**Didactics for third year /group 04 Mrs.Madani**

 **Lesson Planning**

**Reasons for planning**

Some teachers with experience seem to have an ability to think on their feet, and this allows them to believe that lesson planning is unnecessary. However, most teachers do not share this view and prepare their lessons. The resulting lesson plans range from the very formal and elaborate to a few hurried notes. But even the notes are still a plan of a kind. For students, evidence of a plan shows 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 research they might reasonably expect. Lack of a plan may suggest the opposite of these teacher attributes, even if such a perception is unjustified. For teachers, a plan gives the lesson a framework, an overall shape. It is true that they may end up departing from it at some stage 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, 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, especially if they get distracted or momentarily forget what they had proposed. 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. Such

plans are likely to be more elaborate than usual, not just for the sake of the teacher being observed, but also so that the observer can have a clear idea of what the teacher intends in order to judge how well that intention is carried through.

**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, that 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 realise that now is an ideal time to deal with the issue, and amend the plan accordingly. Another scenario is also possible: all the students are working on preparing a dialogue except for two pairs who have already finished. The teacher then has to decide whether to tell them to wait for the others to catch up (which might make them bored and resentful) or whether to stop the rest of the class to prevent this (which could frustrate all those who

didn’t get a chance to finish). 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. So far we have suggested that teachers need to be flexible when confronted with unforeseen problems. 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 (but appropriate and enjoyable) 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 recognise 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 when magic moments or unforeseen problems present themselves. It is the mark of a good teacher to know when and how to deal with unplanned events.

**Lesson shapes**

A good lesson needs to contain a judicious blend of **coherence** and **variety.** 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. In this context, it would not make sense to have students listen to an audio track, 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 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 would militate against the possibility of real student engagement. The ideal compromise, then, is to plan a lesson that has an internal coherence but which nevertheless allows students to do different things as it progresses.

**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 formalised, or they may be vaguer and

more informal. Teachers will be answering seven fundamental questions when they decide what activities to take to a lesson.

**a: Who exactly are the students for this activity?**

The make-up of the class will influence the way we plan. The students’ age, level, cultural background and individual characteristics have to be taken into account when deciding what activities to use in the classroom.

**b: What do we want to do and why?**

We have to decide what we want to do in the lesson in terms of both activities, skills and language. We also need to know why we want to do it. It might be because we ourselves like the activity, or because we think it will be appropriate for a particular day or a particular

group. There is nothing wrong with deciding to do an activity simply because we think it will make students feel good. However, before deciding to use an activity just because we or the students might like

it, we 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?

Examples of what an activity might achieve include giving students a greater understanding of an area of vocabulary, providing them with better listening strategies, teaching them how to construct conditional sentences, improving their oral fluency or raising the morale of the group through appropriate cooperative interaction.

**c: How long will it take?**

Some activities which, at first glance, look very imaginative end up lasting for only a very short time. Others demand considerable setting-up time, discussion time, etc. The students’ confidence in the teacher can be undermined if they never finish what they set out to do; students are frequently irritated when teachers run on after the

bell has gone because they haven’t finished an activity. Teachers, for their part, are made uncomfortable if they have overestimated the amount of time something might take and are thus left with time on their hands and no clear idea what to do. There is no absolute

way of preventing such problems from occurring, of course, but we should at least 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’.

**d: How does it work?**

If we want to use the photograph-choosing activity on page 124, we need to know how we and our students are going to do it. Who does what first? How and when should students be put in pairs or groups? When do we give instructions? What should those instructions

be? What should we be doing while the students are working in groups?, etc. 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 an activity.

**e: What will be needed?**

Teachers have to decide whether they are going to use the board, a CD or tape player, an overhead projector, some role-cards or a computer (or computers). It is important to think about the *best way* of doing something. 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.

**f: What might go wrong?**

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. Nevertheless, thinking around our activities - trying to put ourselves in the students’ minds, and gauging how they might react - will make us much more aware of potential pitfalls than we might otherwise be.

**g: How will it fit in with what comes before and after it?**

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? Is there a

language tie-in to previous or future activities? Perhaps two or three activities are linked by topic, one leading into the other (like the threads of a **multi-lesson sequence**). 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. The point of answering this question for ourselves is to ensure that we have some reasonable vision of the overall shape of our lesson and that it is not composed of unrelated scraps.

**Plan formats**

When making plans, some teachers write down exactly what they are going to do. Others use note-form hints to themselves (e.g. ‘T checks comprehension’) or just write ‘pairwork’ or ‘solowork’ or ‘whole class’, for example, to describe how they are going to do something. Some teachers write down notes with ordered paragraph headings, whereas others produce flow diagrams or random notes. 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 (observers, possible substitute teachers, etc.) 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:

**a: Description of the students:** this includes anything from a general picture of the group (its level, age, etc) to detailed descriptions of individual students (what they find easy or difficult, how they respond to different activities, etc).

**b: Aims and objectives:** we generally say what we hope to achieve; the more specific we are, the easier it will be for us 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.

**c: 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. We might write T--SS (for times when the teacher talks to the whole class), S--S (for pair work) or SSS--SSS (for group work); or we could write ‘groups’, ‘pairs’, etc, or record these patterns in some other way. 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’.

**d: Anticipated problems:** teachers frequently make some kind of a list of potential difficulties and suggestions about what to do if they arise.

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

**f: 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.

The actual form of a plan becomes important for teachers in training, especially when they are about to be observed. In such circumstances, the plan format is dictated by the training program and the trainers who teach it.

To sum up: the purpose of a plan is to be as useful as possible to the people who are going to use it (whether they are the teachers themselves, their observers or an examination board). This, in the end, is what should guide the form in which teachers put their thoughts down on paper.

**Planning a sequence of lessons**

We have stressed the need for variety in classroom activities and teacher behaviour as an antidote to student (and teacher) boredom. This means, as we have seen, that when teachers plan a lesson, they build in changes in pace and a variety of different activities.

The same principles also apply to a sequence of lessons stretching, for example, over two weeks or a month. Once again, students will want to see a coherent pattern of progress and **topic-linking** so that there is a transparent connection between lessons, and so that they can perceive some overall aims and objectives to their program of study. Most find this preferable to a series of ‘one-off’ lessons.

However, two dangers may prejudice the success of a sequence of lessons. The first is **predictability;** if students know exactly what to expect, they are likely to be less motivated than if their curiosity is aroused. The second is sameness; students may feel less enthusiastic

about today’s lesson if it starts with exactly the same kind of activity as yesterday’s lesson.

According to Tessa Woodward in her book on planning, an ideal multi-lesson sequence has **threads** running through it. These might be topic threads, language threads (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) or skill threads (reading, listening, etc.). Over a period of lessons students should be able to see some interconnectivity; in other words, rather than a random collection of activities. The need for both coherence and variety is just as necessary in multi-lesson sequences as it is in single lessons.

**After the lesson (and before the next)**

Evaluation of how well things have gone (for both teacher and students) is vital if our lessons are to develop in response to our students’ progress. In other words, we need to plan future lessons on the basis of what happened in previous classes. Not only that, but our

decision about whether to use an activity more than once (or whether we need to change the way we use that activity) will depend on how successful it was the first time we tried it. When we evaluate lessons or activities, we need to ask ourselves questions such as: Was the activity successful? Did the students enjoy it? Did they learn anything from it? What *exactly* did they get from the activity? How could the activity be changed to make it more effective next time? Unless we ask ourselves such questions, we are in danger of continuing with activities and techniques that either do not work, or, at the very least, are not as successful as they might be with appropriate modification.

One kind of data which will help us evaluate lessons and activities is **feedback from students.** We might, for example, ask them simple questions such as, ‘Did you like thatexercise? Did you find it useful?’ and see what they say. But not all students will discusstopics like this openly in class. It may be better to ask them to write their answers downand hand them in. A simple way of doing this is to ask students once every fortnight, forexample, to write down two things they want more of and two things they want less of.The answers we get may prove a fruitful place to start a discussion, and we will then be ableto modify what happens in class, if we think it appropriate, in the light of our students’ feelings. Such modifications will greatly enhance our ability to manage the class. We can also give students special evaluation forms where they have to rate different activities with a score, or put them in some kind of order and then add comments about what they thought. Another way of getting reactions to new techniques is to invite a colleague into the classroom and ask them to observe what happens and make suggestions afterwards. This kind of **peer observation** is most successful when both teachers discuss the content and practice of the lesson both before and after the observation. It is important that the colleague who comes into our classroom does so in order to offer constructive advice rather than to concentrate on our apparent failings. The lesson could also be videoed. This will allow us to watch the effect of what happened in the lesson with more objectivity than when we try to observe what is happening as it takes place. Some teachers keep **journals** in which they record their thoughts about what happened as soon as possible after the lesson has finished. In that way they can read through their comments later and reflect on how they now feel about what happened.

**Lesson plan example:**

 **Lesson Plan**

**Level : Teacher:**

**Sequence :** …………… **Lesson :** ………………………….

**Lesson Focus :**

**Learning Objectives :** By the end of the lesson, my learners will be able to :……………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

**Target Competencies :** Interact \_ Interpret \_ Produce

**Target Structures :** …………………………………………………………………………………………. …...

**Domain :**…………………………………….

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| --- | --- |
|  **Cross curricular Competencies** |  **Core Values**  |
| -**Intellectual**:……………………………………………………….**Methodological**:………………………………………………….**Communicative** :………………………………………………….**Social/Personal** :………………………………………………….. | -………………………………………....-…………………………………………-…………………………………………-………………………………………… |
| Time |  Framework |  Procedure | Focus |  Objectives | Aids / VAKT |
|  |  | ……………………………………………………………………………………………..……………………………………………..…………………………………………….…………………………………………….…………………………………………….…………………………………………… .……………………………………………...……………………………………………..……………………………………………..……………………………………………..…………………………………………….…………………………………………….…………………………………………….……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..…………………………………………..………………………………………………………………………………………..………………………………………………………………………………………..…………………………………………… |  |  |  |
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| **Teacher’s Comments** :

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  **What worked** |  **What hindered** |  **Action points** |

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**Materials :**…………………………………………………………………………………………………………