Planning Lessons and Courses

Designing sequences of work for the language classroom

Tessa Woodward

Consultant and editor: Penny Ur
Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers

This is a series of practical guides for teachers of English and other languages. Illustrative examples are usually drawn from the field of English as a foreign or second language, but the ideas and techniques described can equally well be used in the teaching of any language.

Recent titles in this series:

- **Ways of Doing**
  Students explore their everyday and classroom processes
  Paul Davis, Barbara Garside and Mario Rinvolucri

- **Using Newspapers in the Classroom**
  Paul Sanderson

- **Teaching Adult Second Language Learners**
  Heather McKay and Abigail Tom

- **Teaching English Spelling**
  Ruth Shemesh and Sheila Waller

- **Using Folktales**
  Eric Taylor

- **Personalizing Language Learning**
  Personalized language learning activities
  Griff Griffiths and Kathryn Keohane

- **Teach Business English**
  A comprehensive introduction to Business English
  Sylvie Donna

- **Learner Autonomy**
  A guide to activities which encourage learner responsibility
  Ágota Scharlé and Anita Szabo

- **The Internet and the Language Classroom**
  Practical classroom activities and projects
  Gavin DudeneY

- **Using the Board in the Language Classroom**
  Jeanine Dobbs

- **Learner English (second edition)**
  Michael Swan and Bernard Smith

- **Teaching Large Multilevel Classes**
  Natalie Hess

- **Writing Simple Poems**
  Pattern poetry for language acquisition
  Vicki L. Holmes and Margaret R. Moulton

- **Laughing Matters**
  Humour in the language classroom
  Péter Medgyes

- **Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom**
  Jane Sherman

- **Stories**
  Narrative activities for the language classroom
  Ruth Wajnryb

- **Language Activities for Teenagers**
  edited by Seth Lindstromberg

- **Pronunciation Practice Activities**
  A resource book for teaching English pronunciation
  Martin Hewings

- **Five-Minute Activities for Business English**
  Paul Emmerson and Nick Hamilton

- **Drama Techniques (third edition)**
  A resource book of communication activities for language teachers
  Alan Maley and Alan Duff
Contents

Thanks and Acknowledgements vii
Map of the book viii

Introduction 1

1 Who are the students? 16
2 How long is the lesson? 47
3 What can go into a lesson? 73
4 How do people learn and so how can we teach? 110
5 What can we teach with? 131
6 How can we vary the activities we do? 162
7 Getting down to the preparation 180
8 What are our freedoms and constraints? 212

Bibliography 243
Index 248
To Pat and Robin, all their offspring and to Grandma Lil

Thanks

To Seth for listening to chapters read out loud and for taking over the typing when my fingers gave out!

To Penny Ur for inviting me to contribute to this series and for her helpful, indefatigable and swift responses to my drafts.

To Alison Silver for her patience and humanity while editing the typescript.

To Jane Clifford for all her support.

To Christine Frank for commenting so charitably on my first draft chapter.

To the two anonymous readers who gave comments on a very early draft.

To Phillip Burrows for his beautiful illustrations.

To Ruth Carim for her meticulous proof-reading.

Acknowledgements

The author and publishers are grateful to the authors, publishers and others who have given permission for the use of copyright material identified in the text. In the cases where it has not been possible to identify the source of material used the publishers would welcome information from copyright owners.

Text on p. 53 from Teacher Cognition in Language Teaching by Devon Woods, Cambridge University Press; poem on p. 191 ‘London Airport’ from Selected Poems by Christopher Logue, Faber and Faber Ltd; text on p. 200 from Cambridge English for Schools by Andrew Littlejohn and Diana Hicks, Cambridge University Press. Illustrations on pp. 46, 72, 109, 130, 161, 179, 211, 242 by Phillip Burrows.
Map of the book

A = Activity

Introduction 1

What do I mean by planning?
What do I mean by a ‘good’ lesson or course?
What are teachers’ concerns about lesson and course planning?
A beginner teacher’s concern: ‘Planning takes too long’

1 Who are the students? 16

1.1 Introduction
1.2 Who can you find out from?
The institution
Students from a different institution
Students from inside or outside your own institution
Past and present teachers
Other stakeholders
1.3 What you can know and why
The students
1.4 How to get information before meeting the class
Letter writing A
1.5 How to get information on first meeting
First lesson sequences
Name learning
Labels A

2 How long is the lesson? 47

2.1 Introduction
2.2 Beginnings
Beginning before the beginning
Clear boundaries
Fluid boundaries
Working starts
Taking care of the atmosphere
Student starts
Discussing the menu
An experienced teacher’s concern: ‘It’s getting boring’

Ways of getting better at planning
The first way: Considering our past learning experiences
The second way: Using coursebooks
The third way: Learning as we teach

Using ‘Chunks’
What are ‘Chunks’?
When are chunks good or bad?
Beliefs, perceptions and assumptions
The four-column analysis
The organisation of this book

Register mnemonics  A
Testing yourself  A
Building a sense of community  A
Drawing yourself  A
Group profile  A
Student expectations  A
Why are we here?  A
Unfinished sentences  A
The graph  A
Bartering  A
‘What we are used to’ sentences  A
Level  A
How much can they understand?  A
One thing I know about English  A
Class dictionary  A

1.6 How to get information during subsequent lessons
Name review – Chair swap  A
50-second talks  A
Learner style  A
Teacher style  A
Probing thinking to see what students understand  A
Learning contracts  A
Tutorials  A
Other ideas  A

1.7 How to get information after the students have gone
Tracer study  A

1.8 Conclusion  A

2.3 Middles
Threads  A
An animal a day  A
Stimulus-based blocks  A
Meeting the stimulus  A
Analysis  A
Personalisation  A
Alteration and transfer  A
Creation  A
Generalisable procedures for texts  A

2.4 Break time
Rounding off  A
Complete break in class  A
Complete break outside class  A

2.5 Ends
Homework  A
Dialogue journals  A
What have we done today and why?  A
Plans for next time  A
Filling up the last remaining moments  A

2.6 Conclusion  A
4 How do people learn and so how can we teach? 110

4.1 Introduction
Ways of learning and teaching

4.2 Finding out for yourself
What it is and how it works
Finding out for yourself: Functional expressions
Finding out for yourself: Discourse structure and lexical phrases

4.3 Things made plain
What it is and how it works
How it works in the language class
Map of the book

Stage 1: Exposure to language
Stage 2: Noticing
Stage 3: Remembering (or mental storage)
Stage 4: Use and refinement

3.4 Language skills
  - Listening
  - Speaking
  - Reading
  - Writing
  - Practical principles for working on skills and sub-skills

3.5 Combinations

4.4 Periphery learning
  - What it is and how it works
  - How it works in the language class

4.5 Use and refinement
  - Use and refinement: Functional expressions
  - Use and refinement: The listening skill

4.6 Taking stock

3.6 Literature
  - Practical principles for teaching literature

3.7 Culture
  - Practical principles for working with culture

3.8 Study skills
  - Practical principles for teaching study skills

3.9 Other subjects

4.7 Test, teach, test

4.8 Pre-, in-, post- stages for receptive skills

4.9 PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production)

4.10 TBL (Task-based Learning)

4.11 Conclusion

5.6 The picture pack
  - Main types of picture pack
  - Uses of picture packs
  - It reminds me of ...

5.7 The music tape
  - Main types of music tape
  - Uses of music tapes
  - Mental images

5.8 How to look after your tools:
  - Maintenance and storage

5.9 A central tool: The coursebook
  - Advantages of using a coursebook
  - Disadvantages of using a coursebook

5.10 Using the whole coursebook: The stimulus-based approach
  - Meeting the coursebook
  - Me Teacher, You Book
  - Sharing your reasoning

5.11 Conclusion

Part 2

5.12 A central tool: The coursebook
  - The coursebook vocabulary thread for students in class

© Cambridge University Press  www.cambridge.org
6 How can we vary the activities we do? 162

6.1 Introduction
6.2 Description of a learning activity
   The alphabet blackboard game
6.3 Definition of the features of an activity
6.4 Changing the features of an activity
6.5 The activity bank

7 Getting down to the preparation 180

7.1 Introduction
7.2 What is ‘planning’?
   Why would we want to plan courses and lessons?
   Why would we not want to plan courses and lessons?
   Who can you do your planning with?
   When can you plan your courses and lessons?
7.3 Specifying objectives
   The traditional view
   The ‘starting from different angles’ view
   The students
   Time

8 What are our freedoms and constraints? 212

8.1 Introduction
8.2 Type of organisation
8.3 Type of class
   Heterogeneous classes
   Practical principles for working with heterogeneous classes
   Syllabus and content
   Materials and tasks
   Mixed ability dictation
   Working together
   Very large classes
   Practical principles for working with large classes

Map of the book

5 What can we teach with? (continued)

Personalising the book
Covering the coursebook
Coloured filters
Forging connections
Inner voice
Teacher dissects the coursebook at home
Altering the coursebook
Teacher selects, rejects and supplements parts of the coursebook before use in class

© Cambridge University Press

More information
Map of the book

Teacher and students alter texts that are too short A
Teacher and students alter texts that are too long A
Adding the students in Read aloud and shadow A
Different voices and gestures A
Reversals A
Creating things based on the coursebook
Using the pictures A
Bringing out the coursebook characters A
Things you can do with the coursebook apart from studying it A
Finishing off A
5.11 Conclusion

Reading a text and then answering questions on it A
Dictation A
Repeating after the teacher A
Copying from the blackboard A
Reading a dialogue and then role playing it A
Checking homework around the class A
Filling in gaps in a cloze text A
Student presentations A
Memorising A
6.6 Conclusion

Generative activity frameworks
Content
How people learn
How teaching can be handled
Materials
7.4 What happens once you get some starting points
Building courses, playing your course cards
Laying down one card, or the one card trick
Playing similar sorts of cards
Heart, club, diamond, heart, club, diamond
One of spades, one of hearts, one of clubs
Building a pack of cards
Face down concentration
7.5 Before individual lessons
The zero option
Writing lesson notes
Different sorts of notes
Visualising the class
In-class ideas
Immediately after class
More ambitious ideas for later on
Keeping track
Analysis of tapes
Ideas for balancing up
Variety stars
7.6 The design model for planning
7.7 Conclusion

Crowd control
Basic chores
Group work
One-to-one (or very small group) teaching
Practical principles for teaching one-to-one or very small groups
Exam classes
Practical principles for working with exam classes
Transparency
Similarity
Get students in the study mood
Balance
Exam tips
Sort yourself out!
Substitution classes
Practical principles for working with substitution classes
Using pictures A
Using an unusual methodology A
Using teacher resource books
Using a topic-based lesson
Classes with few resources or facilities
Practical principles for working with under-resourced classes
Seating
Boards and display surfaces
Individual student materials
Map of the book

8 What are our freedoms and constraints? (continued)

- Crowd control
- Basic chores
- Group work
- One-to-one (or very small group) teaching
- Practical principles for teaching one-to-one or very small groups
- Exam classes
- Practical principles for working with exam classes
- Transparency
- Similarity
- Get students in the study mood
- Balance
- Exam tips
- Sort yourself out!
- Substitution classes
- Practical principles for working with substitution classes
Map of the book

Using pictures
Using an unusual methodology
Using teacher resource books
Using a topic-based lesson
Classes with few resources or facilities
Practical principles for working with under-resourced classes
Seating
Boards and display surfaces
Individual student materials
8.4 The unpredictability of working with people
Classes with students who don’t get on
Practical principles for working with classes who don’t get on
Avoidance
Confrontation
Separate development
Cooperation
Undisciplined classes
Practical principles for dealing with undisciplined classes
Before class
In class
After and between lessons
Hijacks: Pleasant and unpleasant surprises
Practical principles for dealing with surprises and hijacks
8.5 The internal variable: Ourselves
Practical principles for dealing with strengths and weaknesses in ourselves
Finding out about ourselves
Working on our weaknesses
Working on our strengths
8.6 Conclusion