

## КАК СЛЕДУЕТ ПЛАНИРОВАТЬ ЗАНЯТИЯ

## HOW SHOULD TEACHERS PLAN LESSONS

**Аннотация.** В статье раскрывается цель и формат планирования. Даны ответы на самые важные вопросы: Как? С какой целью? Что может не получиться? Что необходимо для правильного планирования?

**Summary.** This paper answers the most important questions: How? Why? What for? What might go wrong? How does it work? What will be needed?

Some teachers with experience seem to have an ability to think on their feet, which allows them to believe that they do not need to plan their lessons. However, most teachers go on preparing lessons throughout their careers, even if the plans are very informal.

For students, evidence of a plan shows them that the teacher has devoted time to thinking about the class. It strongly suggests a level of professionalism and a commitment to the kind of preparation they might reasonably expect. Lack of a plan may suggest the opposite of these teacher attributes.

For the teacher, a plan – however informal - gives the lesson a framework, an overall shape. It is true that he or she may end up departing from it at stages of the lesson, but at the very least it will be something to fall back on. Of course, good teachers are flexible and respond creatively to what happens in the classroom, but they also need to have thought ahead, have a destination they want their students to reach, and know how they are going to get there.

Planning helps, then, because it allows teachers to think about where they're going and gives them time to have ideas for tomorrow's and next week's lessons. In the classroom, a plan helps to remind teachers what they intended to do - especially if they get distracted or momentarily forget what they had intended. Finally, planning helps because it gives students confidence: they know immediately whether a teacher has thought about the lesson, and they respond positively to those that have.

No plan is written on tablets of stone, however. On the contrary, the plan is just that – a plan, possibilities for the lesson which may or may not come about, in other words. Of course, we will be happy if things go 'according to plan', but they often don't. As we said at the very beginning of this book, all sorts of things can go wrong: equipment not working, bored students, students who've "done it before", students who need to ask unexpected questions or who want or need to pursue unexpected paths etc. That's when the teacher has to be flexible, has to be able to leave the plan for however long it takes to satisfy the students' needs at that point in the lesson. Sometimes, the plan has to be abandoned completely and it is only after the lesson that the teacher can look at it again and see if some parts of it are recoverable for future lessons. There is one particular situation in which planning is especially important, and that is when a teacher is to be observed as part of an assessment or performance review. The observer needs to have a clear idea of what the teacher intends in order to judge the success of the lesson.

A good lesson needs to contain a judicious blend of coherence and variety. A good plan needs to reflect this.

Coherence means that students can see a logical pattern to the lesson. Even if there are three separate activities, for example, there has to be some connection between them – or at the very least a perceptible reason for changing direction. In this context, it would not make sense to have students listen to a tape, ask a few comprehension questions and then change the activity completely to something totally unrelated to the listening. And if the following activity only lasted for five minutes before something completely different was then attempted, we might well want to call the lesson incoherent.

Nevertheless, the effect of having a class do a 45-minute drill would be equally damaging. The lack of variety coupled with the relentlessness of such a procedure would militate against the possibility of real student engagement. However present it might be at the beginning of the session, it would be unlikely to be sustained. There has to be some variety in a lesson period.

The ideal compromise is to plan a lesson that has an internal coherence but which nevertheless allows students to do different things.

The kind of plan that teachers make for themselves can be as scrappy or as detailed as the teacher feels is necessary. If you look at experienced teachers' notebooks, you may find that they have simply written down the name of an activity, a page number from a book, the opening of a dictation activity or

notes about a particular student. Such notes look rather empty, but may, in fact, give the teacher all she needs to remind her of all the necessary elements. Other teachers, however, put in much more detail, writing in what they're going to do together with notes like 'remember to collect homework'.

On teacher training courses, trainers often ask for a written plan which follows a particular format. The formats will vary depending on the trainer and the course, but all plans have the same ingredients. They say who is going to be taught, what they are going to learn or be taught, how they are going to learn or be taught, and with what.

The first thing such a written plan needs to detail is who the students are: How many are there in the class? What ages? *What sexes?* Cooperative? Quiet? Difficult to control? Experienced teachers have all this information in their heads when they plan; teachers in training will be expected to write it down.

The next thing the plan has to contain is what the teachers/students want to do: study a piece of grammar, write a narrative, listen to an interview, read a passage etc. Looking through a plan, an objective observer should be able to discern a logical sequence of things to be studied and/or activated.

The third aspect of a plan will say how the teacher/students is/are going to do it. Will they work in pairs? Will the teacher just put on a tape or will the class start by discussing dangerous sports for example? Once again, an objective reader of the plan should be able to identify a logical sequence of classroom events. If four activities in a row are teacher-led dictations, we might start to think that the sequence is highly repetitive and that, as a result, the students are likely to get very demotivated by this incessant repetition. For each activity, the teacher will usually indicate how long she expects it to take and what classroom materials or aids she is going to use. The plan will say what is going to be used for the activities: A tape recorder? Photocopies? An overhead projector?

Lastly, the plan will talk about what might go wrong (and how it can be dealt with) and how the lesson fits in with lessons before and after it.

In order to be able to say these things, however, we need to go a little bit deeper and ask some searching questions about the activities we intend to use.

For each activity we intend to use in the lesson (whether it is a role-play about building supermarkets or a writing activity while listening to music), we need to be able to answer a number of questions in our own minds. They are:

Who exactly are the students for this activity? As we said above, the make-up of the class will influence the way teachers plan. Their age, level, cultural background and individual characteristics have to be taken into account when deciding to use an activity. Teachers often have a section called *Description of the class* in their plans to remind themselves and/or show an observer what they know about their students.

Why do you want to do it? There has to be a good reason for taking an activity into a classroom apart from the fact that the teacher happens to like it or because it looks interesting.

What will it achieve? It is vitally important to have thought about what an activity will achieve. How will students have changed as a result of it? It might give the students a greater understanding of an area of vocabulary. It might give them greater fluency in one particular topic area, or it might have the effect of providing students with better strategies for coping with long and difficult stories told orally, for example. It might achieve a change of atmosphere in the class, too. If it is difficult to say what an activity might achieve, then it may well be that the activity is not worth using. In a plan, this is often called *Aims* and most trainers expect the aims to be quite specific. 'Writing' is too general an aim for observers to get much of an idea of what the teacher wants to do, whereas 'to train students to use appropriate paragraph construction' does describe exactly what the teacher intends.

How long will it take? Some activities which sound very imaginative end up lasting for only a very short time. Others demand setting-up time, discussion time, student-planning time etc. One of the things that undermines the students' confidence in the teacher is if they never finish what they set out to do. One of the things that irritates them most is when teachers run on after the bell has gone because they have to finish an activity. Thinking about how long an activity will take is a vital part of planning. Most teachers indicate the intended Timing of an activity in their plan.

What might go wrong? If teachers try and identify problems that might arise in the lesson, they are in a much better position to deal with them if and when they occur. The attempt to identify problems will also give the teacher insight into the language and/or the activity which is to be used. Teachers often call this *Anticipated problems* in their plan.

What will be needed? Teachers have to decide whether they are going to use the board or the tape

recorder, an overhead projector or some role cards. It is also important to consider the limitations of the classroom and the equipment. In their plans, teachers usually indicate the *Teaching aids* they are going to use or attach copies of print material the students are going to work with.

How does it work? If teachers wanted to use the poetry activity on page 76, how would they actually do it? Who does what first? How and when should students be put in pairs or groups? When does the teacher give instructions? What are those instructions? Experienced teachers may have procedures firmly fixed in their minds but even they, when they try something new, need to think carefully about the mechanics of the activity. Teachers often call this *Procedure* in their plans and indicate what kind of activity it is, sometimes in note form. For example, 'TQ > SA' means stages where the teacher leads a question and answer session with the students, and 'S > S' means pairwork.

How will it fit in with what comes before and after it? An activity on its own may be useful, engaging and full of good language. But what connection, if any, does it have to the activities which come before and after it? Is there a language tie-in? Perhaps two or three activities are linked by topic, one leading into the other. Perhaps an activity has no connection with the one before it: it is there to break up any monotony in a lesson or to act as a 'gear change'. The point of answering this question for ourselves is to ensure that we have some reasonable vision of the overall shape for our lesson and that it is not composed of unrelated scraps.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember, however, is that a long teaching sequence (e.g. two weeks) is made up of shorter sequences (e.g. six lessons) which are themselves made up of smaller sequences (one or two per lesson perhaps). And at the level of a teaching sequence we have to ensure the presence of our three elements, *Engage*, *Study* and *Activate*.

We have

- discussed the purpose of planning: it helps to focus our minds, it helps to have something to refer to in the middle of the class, it shows students that we are professional and that we care.
- said that, whatever the format of a plan, it should tell us who is going to learn or be taught, what they are going to learn or be taught, how they are going to do it and what with.
- asked a number of important questions which teachers need to consider before they start to plan an activity: Why do you want to do it? What will it achieve? How long will it take? What might go wrong? What will you need to do it? How will it fit in with what comes before and after it?
- introduced the terms 'description of the class, aims, timing, anticipated problems, teaching aids, procedures' as headings which some teachers use to organise their plans.
- suggested that the actual format of a lesson plan is very much a matter of personal preference, but that trainers may want to guide trainees into certain formats.