Teaching Method

The first step to encourage students is to have them notice circumstances where healthy actions are not, but could be, nurtured and encouraged and/or situations that discourage healthy behavior or cause discomfort and *challenge* them to make it better. Assignments that require a review of current "health" or employee assistance programs offered in the area provides a good way to discover, learn about and review current programs. Change is often resisted because as Prospect Theory documents, there is a preference for the status quo, also called the endowment effect. There is a desire to keep things as they are, due to inherent loss aversion (Kahneman, 2011). Risk Homeostasis Theory also supports a human's natural tendency to avoid taking too many chances without expecting an improvement or recognition of future benefits (Wilde, 2006). In other words, none of us like to be wrong or to do things that are not reinforced or recognized. However, risks are omnipotent and it is necessary to try new ideas. Without new ideas, we could never advance.

To guide students, have them evaluate current health programs being offered to determine which use scientifically grounded methods to promote health and behavior to overcome the temptation of society's status quo and other non-health promoting actions. Then, challenge students to artistically develop ways these programs could not just prevent the wrong action but actually promote a measurable benefit or gain that would also help prevent problems. Giving students ownership of programs intrinsically inspires and involves them with the issues (Kohn, 1993; Pink, 2009). To help students see what is possible, educators should follow Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's advice by treating them as if they are what they could become. In his words, "If I accept you as you are, I will make you worse; however if I treat you as though you are what you are capable of becoming, I help you become that" (Mayo, 1995

p. 106). In other words, educators must see and treat students as who they can become.

Two examples where students accepted a challenge, initiated efforts, and exceeded expectations occurred when students were inspired to not just complete a program evaluation, but also to develop and publish the results (Amerando, Becker, & Johnson, 2010; Decker, Ronay, Telfer, Becker, et. al. 2013). Working toward recognized results connected students to the shared health profession's larger purpose of developing conditions conducive for a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity (World Health Organization, 1946).

### Courage

Accepting a challenge means both educators and students will need courage. As Mark Twain made known, "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear - not absence of fear" (Twain & Blaisdell, 2013, p. 139). Courage is needed to help students challenge, not only their thoughts and values, but also societal norms or the contention that this is the way it has always been done. As Charles Kettering explained, "If you have always done it that way, it is probably wrong" (Blaydes, 2003 p. 75). A thriving state is defined as one in which the participants have an improved ability to accomplish its goals and or mission. Future health professionals should be prepared with the skills needed to help community settings thrive, not just survive.

### Teaching Method

To help students develop these skills, class assignments should be designed to require students to work with both the university and or community personnel to discuss a goal that would help both thrive. Using this idea means teaching efforts should support student attempts to help organizations within the university or community do better by accomplishing its mission more effectively. Of course, a coincidental outcome would be lower problem occurrence, but the main instigator should be improved outcomes beyond the absence of a problem.

To support these efforts, student projects must develop and use a measurable, research supported, thriving outcome corresponding to stated missions. Courage also includes the resolution to challenge what we have known in the field of health education. To facilitate this,

educators must provide students with a venue to develop innovative solutions and also provide an opportunity to share these new ideas in at least a class and preferably a public setting.

To help students develop the courage to challenge ideas and focus on a thriving, not just a surviving outcome, a class assignment should require students to gather evidence using scientific methods to support solutions that could result in improved outcomes. Students will need to be encouraged to draw supported inferences related to improved outcomes. Using this technique will also help students realize every time they develop a program they are really making a prediction of its desired outcome. Understanding that programs are predictions helps students realize the need to design and complete an evaluation of programmatic efforts. Using these techniques to discover and use evidence-backed literature to support their programs, students develop confidence. Confidence is an additional resulting C from this process. Doing this also means these class projects effectively help prepare students to be more effective professionals.

Students who developed innovative ways to expand walking trails at the university and in the community provides an example. In this situation, the students discovered university, city and county operated paths and greenways were in close proximity, however they found university and community members were not aware of these options. To improve the situation, students presented their idea to connect all the trails to expand and improve walkways for university and community residents. Their proposal offered a solution that benefitted all involved parties by creating a trail network that connected the university trails, the city trails and county greenways. Their ideas were first presented to the class, adjusted with feedback, and then courageously presented at City Hall to the council members.

### Competence

Of course, to effectively *challenge* existing norms and have *courage*, students need knowledge about an existing situation and about possible documented options that could lead to improved outcomes. W. Edwards Deming, the quality management expert explained, learning is not compulsory, but neither is survival (Deming, 2013). All projects, therefore, must facilitate investigations of the literature to learn

about related successes to gain enhanced *competence*.

### Teaching Method

*Competence* is developed through assignments that review and analyze existing programs with theoretical concepts. Most notably, having students develop and present their own programs that build on existing efforts develops *competence*. It is important students outline how their programs are an improvement on existing efforts, and they must document how they build on the literature. To complement these efforts, students must relate their experiences to what they are learning in class. For example, if students are learning about nutrition and development, students should be required to explain how and why better nutrition and health would help an organization fulfill its mission more effectively.

A related example evolved from a students' involvement in an after school program. This initiative was triggered by students' service learning experience at a Boys and Girls Club facility where the young participants were not achieving their full potential. Not helping participants achieve their full potential meant the organization did not achieve its mission (Boys and Girls Club of America, 2014). The students observed that the club provided unhealthy processed food to participants so they attempted to improve food choices. After gaining competence about the topic through research, they proposed and then helped this program transition to a local plant-based snack program. Completion of this project led to the development of on-site gardens that provided both an ongoing educational opportunity, a sustainable food source for the facility, and better health status and knowledge about healthy choices for the people and the planet.

### Commitment

The Internet, cell phones, and social media have created instantaneous information. Despite the quickened 21st century pace, new skills do not just happen; a *commitment* toward the development of new abilities is needed. As Colin Powell, former Secretary of State, explains, "There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure" (Boyce, 2011 p. 63). *Commitment* is devotion or dedication represented by persistent effort and thought.

### Teaching Methods

To develop *commitment*, opportunities to learn from failures must be provided through discussions and realistic feedback of ideas with classmates, professors and involved personnel. Student projects should require them to talk with involved professionals to gather information about how to accomplish desired objectives. While it may be necessary for the professor to assist this process, it is vital that students handle most arrangements related to these contacts and meetings with involved personnel.

Examples of persistence were provided by the *committed* students who had to overcome initial concerns to develop improved food options for the after school program. The expanded walking trails provided another reward from committed efforts. To gain support, these students had to diligently and regularly communicate with stakeholders to gain agreement and feasibility of different options. These efforts required a commitment to ongoing communication and self-education beyond what could be considered class credit or time. Momentum and inspiration were achieved in these projects as more and more stakeholders with whom they contacted and met with offered their support.

### Connections

The need for connections can be best understood by quoting Helen Keller. She stated, "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much" (Chang, 2006 p. 126). To help create a thriving outcome, students must *connect* by making strategic alliances with other groups. Strategic alliances are synergistic *connections* to other resources, people and groups with shared goals yet different roles. These alliances or partnerships can be instigated from a university setting to provide benefits to involved groups (Becker, Johnson, McNeil, & Warren, 2006). Any organization entering a strategic alliance has to be better because of that alliance.

### Teaching Methods

Regular guiding informal conversations between educators and students help overcome foreseeable and unexpected difficulties with creative ideas. Working to develop *connections* is imperative for helping students develop collaborative ideas that assist involved parties. To demonstrate the value of strategic collaborations, this class demonstrated the value of strategic alliances by making connections with the school library, the Wellness Education

Center, Career Services and the Volunteer and Service Learning Center. Classes are encouraged to develop strategic alliances that would help facilitate the acquisition of class, project, and job skills. These connections can improve the class experience by helping both the aligned organization and the class each accomplish its stated objectives more effectively. Assignments need to encourage students to find other groups that provide related resources so they can serve as strategic partners. By providing complementary strengths, both parties are stronger because of the alliance.

These *connections* provide students with venues that allow them to work on their *challenge* by *courageously* committing to and using their developed *competencies* to make *contributions* that help organizations better achieve their desired missions. The *connection* with the after school program provided students with an opportunity to develop innovative ideas based on the basics learned in class.

Another example was provided when a student partnered with the policy committee to design a policy that prescribed the type of promotional items to be given at on-campus events by vendors. In this example, the student had collected an item provided at an on-campus event attended and was discouraged because the item was contradictory to the stated mission of the university. The item given to her at this event discouraged healthy behavior. This event sparked her to take initiative and propose a new policy that stated promotion items provided during on-campus events should positively represent the university and the participating organization and that it should support a health promoting behavior. The contradictory item provided by an apartment complex at an on-campus event was a lighter that also could be a bottle opener. The student saw this as encouraging behaviors that would hinder the university from the goal of graduating students and also encouraged disruptive students to live at the apartment complex.

The new proposed promotional item was a study aid that also promoted the facility. The new promotion item would encourage more responsible behavior at the complex and support the academic mission of the university. In this way, the promotional item helps all organizations better achieve its goals. This effort reinforced what they learned in the classroom while

showing them how their efforts can contribute to health promotion.

### Contribution

*Contributions* resulting from using the described 7C framework resulted from applying classroom knowledge into practice. Beyond scholarship gains to future health promotion professionals, *contributions* to the community partners included healthier snacks at an after school program. This contribution also provided an educational opportunity related to understanding the relationship between food choices and personal and planetary health by those involved. Presenting ideas to city council members to expand walking trails with existing university trails *contributed* to these students' professional development and physical activity options for university and community members. It also helped all involved parties get better use of taxpayer funded resources. The new policy for on campus events *contributed* to a more health supporting environment for that resident facility and promoted a positive public image for the university. Each project also *contributed* to the students' development of health professional skills beyond what could be learned in the classroom. Accepting the *challenge*, using *courage*, developing *competence*, being *committed*, and making *connections* so *contributions* can be made provides *consequences* to build upon.

### Consequences

*Consequences* of these projects have provided benefits that have and will continue to be built upon. The afterschool nutrition program created jobs for coordinators and interns. Other beneficial *consequences* of this project are the facility's ability to build new strategic partnerships with local food producers and the university. This project also *consequentially* provided learning and skill building opportunities as it created sustainable methods to provide better food. The *consequences* of improved walking trails is a more desirable community due to its increased capacity to improve citizens quality of life and its ability to enhance the level of satisfaction among the university and the community members (Buettner, 2008; Buettner, 2010). The improved university policy will *consequently* improve the public image of the residential facility and the university. Another consequential by-product of all projects is the availability of multiple behavior, outcome, policy and incentive related research opportunities for the university community.

## DISCUSSION

Incorporating the 7C framework into the pedagogy of health promotion helps students learn more than just facts. Integrating ways to use what they learn helps both educators and students realize the value of teaching and learning health education because they can see how using the information helps improve communities and people's health and lives. As Albert Einstein warned, "One should guard against preaching to young people success in the customary form as the main aim in life. The most important motive for work in school and in life is the pleasure in work, pleasure in its result, and the knowledge of the value of the result to the community" (Swainson, 2000 p. 305). It is by accepting the *Challenge*, having *Courage*, being *Committed* to learning new *Competencies* and making *Connections* that help students *Contribute* to individuals, groups and society. Some beneficial *Consequences* of these efforts include feelings of pride that evolve from knowing their actions helped benefit society.

This 7C Framework can help educators continue to learn, grow and improve their teaching abilities. This framework makes teaching a more interactive process because it stimulates student driven initiative. Educators cannot *make* students learn, but these techniques and philosophy help students *want* to learn. As General Patton explained, "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity." (Murray, 2010 p. 128). Great pedagogy in health education provides value because it helps students become better future health professionals through enhancement of their ability to improve health status.

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