CHAPTER 3

Lesson Planning

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"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" asked Alice.
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cheshire Cat.

Lewis Carroll (1963). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (p. 59). New York: Macmillan.

Introduction

Teachers may wonder "which way they ought to go" before they enter a classroom. This usually means that teachers need to plan what they want to do in their classrooms. Most teachers engage in yearly, term, unit, weekly, and daily lesson planning (Yinger, 1980). Yearly and term planning usually involve listing the objectives for a particular program. A unit plan is a series of related lessons around a specific theme such as "The Family." Planning daily lessons is the end result of a complex planning process that includes the yearly, term, and unit plans. A daily lesson plan is a written description of how students will move toward attaining specific objectives. It describes the teaching behavior that will result in student learning.

This chapter addresses the daily planning decisions that English language teachers make before they enter the classroom. Included in this discussion are the interactive and evaluative decisions teachers make during and after the lesson. Richards (1998) stresses the importance of lesson planning for English language teachers: "The success with which a teacher conducts a lesson is often thought to depend on the effectiveness with which the lesson was planned" (p. 103). For the purposes of this chapter, lesson planning is defined as the daily decisions a teacher makes for the successful outcome of a lesson. This chapter discusses the following issues associated with lesson planning:

- Why plan?
- Models of lesson planning.
- How to plan a lesson.

Why Plan?

Language teachers may ask themselves why should they bother writing plans for every lesson. Some teachers write down elaborate daily plans; others do the planning inside their heads. Preservice teachers say they write daily lesson plans only because a supervisor, cooperating teacher, or school administrator requires them to do so. After they graduate, many teachers give up writing lesson plans. However, not many teachers enter a classroom without some kind of plan. Lesson plans are systematic records of a teacher's thoughts about what will be covered during a lesson. Richards (1998) suggests that lesson plans 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" (p. 103).

There are also internal and external reasons for planning lessons (McCutcheon, 1980). Teachers plan for internal reasons in order to feel more confident, to learn the subject matter better, to enable lessons to run more smoothly, and to anticipate problems before they happen. Teachers plan for external reasons in order to satisfy the expectations of the principal or supervisor and to guide a substitute teacher in case the class needs one. Lesson planning is especially important for preservice teachers because they may feel more of a need to be in control before the lesson begins.

Daily lesson planning can benefit English teachers in the following ways:

- A plan can help the teacher think about content, materials, sequencing, timing, and activities.
- A plan provides security (in the form of a map) in the sometimes unpredictable atmosphere of a classroom.
- A plan is a log of what has been taught.
- A plan can help a substitute to smoothly take over a class when the teacher cannot teach. (Purgason, 1991)

Daily planning of lessons also benefits students because it takes into account the different backgrounds, interests, learning styles, and abilities of the students in one class.

Models of Lesson Planning

There are a number of approaches to lesson planning. The dominant model of lesson planning is Tyler's (1949) rational-linear framework. Tyler's model has four steps that run sequentially: (1) specify objectives; (2) select learning activities; (3) organize learning activities; and (4) specify methods of evaluation. Tyler's model is still used widely in spite of evidence that suggests that teachers rarely follow the sequential, linear process outlined in the steps (Borko & Niles, 1987). For example, Taylor (1970) studied what teachers actually did when they planned their lessons and found that they focused mostly on the interests and needs of their students. More important, he found that teachers were not well prepared in teacher-education programs for lesson planning.

In response to these findings, Yinger (1980) developed an alternative model in which planning takes place in stages. The first stage consists of "problem conception" in which planning starts with a discovery cycle of the integration of the teacher's goals, knowledge, and experience. The second stage sees the problem formulated and a solution achieved. The third stage involves implementing the plan along with its evaluation. Yinger sees this process as becoming routine, whereby each planning event is influenced by what went on before and what may happen in the future. He also sees a place for considering each teacher's experiences as influencing this ongoing process of planning.

Research on what English language teachers actually do when planning lessons has shown that many teachers, when they do write lesson plans (Richards & Lockhart, 1994), tend to deviate from the original plan. Also, when English language teachers do write daily lesson plans, they do not state them in terms of behavioral objectives, even though they are taught this method in preservice teacher education courses (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Freeman, 1996; Bailey, 1996). Instead, English language teachers, especially more experienced teachers, are more likely to plan their lessons as sequences of activities (Freeman, 1996), teaching routines, or to focus on the need of particular students (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

Bailey's (1996, p. 38) study of six experienced English language teachers came up with the following interesting reasons (stated as principles) why teachers deviate from the original lesson plan: (1) "Serve the common good." Here teachers are willing to deviate from the original lesson plan because one student raised an issue that the teacher perceives to be relevant for the other students. (2) "Teach to the moment." Sometimes, teachers may completely abandon the lesson plan to discuss some unplanned event because the teacher thinks it is timely for the class. (3) "Further the lesson." Teachers make a procedural change during the lesson as a means of promoting the progress of the lesson. (4) "Accommodate students' learning styles." Teachers may sometimes depart from their lesson plans in order to accommodate their students' learning styles if the original plan has not accounted for them. (5) "Promote students' involvement." Teachers sometimes eliminate some steps in their lesson plans in order to have more student involvement, especially if the students are not responding. (6) "Distribute the wealth." This last principle has teachers changing lesson plans to encourage quiet students to participate more and to keep the more active students from dominating the class time. These findings show that teacher decision making is a dynamic process involving teachers making choices before, during, and after each lesson.

The question that arises out of these studies is, What kinds of lesson plans should English language teachers write? The next section discusses how to develop, implement, and evaluate a lesson plan.

How to Plan a Lesson

Developing the Plan

An effective lesson plan starts with appropriate and clearly written objectives. An objective is a description of a learning outcome. Objectives describe the destination (not the journey) we want our students to reach. Clear, well-written objectives are the first step in daily lesson planning. These objectives help state precisely what we want our students to learn, help guide the selection of appropriate activities, and help provide overall lesson focus and direction. They also give teachers a way to evaluate what their students have learned at the end of the lesson. Clearly written objectives can also be used to focus the students (they know what is expected from them).

For English language lessons, Shrum and Glisan (1994) point out that effective objectives "describe what students will be able to do in terms of observable behavior and when using the foreign language" (p. 48). Hence, the language a teacher uses for stating objectives is important. I suggest action verbs be used to identify desired student behavior; these can include action verbs similar to those used in Bloom's *Taxonomy of Thinking Processes* (see Appendix B). Vague verbs such as *understand*, *appreciate*, *enjoy* (although these can still be used for certain types of lessons, e.g., English poetry or reading novels), or *learn* should be avoided because they are difficult to quantify. Action verbs such as *identify*, *present*,

Lesson Phase	Role of Teacher	Role of Students
I. *Perspective* (opening)	Asks what students have learned in previous lesson Previews new lesson	Tell what they've learned previously Respond to preview
II. *Stimulation*	Prepares students for new activity Presents attention grabber	Relate activity to their lives Respond to attention grabber
III. *Instruction/ Participation*	Presents activity Checks for understanding Encourages involvement	Do activity Show understanding Interact with others
IV. *Closure*	Asks what students have learned Previews future lessons	Tell what they have learned Give input on future lessons
V. *Follow-up*	Presents other activities to reinforce same concepts Presents opportunities for interaction	Do new activities Interact with others

Adapted from Shrum & Glisan (1994)

Figure 1 Generic Components of a Lesson Plan.

describe, *explain*, *demonstrate*, *list*, *contrast*, and *debate* are clearer and easier for teachers to design a lesson around. Use of these action verbs also makes it easier for the students to understand what will be expected from them in each lesson.

After writing the lesson objectives, teachers must decide the activities and procedures they will use to ensure the successful attainment of these objectives. Planning at this stage means thinking through the purposes and structures of the activities. This step involves planning the shape of the lesson. To highlight some generic components of a language lesson plan, I use Shrum and Glisan's (1994) adaptation of the Hunter and Russell (1977) model (Figure 1). They have built in a place for greater student involvement in the lesson.

The generic lesson plan as shown in Figure 1 has five phases:

I. *Perspective or opening.* The teacher asks the students (or himself or herself) the following questions: What was the previous activity (what was previously learned)? What concepts have they learned? The teacher then gives a preview of the new lesson.

II. *Stimulation.* The teacher (*a*) poses a question to get the students thinking about the coming activity; (*b*) helps the students to relate the activity to their lives; (*c*) begins with an attention grabber: an anecdote, a little scene acted out by peer teachers or lay assistants, a picture, or a song; and (*d*) uses it (the response to the attention grabber) as a lead into the activity.

III. *Instruction/participation.* The teacher presents the activity, checks for student understanding, and encourages active student involvement. Teachers can get students to interact by the use of pair work and/or group work.

IV. *Closure.* For this phase the teacher checks what the students have learned by asking questions such as "What did you learn?" and "How did you feel about these activities?" The teacher then gives a preview about the possibilities for future lessons.

V. *Follow-up.* The last phase of the lesson has the teacher using other activities to reinforce some concepts and even to introduce some new ones. The teacher gives the students

opportunities to do independent work and can set certain activities or tasks taken from the lesson as homework.

Of course, teachers can have variations on this generic model. Shrum and Glisan (1994) point out that as time passes in language lessons and as students gain competence, the students "can gradually take on a larger role in choosing the content and even in the structure of the lessons themselves" (pp. 187–188). English language teachers should also realize that language lessons may be different from other content lessons because the same concepts may need to be reinforced time and again using different methods. The following questions may be useful for language teachers to answer before planning their lessons:

- What do you want the students to learn and why?
- Are all the tasks necessary – worth doing and at the right level?
- What materials, aids, and so on, will you use and why?
- What type of interaction will you encourage – pair work or group work – and why?
- What instructions will you have to give and how will you give them (written, oral, etc.)? What questions will you ask?
- How will you monitor student understanding during the different stages of the lesson?

An example of an authentic lesson plan for an English reading class is given in Appendix A. The lesson plan should not be seen as a prescription or "how to," because each teaching context will be different. After writing the plan, the next step is to implement it by teaching the class.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Implementing the lesson plan is the most important (and difficult) phase of the daily lesson planning cycle. In this phase, the lesson plan itself will retreat into the background as the reality of the class takes over. As many experienced teachers know, it is easy to get sidetracked by unplanned events. However, teachers should remember that the original plan was designed with specific intentions in mind and the plan was based on the teacher's diagnosis of the learning competence of the students. Nonetheless, teachers may need to make certain adjustments to the lesson at the implementation phase. I would suggest two broad reasons for teachers to deviate from their original lesson plan: first, when the lesson is obviously going badly and the plan is not helping to produce the desired outcome; second, when something happens during an early part of the lesson that necessitates improvisation.

When the lesson is not succeeding, teachers should make immediate adjustments to the original plan. This is difficult for beginning teachers because they may not have the necessary experience to recognize that things are going badly. They may also lack sufficient knowledge to develop contingency plans to substitute in such cases. No teacher's guide can anticipate what problems might occur during a lesson (e.g., out-of-class problems such as interruptions from a visitor); however, they must be dealt with quickly. Teachers can build up this professional knowledge with experience.

When implementing their lesson plan, teachers might try to monitor two important issues, namely, lesson variety and lesson pacing. Variety in lesson delivery and choice of activity will keep the class lively and interested. To vary a lesson, teachers should frequently change the tempo of activities from fast-moving to slow. They can also change the class organization by giving individual tasks, pair work, group work, or full class interaction.

Activities should also vary in level of difficulty, some easy and others more demanding. The activities should also be of interest to the students, not just to the teacher. Ur (1996, p. 216), however, cautions that varied activities should not be "flung together in random order." The result of this would be restlessness and disorder. Consequently, Ur (1996) suggests that the harder activities and tasks be placed earlier in the lesson and the quieter activities before lively ones. Teachers may want to try variations of this to see what works best in their particular class.

Pace is linked to the speed at which a lesson progresses, as well as to lesson timing. In order for teachers to develop a sense of pace, Brown (1994) suggests the following guidelines: (1) activities should not be too long or too short; (2) various techniques for delivering the activities should "flow" together; (3) there should be clear transitions between each activity. If teachers remember to work for the benefit of their students rather than their own, then they can avoid falling into the trap of racing through different activities just because they have been written on the lesson plan.

EVALUATING THE PLAN

The final part of daily lesson planning happens after the lesson has ended (although Brown [1994] reminds us that evaluation can take place during the lesson too), when the teacher must evaluate the success (or failure) of the lesson. Ur (1996) says it is important to think after teaching a lesson and ask "whether it was a good one or not, and why" (p. 219). This form of reflection, she says, is for self-development. Of course, both "success" and "failure" are relative terms and their definitions will vary according to each individual teacher's and student's perspective. Nevertheless, Brown (1994) says that without an evaluative component in the lesson, the teacher has no way of assessing the success of the students or what adjustments to make for the next lesson.

Brown (1994) defines evaluation in lesson planning as an assessment that is "formal or informal, that you make after students have sufficient opportunities for learning" (p. 398). Ur (1996) says that when evaluating a lesson, the first and most important criterion is student learning because that is why we have a lesson in the first place. Even though it may be difficult to judge how much has been learned in a lesson, Ur says that we can still make a good guess. This guess can be based "on our knowledge of the class, the type of activity they were engaged in, and some informal test activities that give feedback on learning" (p. 220). Ur offers the following criteria for evaluating lesson effectiveness and orders them as follows: (1) the class seemed to be learning the material well; (2) the learners were engaging with the foreign language throughout; (3) the learners were attentive all the time; (4) the learners enjoyed the lesson and were motivated; (5) the learners were active all the time; (6) the lesson went according to plan; (7) the language was used communicatively throughout (p. 220). Readers might wish to reflect on these criteria and reorder them in their own list of priority.

The following questions may also be useful for teachers to reflect on after conducting a lesson (answers can be used as a basis for future lesson planning):

- What do you think the students actually learned?
- What tasks were most successful? Least successful? Why?
- Did you finish the lesson on time?
- What changes (if any) will you make in your teaching and why (or why not)?

Additionally, for further clarification of the success of a lesson, teachers can ask their students the following four questions at the end of each class; the answers can assist teachers with future lesson planning (I avoid overly judgmental questions such as "Did you enjoy

the lesson?" as these types of questions are highly subjective):

- What do you think today's lesson was about?
- What part was easy?
- What part was difficult?
- What changes would you suggest the teacher make?

Conclusion

I have focused on the day-to-day lesson planning decisions that face language teachers (both preservice and in-service). Because we all have different styles of teaching, and therefore planning, the suggestions in this chapter are not meant to be prescriptive. Teachers must allow themselves flexibility to plan in their own way, always keeping in mind the yearly, term, and unit plans. As Bailey (1996) points out, a lesson plan is like a road map "which describes where the teacher hopes to go in a lesson, *presumably taking the students along*" (p. 18; emphasis added). It is the latter part of this quote that is important for teachers to remember, because they may need to make "in-flight" changes in response to the actuality of the classroom. As Bailey (1996) correctly points out, "In realizing lesson plans, part of a skilled teacher's logic in use involves managing such departures [from the original lesson plan] to maximize teaching and learning opportunities" (p. 38). Clearly thought-out lesson plans will more likely maintain the attention of students and increase the likelihood that they will be interested. A clear plan will also maximize time and minimize confusion of what is expected of the students, thus making classroom management easier.

Appendix A: Lesson Plan

Time: 12:00 P.M. to 12:35 P.M. **Subject:** English language **Class:** Secondary 2 English (mixed-ability level)
Language Focus: Reading **Topic:** Sport
Objectives:
To teach the students how to skim for main idea of the passage – identify key words.
Prior Knowledge:
Students have learned how to locate information by reading and finding the main sentence of each paragraph.
Materials:
1. Reading materials – article from book on Sport
2. Overhead projector/OHTs
3. Whiteboard

Step	Time	Tasks (Teacher)	Tasks (Pupils)	Interaction	Purpose
1	5–10 mins	**Opening:** Introduction to the topic sport. T activates schema for sport. T asks Ss to help him or her write down as many different kinds of sport on the whiteboard within 3 minutes. T asks Ss to rank their favorite sports in order of importance.	Listen Ss call out the answer to the question as the T writes the answers on the board. T writes the answers.	T ⟷ Ss (T = teacher; Ss = students)	Arouse interest. Activate schema for sport.

Step	Time	Tasks (Teacher)	Tasks (Pupils)	Interaction	Purpose
2	5–7 mins	T distributes handout on sports schedule from the newspaper. T asks Ss to read it quickly and answer the true/false questions that follow it within 3 minutes. T goes over the answers and shows Ss how he or she found the answers based on key words in the article.	Ss read the handout and answer the questions. Ss call out their answers to the T. Ss check their answers.	T ↔ Ss Ss ↔ T	Focus attention of Ss on the concept of skimming for general gist with authentic materials.
3	15 mins	T tells Ss that they just practiced skimming to get the general meaning or gist of a passage. T gives another handout on sports from the textbook (*New Clue*). T asks Ss to read and answer the true/false questions written on the paper within 5 to 7 minutes. T asks Ss for answers and writes them on the board. T explains how key words can give the answers.	Ss read the handout and answer the questions. Ss call out their answers to the T. Ss check their answers.	T ↔ Ss Ss ↔ T (S ↔ S possible also) T ↔ Ss	Getting Ss to read passage quickly to get the overall meaning.
4	5 mins	T summarizes the importance of reading a passage quickly first in order to get the gist. T gives homework of reading the next day's newspaper's front-page story and writing down the gist of the story in 4 sentences. **Follow-up:** Next lesson: To teach the students to find the main idea of the passage by scanning.	Ss listen.	T ↔ Ss	To remind Ss what they have just done and why – to develop pupil metacognitive awareness.

Key: Interaction: T ↔ Ss means teacher interacts with the whole class.

Appendix B: Bloom's Taxonomy of Thinking Processes

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY OF THINKING PROCESSES (ADAPTATION)			
Level of Taxonomy	**Definition**	**Student Roles**	**Action Verbs**
Knowledge	Recall of specific information	responds absorbs remembers recognizes	tell; list; define; name; identify; state; remember; repeat
Comprehension (understanding)	Understanding of communicated information	explains translates demonstrates interprets	transform; change; restate; describe; explain; review; paraphrase; relate; generalize; infer
Application (using)	Use of rules, concepts, principles, and theories in new situations	solves problems demonstrates uses knowledge constructs	apply; practice; employ; use; demonstrate; illustrate; show; report
Analysis (taking part)	Breaking down information into parts	discusses uncovers lists dissects	analyze; dissect; distinguish; examine; compare; contrast; survey; investigate; separate; categorize; classify; organize
Synthesis (creating new)	Putting together of ideas into a new or unique plan	discusses generalizes relates contrasts	create; invent compose; construct; design; modify; imagine; produce; propose; what if...
Evaluation (judging)	Judging the value of materials or ideas on the basis of set standards or criteria	judges disputes forms opinions debates	judge; decide; select; justify; evaluate; critique; debate; verify; recommend; assess

Adapted from Shrum & Glisan (1994)

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