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Lesson Planning

Planning a lesson before teaching is an essential part of giving an effective ESL lesson. Depending on the experience of the teacher and the type of information included, the planning process for a lesson plan can be quite varied. Experienced ESL teachers tend to make a mental plan of what they are going to teach compared with newer teachers who tend to create very detailed lesson plans.

An important reason to prepare a lesson plan is so you can develop the structure of the lesson as well as organize the content effectively. This improves your ability to select ESL activities and materials that will best suit your students. A lesson plan functions to give the teacher a framework for the lesson. Furthermore, it helps the teacher to think about the process of teaching. This gives the teacher a feeling of security knowing that they are prepared to instruct the class. A lesson plan also helps the teacher with the timing of activities to ensure the students receive a well-balanced and time-managed lesson.

There are many factors that you need to consider when planning a lesson. For example, how the students prefer to learn, the level of the students, the class size and seating arrangements, etc.

Here is a list of questions to consider when planning a lesson:

The Objective: What is the objective of the lesson? How can I best achieve the objective?

ESL Teaching Activities: What ESL teaching activities will I need during the lesson to accomplish my objective? For example, speaking activities, role-plays, brainstorming, listening exercises, etc.

Beginning: What activity should I use to start the class? For instance, a warmer, a review, etc.

Timing: How much time will I spend on each activity?

Sequencing: What would be the best order for the activities?

Extra Materials: Will I need to use any other materials during the lesson? For example, worksheets, videos, etc.

Suitability: Will the students be interested and motivated by the activities provided? Are the ESL activities suitable for the students?

Level: Is the lesson pitched at the right level for the students? What problems might the students have understanding the content?

Groupings: In which activities will the students work alone, work in pairs, or groups? Why?

Transitions: How will I move from one activity to the next? How will the activities connect?

Language Focus: Is there enough language focus in the ESL activities? Will the students need more examples before doing the activities? For example, extra vocabulary, grammar examples, modelling, etc.

Textbook-Based Lesson Plans

Most schools, language centres, and universities use commercial textbooks for teaching English. Commercial textbooks are often the basis of course syllabuses and lessons. These books often become the backbone of each lesson and provide the greatest source of language input for the students. Some teachers rely heavily on these teaching resources as many come with a teacher's book to guide the teacher easily through each class. More experienced teachers tend to rely less on textbooks. Instead, they prefer to use their own ESL materials. Creating your own materials opens up a completely new world for the learner. ESL students identify more with materials that relate to their interests, needs and surroundings. This is not to say that experienced teachers do not use textbooks. They just seem to be more selective in the content they wish to teach, and prefer to adapt materials rather than teach directly from the book. There are many ways ESL teachers can adapt textbooks. Here are some examples:

Reorganizing the Structure of the Units

During an English course, students have projects, assignments and other criteria they need to fulfill. Therefore, once the teacher has reviewed all the units of a textbook, it may be necessary to reorder the arrangement of the units to cover certain topics at certain times. This may also take place within a unit. The teacher may reorder the activities to best suit the students or leave some activities out entirely.

Adapting Activities

Adapting ESL activities can benefit students by adding extra focus on certain language points and topics. In addition, many course books are designed to be universal. However, sometimes they may not be suitable for the culture and country that your students come from and may need to be adapted. Adapting activities means your students can use English authentically. This can dramatically increase the students' motivation to learn English as they can identify more with the content of the lesson.

Adapting Textbook Exercises

Activities and exercises can be adapted to give the students more focus on a particular language point or topic. Exercises can also be changed or personalised to give the students more understanding of the subject matter. For example, questions in a speaking activity could be changed to suit the students' interests.

After the Lesson

After your lesson has taken place, you should review how the lesson went. You should also review your lesson plans regularly to keep track of activities that worked well. Lesson plans should also be kept as a record of what has been covered.

Here are some questions that you can use to evaluate the lessons success:

Did the students enjoy the lesson?

What problems were there during the lesson?

Which ESL activities were successful and which were not?

Did I manage to achieve the objective of the lesson? How do I know this?

Will I teach this lesson again in the same way?

As a teacher, you may find a lesson that worked perfectly well with one class has different results in another. You should always be prepared to change the lesson plan as the class takes place and adapt to the needs of the students.