

2.5 Lesson planning and evaluation

Transcript

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In this Section of our Course we will look into the more practical aspects of designing lessons and using a specific chart for this process, called a “lesson plan”. We will see how lesson plans can help us not only in the preparation of our lessons, but also in its evaluation, in judging its effectiveness and efficiency.

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But first, let’s see what we already know and what we already do in our own teaching practice. Think about the following questions:

- From your own experience, how would you define a lesson plan?
- How useful do you think a lesson plan is, in general? Where does its usefulness lie in your view?
- More specifically, have you ever designed a lesson plan for your own teaching purposes? If so, what process have you followed? What have been your priorities while designing the lesson, its activities, and so on?

It’s really important to consider these questions before moving on with the video. So, stop the video now and click the link under the video to share your views in the Forum.

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Lesson planning is essential, because it helps us think about the lessons that we conduct:

- **Before** the actual lessons—in the sense that we have to consider the learning needs and styles of our learners vis-à-vis a particular syllabus and textbook (if there is one) and develop, or adapt, comprehensive instructional sequences that are appropriate for them,
- and **After** each lesson—in the sense of using the aims and expected outcomes laid out in the lesson plan to evaluate how the lesson that we just taught fared, how successful it was.

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In other words, planning and evaluation go hand-in-hand, as they use the same ingredients and processes. In what follows, we will see how we can develop lesson plans that can help you both prepare appropriate lessons for you class and evaluate your own teaching as comprehensively as possible.

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It is no surprise, after everything we have discussed in thus Course so far, that the key ingredient, the “secret” to developing successful lesson plans is **awareness**, on the part of the teacher, of all the central elements that go to make up a lesson:

- the syllabus and the aims and objectives it specifies;
- the textbook or textbooks used, and the extent to which the activities inside them can be adapted;
- the learners, of course, their learning styles and strategies and the ways in which they respond to our teaching; and the
- actual teaching methodologies adopted by us during actual teaching – please note that ALL of these elements are discussed at some length in other sections of this Course, and I urge you to view the relevant videos if you haven't done so already.

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It is indeed true that the teacher who plans their lessons in advance and uses these plans to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching is, well... a better teacher, and this always reflects on the learners becoming more and more efficient in their learning.

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So, let's begin by considering what is involved in lesson planning.

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Lesson plans offer specific descriptions of lessons. This is always the case. But where does these plans take their lead from? There are different possibilities here: IF your teaching situation has a specified, a very particular curriculum, then of course that curriculum has to take precedence in the structuring and the design of the lesson plan.

However, if a curriculum is NOT present or available to you, then chances are that you are free to determine your own priorities for teaching and learning in this specific context. There are cases, though, where the lack of a comprehensive curriculum will lead to a teaching context that is disorganized and hazy, without

the presentation of specific aims and objectives. If your own context is closer to this reality, you still need to develop your own principles and aims for your teaching, which means that designing lesson plans is of paramount importance for you.

And, of course, there are situations where a curriculum does not exist (or you may not have access to it), and instead the aims and objectives for a course are provided solely and completely by the textbook. Again, if this is your situation, you need to know it and recognise it—but, in every case it is important, as we've said before, to be fully aware of your teaching context.

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What does lesson planning refers to?

- It offers a clear organisation of the activities to be carried out in a particular lesson.
- In order for this to happen, though, you need to be aware of the constraints of your class—in our case, how ELF-aware your context is, to what extent is it possible to integrate activities or edit and adapt existing textbook activities to make them more ELF aware, as we have demonstrated in the ELF awareness section of this Course.
- In other words, everything you decide to do in rendering your teaching context more ELF-aware should be reflected in your lesson plans, but for this to happen you first need to be cognizant of the specifications and constraints of your class, of the extent, in other words, to which you are “allowed” to experiment with ELF awareness.

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As we've seen, lesson plans can be used in both planning and in evaluating. In this sense, they can be used **prescriptively**, when they refer to the preparation for a particular lesson or **descriptively**, when they are used as a reference against which the effectiveness of the actual lesson will be judged.

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Here are the **Parameters** to consider when designing lesson plans:

- **Knowledge of the current learning situation and of the learners at which the lesson is targeted**—their competence levels, learning styles and preferences.
- **Awareness of the curricular situation 'governing' the lesson** (as we've just shown).

- **Appreciation of the resources available for that lesson** (e.g., writing board, quality of desks, Overhead Projector if necessary, whether laptops or tablets will be available, and so on).
- And, of course, an **awareness of the teaching strategies to be used**, or the means of guiding the learners from that particular point of their learning to the next milestone of their learning. Lesson plans have a purpose, and their ultimate purpose is: achieving learning.

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OK, so, let's see whether we understand what we have been discussing so far. In this activity, you are invited to check that you understand what the main components of a lesson plan are.

Stop the video now and go to the accompanying file for this activity. Consider the 10 sentences provided and, based on your own teaching experience, and what we've been discussing so far, match each sentence to one of these components (whether they refer to the teaching situation, the learners' profile, materials and resources, etc.)

Again, stop the video and click the link under the video to do this Activity. Then, carry on with the rest of the video.

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What are the components of a lesson plan? What information should a good lesson plan include? Let's have a look.

There are different sorts of information that should go into a lesson plan for it to be comprehensive and understood by anyone reading it. They can be divided into two categories, the **"static"** characteristics, which refer to information that is immediately available to us and does not change from day to day, and the **"dynamic"** characteristics, which refer to information that changes from day to day, as a direct result of the teaching and learning pace of the lessons.

Let's begin with the static characteristics. These refer to the **teaching situation**, and specifically to the overall context and purpose of teaching—is it a general EFL or a more specific teaching setting, is it an exam-oriented class, is it a public school or a private setting, what ages are targeted and so on. Then we have information about the curriculum and syllabus and how teaching and learning are orientated: as regards ELF awareness, we want to establish the approach to language teaching, the emphasis and priority given to native speaker norms, the ways that cultures are viewed (are they predominantly large or small culture oriented). All these are important issues to consider and must enter the overall lesson-planning scheme. We also want information about the learning materials used, textbooks, grammar books, dictionaries, any other such materials.

A second major feature that should be considered is the **learner profile**. We need to incorporate as much information about the learners as possible: their age, how many there are in the classroom, the situation regarding their proficiency on other languages, including their mother tongues and of course including English, their nationalities. And of course we need to add vital information regarding their learning needs, how motivated they are to participate in these lessons, how they use English outside the classroom (remember, this is especially important in this Course), and most importantly, we need to have an awareness of their attitudes with regard to key issues concerning ELF, native speakers, standard English, their own self-confidence in using English, and so on.

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With regard to the **learning materials**, we need to have a comprehensive awareness (which should be described in the actual lesson plan) of anything to be used in the class, from textbooks (as we've seen) and handouts to online materials, access to laptops and tablets (if at all), and speed of Internet connection.

We also need to present a layout of the actual **classroom setting**, the way the learners are seated, whether their stations can be moved or not, how easy it is to enable groupwork. This information is vital because, as we have seen, ELF-related tasks tend to work more with the spoken language, which means that learners will have to move around a lot and interact with one another.

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Let's now consider the 'dynamic' characteristics of lesson planning. What information should we provide here?

First and foremost, lesson plans should have information about the **overall purpose of the lesson**. Thus, for example, an ELF-aware lesson plan may specify that the target of the lesson is to raise learners' awareness of ELF usage, to develop their listening skills, and to raise their awareness of their beliefs and attitudes (through certain metalinguistic and metacognitive questions).

These overall aims should be coupled with a list of more **specific objectives** that will spell out the general aims into very specific concerns (essentially, how general aims are translated into specific concerns). For example, a list of specific objectives for an ELF-aware lesson may be to have the learners notice the role of L1 phonology in interactions in ELF, to develop the sub-skills of 'listening-for-gist' and 'listening for individual sounds', and incorporate activities that will raise learners' awareness of their beliefs and attitudes as regards non-native speaker

pronunciation and accent. Do you see how the more general lead into the more particular? This smooth transition is essential in comprehensive lesson planning.

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There are further issues to consider, of course. How are you going to treat **correction** and how do plan to **assess** your learner's performance? To what extent are you interested in correcting? Which aspects of your learners' performance do you plan to focus on and why? It is important to understand that you cannot incorporate each and every aspect of communication, function and structure in one single lesson, so you have to make choices, give priorities. So, in an ELF-aware lesson, what elements are you going to be focusing on? For example, you may choose to focus on raising your learners' awareness of certain cultural issues—if you're doing this through the use of metalinguistic and metacognitive questions, THIS should be EXPLICITLY mentioned in your lesson plan!

Also, WHO will be performing the correction? You, the teacher, perhaps the learners might be involved? Another useful piece of information to be incorporated in the lesson plan. More importantly, HOW are you going to carry out such assessment? What is your correction policy? Are you going to be correcting during a task or after a task?

And finally, what roles do you anticipate to take on during this particular lesson. Are you going to be a facilitator of interactions, prompting communication and enabling open reflection? Or are you going to be the teacher at the front of the class giving instructions? Of course, we all know what the answer should be in an ELF-aware lesson, don't we! Plus, do you anticipate any problems or issues, for example, with timing each task, having external interruptions (which should be avoided at all cost, but may be an issue to consider in certain cases), and so on.

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Here is an example of a template for a lesson plan. As expected, lesson plans need structure and we're offering you a specific **template** to use for the purposes of the assignment in this Course.

As you can see, the horizontal lines have descriptions of the various phase of the lesson—this is where each activity will go. The vertical columns have information about the procedure (the different, VERY specific steps within each activity), the objectives of the activity, the intended interaction involving the learners and, last but not least, the timing of each activity (which is of paramount importance because you do NOT want to plan activities that will span longer than necessary or that will not fit within the whole lesson's time).

For example, you may plan to design a lesson that centres around listening. The first phase would be the so-called “pre-listening” stage whose purpose would be to raise learners’ awareness of the themes to be listened to. This stage might have two distinct steps, e.g., two sets of questions that you ask learners to think about, one might be a more general one that learners think about by themselves (e.g., “What do you think about living abroad?”) and the second one would be a more specific one directly prompting learners to interact with each other (e.g. “Discuss the benefits of traveling abroad”). Write down the full list of objectives for each step in the Objectives column and spell out the intended interactions (e.g., to engage group oral activity). And, of course, think about the place and function of these questions in the overall plan of the lesson and write down the suggested time that this phase intended to last. Timing is always a potentially problematic issue on lesson planning, as quite a large number of lesson plans tend to be over-ambitious and incorporate many activities without considering the time constraints of the entire lesson, which means that, it is often the case that certain activities remain incomplete or even not done at all! In the case of our example, you may allocate, say, 5 or 7 minutes to this pre-listening stage.

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As already mentioned, you can view and download the file “**Lesson plan template**” by clicking the link under this video. The file contains a sample template for you to use in your own classroom.

Please remember that you are expected to use this template when designing the lesson in the **Final Assignment** of this Course!

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As you see, designing a lesson plan is not difficult at all. Truth be told, though, the more lesson plans you design the better you become at designing them. No one is perfect and, needless to say, **there is no perfect or ideal lesson plan!**

Before we move on, think about the following questions and, if you want, click the link under the video to share your views with your colleagues in the Forum.

In light of the above, and from your own experience,

- What advantages and disadvantages can you see in designing a lesson plan?
- How could a lesson plan help in evaluating a lesson?
- And, what aspects should be considered when evaluating a lesson?

Take some time to respond to these questions, then move on with the rest of the video.

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Let us now see how lesson plans can help us in **evaluating** our lessons and, in fact, our teaching.

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The underlying assumption to using lesson plans as a tool in evaluation is that, while evaluating our lessons, we use the exact same characteristics of the lesson that we presented when we discussed lesson planning.

One such group of characteristic is the teaching situation. Questions to ask here, with referenced to the lesson plan are:

- To what extent was the **purpose of teaching** (e.g. ESP) in this particular setting (e.g. exam-oriented class) fulfilled, and Why? For example, if the purpose of this particular lesson was to raise your learners' ELF-awareness, and your own context was a high-stakes exam preparation class, to what extent were you able to meet that purpose? Perhaps you were too ambitious with your ELF-aware activities and questions?
- Also, to what extent were the **curriculum, syllabus, and textbook specifications** followed? For example, did you use the textbook activities, or did you develop you own? If you did integrate the ELF-aware questions within the existing syllabus and textbook, how were you able to treat possible nativespeakerist assumptions about the function of standard English?

Another set of questions to ask are related to the **learner profile**, for example,

- To what extent was the lesson appropriate and relevant as regards the learners': age, level, interests, language needs, mother tongue(s), nationality(-ies), other languages they use, beliefs and attitudes? To what extent were the ELF-aware interventions met with approval by your learners? How seriously did your learners take the new perspective towards these important issues?

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Since each lesson plan incorporates a very specific description of the purpose, objectives and overall procedures adopted in the lesson, you have at your disposal an extensive checklist of the issues to consider in the post-lesson evaluation, asking questions like:

- To what extent was the overall purpose and specific objectives of the lesson fulfilled? Why?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson? Why?
- To what extent was each task, including the assessment policy that was followed, effective? Why?

- What obstacles or problems were there? Why? How did you / would you try to overcome them? Why?
- How would you improve this specific lesson? Why?

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Finally, it should be possible to use the lesson plan to evaluate the impact of your lesson with regard to:

- Learners' response both to each task and to the entire lesson
- How the lesson contributed to each learner's level of motivation, learning processes, development of skills and competences and overall growth
- The conclusions that you, as a teacher, have drawn from planning and evaluating the lesson and the impact of this specific experience on future lessons, and, last but not least,
- The contribution of your lesson to your own growth as a teacher.

For maximum results it is important to refer back to your lesson plan immediately after the end of your lesson, when things are still alive in your mind and you can comment on the details of specific aspects of your lesson—for example, remark on the timing of a particular question, the response of one of your learners in another task, or the way in which a particular group work fared.

Ideally, of course, evaluation works best when it is based on real data, which means that if you can, on occasion, record (audio-record or video-record) your lessons, you are able to refer to specific aspects of them more vividly and also see yourself, your own actions, your own handling of the class, your own discourse, as an observer, as an outsider.

It is obvious, therefore, that the criteria for evaluating the lesson are incorporated in the lesson plan itself, which makes things extremely neat and tidy and also convenient and can help you quickly appreciate the strengths and the weaknesses of your intended actions vis-à-vis the reality of a specific lesson.

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With all the above in mind, let's complete this section with another activity.

Remember, our aim in this Course is to develop, teach and evaluate lessons that are ELF-aware and involve all our learners, in ways that are inclusive, open and sensitive to difference.

Think about the following questions, and refer back to your knowledge and experience as a teacher, as well as your participation so far in this Course:

- What aspects would you prioritize in designing an ELF-aware lesson plan for your own class? What would the purpose and objectives be? Why?

- In your opinion, what characteristics would a 'good ELF-aware lesson' have? Why?

These are important questions. There are no right or wrong answers. Only you are in the position to know your own teaching context, your own learners, the curriculum, syllabus and textbooks that you use, and only you can provide the answers to these questions. We are REALLY interested to hear your viewpoints, though. It's all about sharing ideas and experiences, so, please, do not hesitate to share yours in the Forum.