

## INTRODUCTION

English has become the worldwide second language for all the nations around the world. But do we surely know how to teach languages. After all, people have been doing it successfully for two thousand years or more, and some aspects of teaching in the past have probably not changed that much. But other things have, and continue to change. And one of the aspects of good teaching is lesson planning. Lesson planning is at the heart of being an effective teacher. A teacher with a plan is a more confident teacher. Lesson planning helps teachers break down each lesson into a defined flow with specific classroom activities – and gives them a schedule they can stick to. Plus, it gives the regular teacher confidence knowing that class time is being used effectively. Lesson plans are systematic records of a teacher's thoughts about what will be covered during a lesson, they help the teacher think about the lesson in advance to resolve problems and difficulties, to provide a structure for a lesson, to provide a 'map' for the teacher to follow, and to provide a record of what has been taught.

## **Reasons for planning**

According to Jeremy Harmer for teachers, a plan gives the lesson a framework, an overall shape. Of course, good teachers are flexible and respond creatively to what happens in the classroom, but they also need to have thought ahead, to have a destination which they want their students to reach, and some idea of how they are going to get there. In the classroom, a plan helps to remind teachers what they intended to do. 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.

## **A proposal for action**

Whatever lesson plans look like, they should never be thought of as instructions to be slavishly followed, but rather as proposals for action. We may have an idea of what the learning outcomes for the lesson should be (that is, what the students will have learnt by the end), but we will only really know what those outcomes are once the lesson itself has finished. How closely lesson plans are followed depends, in other words, on what happens when we try to put them to work. Suppose, for example the teacher has planned that the students should prepare a dialogue and then act it out, after which there is a reading text and some exercises for them to get through. The teacher has allowed twenty minutes for dialogue preparation and acting out. But when the students start working on this activity, it is obvious that they need more time. Clearly the plan will have to be modified. A similar decision will have to be made if the class suddenly encounters an unexpected language problem in the middle of some planned

sequence of activities. The teacher can bypass the problem and keep going, or they can realize that now is an ideal time to deal with the issue, and amend the plan accordingly.

There are other unforeseen problems too: the tape/CD player or computer program suddenly doesn't work; we forget to bring the material we were relying on; the students look at the planned reading text and say 'We've done that before'. Good teachers need to be flexible enough to cope with unforeseen events, and it is because they know that they may have to adapt to changing circumstances that they understand that a lesson plan is not fixed in stone.

But a happier scenario is also possible. Imagine that during a discussion phase a student suddenly says something really interesting, something which could provoke fascinating conversation or suggest a completely unplanned activity. In such a situation - when this kind of magic moment suddenly presents itself - we would be foolish to plough on with our plan regardless. On the contrary, a good teacher will recognize the magic moment for what it is and adapt what they had planned to do accordingly. Magic moments are precious, in other words, and should not be wasted just because we didn't know they were going to happen. There will always be a tension between what we had planned to do and what we actually do. It is the mark of a good teacher to know when and how to deal with unplanned events, and how to balance a proposal for action with appropriate flexibility.

### **Planning questions**

Unless teachers walk towards a class with absolutely no idea about (or interest in) what is going to happen when they get there, they will have thought about what they are going to do. These thoughts may be extremely detailed and

formalized, or they may be vaguer and more informal. But in every case teachers will be answering seven fundamental questions when they decide what activities to take to a lesson.

They should know exactly who the students for this activity are, their age, level, cultural background and individual characteristics have to be taken into account when deciding what activities, texts or methodologies to use in the classroom.

Teachers have to decide what they want to do in the lesson in terms of both activities, skills and language. And also need to know why they want to do it. However, before deciding to use an activity just because they or the students might like it, they need to try to predict what it will achieve. What will students know, be able to do, understand or feel after the activity that they did not know, were not able to do, did not understand or feel before? What, in other words, is the learning outcome of the activity?

Teachers should try to estimate how long each activity will take (based on our experience and knowledge of the class) so that we can measure our progress as the lesson continues against our proposed 'timetable'.

Teachers have to think about what will be needed as well, decide whether they are going to use the board, a CD or tape player, an overhead projector, some role-cards or a computer. It is important to think about the best way of doing something, rather than automatically choosing the most technologically exciting option. It is also important to consider the physical environment of the classroom itself and how that might affect whatever teaching equipment we wish to use.

If teachers try to identify problems that might arise in the lesson, they are in a much better position to deal with them if and when they occur. This will also

give the teacher insight into the language and/or the activity which is to be used. This isn't to say that we can predict everything that might happen. An activity on its own may be useful and engaging and may generate plenty of good language. But what connection, if any, does it have with the activities which come before and after it? How does it fit into our need for the three ESA lesson elements? Is there a language tie-in to previous or future activities? Perhaps an activity has no connection with the one before it: it is there to break up the monotony of a lesson or to act as a 'gear change'. Perhaps we may decide to start our lesson with a short icebreaker (sometimes called a warmer) for no other reason than to get the students in a good mood for the lesson that is to follow.

### **Plan formats**

When making plans, some teachers write down exactly what they are going to do and note down each sentence that the students are going to say. Others use note-form hints to themselves or just write 'pairwork' or 'solowork' or 'whole class', for example, to describe how they are going to do something. Some just write short headings like 'going to' or 'photograph activity' or 'Little Rock reading' to remind them what to do. And of course there are teachers who keep the whole plan in their heads. This may be completely appropriate for them, of course, but won't help anyone else to know what they had in mind.

When teachers are observed - or when an institution asks for formal plans - the exact format of the plan may depend on the personal preferences of trainers, exam schemes or institutions (schools, colleges, etc). However, in some form or other, the following elements are usually included:

**Description of the students:** this includes anything from a general picture of

the group (its level, age range, atmosphere, etc) to detailed descriptions of individual students (what they find easy or difficult, how they respond to different activities, etc).

**Aims and objectives:** we generally say what we hope to achieve; the more specific we are, the easier it will be for us - and anyone observing - to see whether or not we have achieved those aims. Broad aims like 'have a good time' are bound to be less useful than 'sensitise students to uses of pitch and intonation to indicate enthusiasm (or lack of it)'. Most lessons will have a series of primary and secondary aims.

**Procedures:** the meat of the plan is in the description of how it will be executed. The section on procedures can include patterns of interaction. Frequently we will include timings as well, so that we have some idea of how long we expect things to take. We will also include the actual procedures, such as 'students look through the pictures and match them with the phrases'.

**Anticipated problems:** teachers frequently make some kind of a list of potential difficulties - and suggestions about what to do if they arise. They might consider what they would do if a computer or other piece of equipment failed them - or if some other student-based eventuality occurred.

**Extra activities/material (just in case):** many teachers make a note of extra activities they could include if things go quicker than anticipated.

**Material to be used in the lesson:** especially when they are to be observed, teachers attach examples of the material they are to use with the students to their plan.

### **Lesson planning aims**

Aims are what teachers and learners want to achieve in a lesson or a course. In other words, the aims on lesson plans often describe what the

teacher wants learners to be able to do by the end of a lesson, or what they will have done during it.

### **Main aim**

Your main aim is the most important part of the lesson plan. This is what you want the students to be able to do, or do better, at the end of the lesson that they couldn't do at the beginning. Think of your lesson in terms of you, the teacher, taking your students on a journey. The main aim is your destination. Once you have decided where you want your students to go, the journey is much easier to plan. You should only have one main aim (or possibly two in a long lesson). Express your main aims in terms of STUDENT OUTCOMES (what the students will do in the lesson) not the teacher actions.

Examples of main aims are:

- To enable sts to understand and use the past simple questions, negatives and affirmative forms
- To enable sts to understand and use the following lexical items related to sport (then list the lexical items you intend them to learn)
- To enable sts to understand and use the following expressions for making personal arrangements (then list the expressions you intend them to learn)
- To enable sts to understand and use the following functional exponents of giving advice (then list the exponents you intend them to learn)
- To check and extend students' understanding of narrative tenses for telling a story, and to enable sts to practise these in the context of a disastrous holiday
- To enable sts to prepare and then give a talk on the best places to visit in their country

If the main aim of your lesson is new language, then write down exactly what language you are planning to teach. For example, if you are planning to teach a

structure or tense, write down an example of the structure/tense from the lesson (and the question and negative forms if you are teaching them).

### **Subsidiary aims**

As well as your main aim, you might also have some subsidiary aims. These are aims that are not the main focus of the lesson, but are aims you hope will be achieved along the way on the journey to your main aim.

Examples of subsidiary aims are:

- To revise yesterday's vocabulary on the topic of housework
- To develop sts' skills of reading/listening for gist/specific information (if, for example, your main aim is a new language point and you are presenting it through a text)
  - To develop sts' writing skills (if, for example, the writing is practice of a language point)
  - To improve sts' awareness of intonation (if, for example, you're teaching some functional language)
  - To enable sts to understand vocabulary items related to travel (for example you are pre-teaching them for a reading text)

NOTE: You don't have to have any subsidiary aims – it depends of your lesson!

### **Assumptions**

You don't have to write your assumptions, but it's a very good idea to consider them while thinking about problems and solutions. These are the things relating to your lessons that you feel you can safely assume your sts will know. For example:

- Sts will be familiar with past participles of the verbs used in the lesson
- Sts will be familiar with the present simple active (if, for example, you are

teaching the passive)

- Sts will be familiar with meaning, form and pronunciation of the present perfect simple (if, for example, you are following on from another teacher who is going to present the language)
- Sts will have a basic knowledge of the political systems in their own countries
- Sts will know some of the vocabulary included in the lesson

### **Personal aims**

These are aims that relate to you as a teacher, rather than the lesson itself, and will help you focus on your own personal development. They could include such things are:

- To sit down more
- To make sure I include all the sts
- To stop talking so much
- To give clear, short, simple instructions
- To check instructions using ICQs
- To monitor more effectively
- To maintain a good pace
- To correct more during drilling

### **Aims and materials**

These are the things you need to do in the lesson, e.g. flashcards, tape, map of the world, handouts etc. Listing them on the front of your plan will help you make sure you've got everything ready, and will be useful when you look back at the lesson after the course.

## **Anticipated problems and solutions**

This is the section that you probably need to spend the most time thinking about. You need to consider what mishaps might befall you on your journey, and how you will deal with these if they occur. If you have not got a bag full of solutions with you, you might NOT reach your destination. Firstly, decide if your lesson is a LANGUAGE FOCUS lesson or a SKILLS FOCUS lesson.

In a language focus lesson, your main aim will be to introduce or revise specific items of language, e.g. vocabulary, a tense, a grammar structure, functional language etc.

In a skills focus lesson, your main aim will be to improve your sts' ability to read, listen, write or speak.

### **A LANGUAGE FOCUS LESSON**

Anticipated problems in a language focus lesson can be problems of meaning, form, pronunciation and possibly appropriacy (although remember that not every language item necessarily causes all these problems for sts). This section needs to be done in some detail. For example, 'they will have problems with form' is not enough.

You need to say WHAT problems they will have with form – is it the question form, infinitive with or without 'to', word order, spelling, third person 's' etc. Once you have anticipated the problems your students will have, you're half way there – now you only need to think of the solutions! These need to relate directly to your anticipated problems, and they are the key to successfully arriving at your destination with your students still on the same bus as you! If you have anticipated their problems accurately and devised solutions to these problems, then you and your students will arrive at your planned destination. Again, your solutions need to be considered in some detail, and written on

your plan.

### **A SKILLS FOCUS LESSON**

Anticipating problems in skills focus lesson obviously depends on the skill you are working on. For receptive skills (reading/listening) you need to consider vocabulary problems, content of the text, the degree of difficulty, your students' different abilities, the length of the text, any cultural problems the text or topic might produce etc. For productive skills (writing/speaking) you will need to consider whether the sts have the appropriate language to do the task, whether they'll be interested in the topic, problems with grouping your students, whether the students will have enough ideas to contribute etc. Again, once you have thought of your problems, work out the solutions.

### **THE LESSON PLAN**

Now you have decided where you and your students are going on your journey, all the problems that might lie ahead and all the solutions you're going to put in your mental rucksack to deal with them, next thing to think about is how to get there. Therefore, think of your lesson plan as your **route map** – it tells you how you are going to reach your destination.

**Stages-** Each lesson needs to be broken down into stages. You can have as many stages as you like, depending on the lesson.

**Stage aims** -Each stage must have an aim – a reason WHY you are doing this in the class. What's more, this aim must in some way help your sts achieve the MAIN AIM on the front page of the plan. It must help them move forward on their journey to their final destination. If it does not, you might need to reconsider = perhaps you are getting sidetracked.

**Procedure-** For each stage aim, you need to decide how you are going to achieve this aim; this is your procedure. Your procedure says exactly what you are going to do in the class to achieve that particular stage aim. You do not need to write every single word you are going to say, although you might like to script your instructions, particularly at low levels.

You will also need to estimate the **TIME** you think each stage of your journey will take. Try to be realistic here – very few stages take 2-3 minutes. This will help you time your lessons as a whole, and help you reach your destination **ON** time.

Finally think about the **FOCUS** of the class for each stage. This will help you think about what the students are doing in the class, and help you achieve a variety of focus during the lesson.

**CHECKING YOUR PLAN** When you have finished your plan, check the following:

1. Is there a variety of focus in the lesson? If there are too many T-S stages, the lesson is probably going to be too teacher centered.
2. Is your plan logical and does each stage follow on from the previous one?
3. Look at your plan backwards. Do the sts have the necessary language or information to be able to do your final activity? For example, if the students are asking each other questions at the end, have they been taught the question and the answer?

Here is an example of lesson planning :

**Lesson Duration** : 45 minutes

**Starting Situation** : The students receive a handout about a murder mystery, and receive a mix of events. Their job is to find out how the murder mystery came to a conclusion. What happened? Who was involved and how?

**Teacher's Aims and Objectives** : To pass out handouts, explain the rules, try to

get everyone involved, read over and help students comprehend, help students to from questions to gain more information and extra clues.

**Students' Activities:** They learn to work in groups, learn to use different tenses, they are motivated to thinking more abstract, analyze the story, listen to everyone's input.

**Anticipated problems and possible solutions:** Perhaps it would be an idea to bring a practice mystery, that the students have already seen how it works , what we are looking for and how it can be found.



## Conclusion

We have discussed reasons for planning, showing its advantages both for student confidence in the teacher and also as a framework for teachers to work from. We said how important plans are for teachers in training.

Stressed that plans are proposals for action rather than the action itself.

Teachers need to be receptive and flexible when unforeseen problems and magic moments turn up in a lesson.

Talked about the need for a blend of both coherence and variety in a lesson plan.

Said that whatever the format the plan takes, it should be based on who the students are, what we want them to do, how long each activity will take, how the activity actually works, what equipment will be needed, what might go wrong and how what we are planning will fit into what comes before and after it.

Discussed different plan formats, saying that there are many different ways of laying out the information. A lot will depend (especially on training courses) on who the plan is written for - apart from the teacher. However, we have suggested that most formal plans should include a description of the students, a statement of aims and objectives, a description of procedures (including who will be interacting with whom, and how long each activity will take), anticipated problems, extra materials and the material to be used in the lesson.

Talked about planning a sequence of lessons where topic-linking is important, but there are dangers of predictability and sameness. We introduced the concept of lesson threads which run through a sequence of lessons. said that it is important to plan future lessons on the basis of what has gone before, and using student feedback and our own observation to inform our future

decisions.

Bibliography:

“How to teach English” Jeremy Harmer ( Harlow , 2017 )

[https://jobs.languagelink.ru/tefl\\_clinic/teaching\\_knowledge/glossary/lesson\\_planning.php](https://jobs.languagelink.ru/tefl_clinic/teaching_knowledge/glossary/lesson_planning.php)

