

Alternatives to traditional planning

Sometimes writing out a traditional sequenced procedure helps - but at other times you could ...

Prepare – don't plan

- Familiarise yourself with language points, material etc
- Imagine possible techniques, lesson sequences, atmosphere etc
- Cut up, tippex, draw, photocopy etc
- ... but don't plan in detail what to do

The Overload approach

Take in lots of material that you have prepared (i.e. language to be studied; cut-up bits, role cards etc). Only decide exactly which you will use and how in the lesson.

Briefly note 10 things you could do with a piece of material

In class do whichever seems appropriate.

Dream through the lesson

Don't write anything. Repeatedly imagine your way through the lesson (eyes closed?) Think up possible different routes you might initiate – or that learners might. See where each leads. (Try just before you fall asleep at night!)



Alternative written formats – e.g. Flow-chart

Write your procedure notes in sketch-boxes rather than in traditional linear down-the-page fashion. Show a variety of different possible running orders and routes through the stages by drawing arrows between different boxes.

Talk-through

... options pre-class with another teacher for 10 minutes or so

Focus on the "Critical Learning Moments"

List some specific key things you hope learners will gain from the class (e.g. being able to pronounce a set of new words well e.g. being able to replay a difficult tape until they can understand the main message etc). For each of these, decide what the "critical learning moment" will probably be i.e. something you or they do (lasting 1 - 30 seconds) – that is likely to make the most significant impact on their success. Focus 95% of your planning on paying attention to the "challenge" inherent in these moments.

Plan the "Critical Teaching Moments"

Which instructions, explanations, feedback stages etc will be "critical moments" for the teacher which may need to be prepared in detail in advance?

Half-plan. (Plan the skills; don't plan the language)

Put your energy into planning how your class will do skills work (e.g. reading, speaking etc). Don't plan any language systems work (e.g. lexis, grammar etc). In class spontaneously work on language issues as they come up *if* they are useful, interesting and appropriate for students. (NB "work on" doesn't just mean "explain explain" – can you invent engaging on-the-spot practice tasks as well?)

Lesson images

Draw sketch pictures of the class at several key moments in the lesson. Show what learners and teacher are doing. (Not appropriate for a "sit down and write all the time" kind of lesson ...)

Plan with the learners

Allow 10 minutes a week to negotiate and plan with learners – not just "What shall we do?" but also "How shall we do that?" You may be surprised to find some strong opinions and preferences.

Jungle path / Dogme

... or perhaps: Don't plan anything. Discover what a lesson is like without any previous thought. Work entirely with what you find in the class. Many teachers are surprised to come out feeling that they have taught particularly well – is this because they have had to listen and respond to students far more carefully than usual?

Lesson Planning and Preparation

Fifteen suppositions ...

*(supposition - noun - something you believe is true although you cannot prove it
Macmillan English Dictionary)*

- 1: Trainers and trainees often view it as an act of writing - but lesson planning is essentially a thinking skill.
- 2: A plan is not a route-map of what must happen in class; it is only your best -informed / best-guess setting-up of some possibilities.
- 3: It is important to be honest to trainees and teachers about why they are asked to plan.
- 4: The main aim of asking trainees to plan is not to teach trainees to make written plans – rather it is to train trainees in “planning thinking”
- 5: Planning is imagining the lesson before it happens. It should not have as a primary concern the writing of a schedule of timed actions.
- 6: A secondary reason for having written lesson planning on a training course is to demonstrate to observers what kinds of thinking and preparation have gone into the lesson (in order to facilitate relevant support or to aid assessment).
- 7: The kind of planning that a trainee teacher needs to do is quite different from that an experienced teacher needs to do.
- 8: Beyond the initial training stage it is increasingly important for teachers to become more effective and responsive in understanding and working with individuals and their needs.
- 9: An experienced teacher planning in a trainee way is perhaps not growing as a teacher.
- 10: Planning is not the same as preparation
- 11: As experienced teachers we mainly need to prepare but not plan.
- 12: An experienced teacher still needs to prepare thoroughly – but may actually hamstring themselves by planning too much.
- 13: Weak teachers may use written lesson plans as a way of avoiding developing as teachers.
- 14: Good teaching is essentially process-orientated not product-oriented
- 15: A significant part of good teaching is the act of alert ‘tuning in’.

