

DON'T FORGET THE LESSON PLAN

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A man tried carefully to follow his wife's instructions to meet her with their baby and a myriad of equipment: diapers, bottles, blankets, extra sweaters, and a teething ring. He paid close attention to each of the details and at the appointed time appeared proudly at the meeting place with all of the equipment. His wife checked it over, found all the items there and then cried in horror, "But where is the baby?".

In language teaching journals we read about the role of audio-visual materials, motivation, psycholinguistics, and philology. An array of technological aids ranging from film-strip machines and overhead projectors to videotape equipment and versatile language laboratories are available to many language teachers and can require the expertise of the engineer and the agility of the circus juggler. Should a teacher feel inadequate if the latest aids are impractical in a particular work situation? Are students missing out on essential aspects of their language study when such elaborate equipment does not exist in their schools? A firm no answers both questions. Simple, traditional means like chalkboard and magazine pictures can be used effectively in the foreign language and English as a Second Language class to teach languages in an interesting, up-to-date and pedagogically sound way.

The lesson is the means through which a language should be taught. Under the term "lesson" a variety of types of activities occur in the class hour. We are not concerned here with lessons devoted to testing, field trips, lectures, review in preparation for testing, and so on; instead, our focus is the presentation sequence through which most foreign language teaching is carried out.

There are several obvious reasons for an unsuccessful lesson:

1. The lesson is either not well structured or not structured at all.
2. The teacher, and therefore the student, has no objectives in mind and no clear idea of the aim and result. The teacher leaves too much to improvisation.
3. When a goal exists, there is no guarantee of an effective connection between this goal and the means to achieve it.
4. Lessons are not properly coordinated internally and with each other, so that one follows logically from the one before and leads to the one following.
5. Lessons lack variety and enough practice for each student.

Simple principles of teaching are forgotten. More attention to planning is a big part of the cure.

Two kinds of plans are needed: the plan for a series of class periods (a unit) and the daily plan for a particular class period. In preparing a unit plan, the teacher notes in advance the phonetic difficulties, such as sounds, stress, and intonation; the grammar difficulties, such as subject-verb agreement and use of articles; and the vocabulary difficulties, such as the number of new words and their situational occurrence. He then distributes the difficult items to be learned throughout the number of class periods allotted to the lesson in the unit plan. The lessons should form a chain whose links are interconnected. A constant recycling and review of the language materials is thus built into the learning process, connecting all lessons to each other.

After completing the unit plan, the teacher moves on to the daily plan, which provides the detailed ways in which the class time will be organized. The daily plan indicates: 1) The goals of the particular lesson, 2) The materials to be used to achieve these goals, and 3) Exactly how the goals should be achieved.

A workable form for a daily plan should state the objectives, specify the activities, indicate the assignment for the next class, describe the visual aids and other teaching material that will be obtained in advance, and possibly include an evaluation

technique. Further, the plan should be brief, yet indicate exactly what words, expressions, rules, facts and other items are to be learned; the plan should assign a definite number of minutes to each activity and state which varieties of activities will be used. The teacher should consciously distribute exercises throughout the class period which provide practice in most of the four basic language skills and which offer variety in format: teacher-class, student-class, teacher-student, and student-student. Recycling and practicing already taught material is deliberately planned. New vocabulary is presented within the framework of familiar grammatical structures and new grammatical items are practiced using already assimilated vocabulary.

The carefully planned objectives and sequencing of the lesson are not for the teacher's use alone. They are stated for the students' benefit at the beginning of each class. The teacher also keeps long term goals in mind to insure that each lesson is moving in the right direction and is another step toward accomplishing the ultimate goals of the course. "To help the class to speak English better," and "To develop a student's proficiency in reading," can not be the objectives of the lesson. They are too broad to be clear to either the learner or the teacher. The lesson objectives indicate the concrete, discrete increments of learning which are to take place and how they may be evaluated. What will the student be able to do at the end of the hour? The student should know what will be expected of him and how he can achieve the goals. At most levels of instruction, no more than three objectives, narrow in scope, are planned for a single class period.

The lesson has four basic components: presentation, assimilation, application, and review. There are elements of each lesson, however, that are rarely emphasized in lesson plans. These elements are the beginning and the end of each class, the warm-up and the recapitulation.

A thoughtful beginning creates for the student an individual mood, a general atmosphere, an attitude, an expectation, an eagerness. The beginning forecasts what is to follow. Depending on the level of instruction, several approaches are possible. At the intermediate level the warm-up period might begin with a conversation involving ordinary greeting expressions and vocabulary. Through this conversation all students should be motivated to participate in the lesson. If the

teacher plans to review vocabulary related to household furnishings and the simple past tense, humor and realism might be found in an initial (confessional) dialogue like:

Teacher: I finally cleaned my refrigerator last night.
What a smell! Did you clean yours?

Student: No, I cleaned the stove instead.

The teacher then states the context and structure being practiced, perhaps writing a brief schema on the blackboard, so that the students can consciously continue the conversation in the same vein. The content or form of this greeting conversation should lead into the next part of the lesson, which is usually a presentation of new material or the checking of homework.

The greeting interaction could also be the appropriate time for a joke, proverb, poem, or even a song, especially when it includes vocabulary and expressions naturally used in everyday life and related to the content of the classwork.

The last few minutes of the class is the recapitulation of the lesson. Psychologically the student will be mobilized to get the most out of the summary, if the teacher asks the student to state the goals of the lesson. The teacher emphasizes the fact that the final activities will indicate whether these goals have been accomplished. Everything practiced during the lesson will be reviewed quickly. These final activities will also be the bridge to carry the class over to the next lesson.

While a short written test may achieve these goals, perhaps a better way is to cover the same grammatical and lexical territory again, varying the type of drill, visual aid, or realia used as cues. This would be an appropriate time to encourage students in a more independent use of the language. At all times the student must be aware of what he is doing and the how and why of it.

Although most of the reminders presented in this article refer to techniques that have been known and used by teachers for years, a few quick visits to foreign language classrooms and a bit of introspection into our own teaching of yesterday or last week reveal how often we forget to implement an organized and careful approach to planning the lesson.