

On the design of foreign language curricula



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ON THE DESIGN OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULA

Discuss the steps involved in planning a general English language course. In designing a syllabus for a group of Greek learners in a public secondary school what factors would you take into account in its development, how would you go about developing it, what would the nature of this syllabus be and why?

Planning a general English language course can be very interesting as you are creating a teaching strategy that helps not only the students but also you, in a very effective way.

Lesson planning is the first step. It includes data such as content, language learning objectives, instructional approaches and procedures, materials required, and criteria for constructing an assessment for the lesson. It is like a map guiding someone to his / her destination through unknown or known paths and places. Lesson planning is a teacher problem solving activity pursuing the answer to the question OF how to most effectively promote and accomplish intended learning outcomes. It is, then, defined as the in advance study of the teaching process intended to implement curricular objective(s).

In summary, lesson planning is needed for a) giving a sense of direction, b) helping students become aware of the lesson objectives and the learning tasks they are asked to perform, c) managing a classroom, d) helping teachers to solve, in advance, teaching problems, and e) reducing anxiety on the part of students and, especially, the teacher.

Teaching approach is the second step. The five factors, which could be applied in the teaching approach of global English, are presented below:

1. LESSON CLARITY

2. INSTRUCTIONAL VARIETY

3. TEACHER TASK ORIENTATION

4. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

TIME

5. MODERATE TO HIGH STUDENT SUCCESS LEVEL

A full lesson cycle includes three phases of duties on the part of the teacher.

The lesson phases

are the following:

(I)Pre teaching phase

(II)Interactive phase.

(III)Post teaching phase.

The interactive phase takes place during the allocated lesson time; the pre teaching phase, usually, takes place before the lesson starts or /and at the beginning of the lesson. The post teaching phase follows the end of the interactive phase and, usually, post teaching duties are performed after allocated lesson time.

THE PRE TEACHING PHASE

Lesson planning at the pre teaching phase includes making decisions and acting before the interactive phase takes place. The pre teaching phase, as previously defined, takes place before the lesson starts or at the very beginning of the lesson.

Pre teaching duties before the lesson starts include, among others, the setting of lesson objective(s), study and consideration of student data, content selection and organization, selection of teaching methods, techniques, activities and learning tasks, preparing and / or selecting materials, student work evaluation, and preparation of group work.

Pre teaching duties at the beginning of the lesson include, among others, reporting on previous student assignment, collecting student work, distribution of student papers, and homework evaluation.

THE INTERACTIVE TEACHING PHASE

The interactive teaching phase of a lesson, mostly, represents the implementation of the planning of the pre teaching phase during the regular time allocated for the English lesson. During the interactive phase major student - student and teacher- student interactions take place. Although the planning phase of a lesson is of vital importance, planning per se produces no effects. It is at this interactive teaching stage, that plans are put in action and language learning and acquisition take place.

The interactive phase consists of seven steps: student's attention, informing lesson objective, recall of required prior knowledge, presentation of new content, guided practice, consolidation and evaluation.

THE POST TEACHING PHASE

Post teaching tasks are exercised just before the official ending of the lesson, after the last step of the interactive phase, or, especially, after the allocated lesson time is over.

Post teaching duties before the lesson ends include, among others, the setting of lesson objective(s) for the next lesson, collecting student written work, student testing, homework assignment, extra reading or writing assignment, singing, playing a game promoting English language learning, student reports, and individualized student work.

Post teaching duties after the lesson is over include, among others, report on student previous assignment(s), collecting student work, distribution of student papers, homework evaluation, evaluation of student work, analysis of test results, and redirecting the unit's objective (s).

Evaluation of the lesson plan

Post teaching duties include the evaluation of the lesson plan, as well. The most important areas that evaluation, at this phase, should deal with are the following:

(a) How far the work has developed as planned.

(b) Particularly good aspects of the work: For example, things in which the students showed unusual interest; marked cooperation on the part of the children; particularly useful material or equipment; outstandingly good work.

(c) Particularly bad aspects of the work: For example, things in which the children showed very little interest; behaviour difficulties; inadequate provision of material or equipment; unforeseen difficulties; outstanding bad work; low level student success rate.

(d) Assessment of the total situation, suggestions about future work, good points to be followed up, deficiencies, desirable modifications in original program.

(e) Student testing.

Lesson Follow up

The post teaching aspect of lesson follow up refers to action that should be taken soon after the end of the interactive phase, in order to further implement the instructional program. Some activities, suitable for this function of teaching, are the following:

- Collection of student writing assignments.
- Student preparation for the following lesson.
- Grading student work.
- Student evaluation.
- Test data analysis.

- Meeting with student or group of students for classroom management affairs or discipline problems.
- Meeting with student or group of students for additional work on the topic.
- Meeting with student or group of students for remedial work.
- Meeting with parent(s).
- Homework assignment.
- Return of teaching media at proper place for future use.
- MAKING a record OF content covered during the lesson.

CONCLUSION

Lesson planning is the in advance study of the teaching process on the basis of set and implemented objective(s). Lesson planning is needed for a) giving a sense of direction, b) helping students become aware of the lesson objectives and the learning tasks they are asked to perform, c) classroom management purposes, d) helping teachers to solve, in advance, teaching problems, and e) reducing anxiety on the part of students and, especially, the teacher.

Designing a Syllabus

Whether you teach full or part-time, the syllabus, an essential teaching document, should be part of your instructional tool kit. A well-designed syllabus clearly communicates to your students. Of course you should have

an initial idea of whom you are targeting for your new course. You should more or less know the following regarding future participants to your course:

1. the average age,
2. their educational qualification,
3. their skill level,
4. their life/work experience,
5. access to resources (including available time), and
6. the reasons for doing the course

The role of a syllabus is key for a learning course. Essentially, the syllabus operates as table of contents for the course; it provides a sketch of what is to come.

First of all when you are creating a syllabus you should provide basic information. Include the current year and semester, the course title and number, the number of units, the meeting time and location. You should also indicate any course meetings which are not scheduled for the assigned room. List your name, office address (include a map if your office is hard to locate), office phone number (and indicate whether you have voice mail), email address, website URL, fax number, and office hours. For your office hours, indicate whether students need to make appointments in advance or may just stop in. If you list a home telephone number, indicate any restrictions on its use (for example, “ Please do not call after 10 P. M.”).

Include the names, offices, and phone numbers of any teaching or laboratory assistants.

Secondly you should describe the prerequisites to the course. Help students realistically assess their readiness for your course by listing the knowledge, skills, or experience you expect them to already have or the courses they should have completed. Give students suggestions on how they might refresh their skills if they feel uncertain about their readiness.

Thirdly you should give an overview of the course's purpose. Provide an introduction to the subject matter and show how the course fits in the college or department curriculum. Explain what the course is about and why students would want to learn the material.

State the general learning goals or objectives. List three to five major objectives that you expect all students to strive for: What will students know or be able to do better after completing this course? What skills or competencies do you want to develop in your students?

Do not forget to clarify the conceptual structure used to organize the course. Students need to understand why you have arranged topics in a given order and the logic of the themes or concepts you have selected.

Moreover describe the format or activities of the course. Let students know whether the course involves fieldwork, research projects, lectures, discussions with active participation, and the like. Which are required and which recommended?

In addition specify the textbook and readings by authors and editions. Include information on why these particular readings were selected. When possible, show the relationship between the readings and the course objectives, especially if you assign chapters in a textbook out of sequence. Let students know whether they are required to do the reading before each class meeting. If students will purchase books or course readers, include prices and the names of local bookstores that stock texts. If you will place readings on reserve in the library, you might include the call numbers . If you do not have access to the call numbers or if it makes to reading list look too cluttered, give students as their first assignment the task of identifying the call numbers for the readings. Let students know that this will make it easier for them to locate each week's readings, and more importantly, it will give them practice in using the library's electronic resources.

Identify additional materials or equipment needed for the course. For example, do students need lab or safety equipment, art supplies, calculators, computers, drafting materials?

Also list assignments, term papers, and exams. State the nature and format of the assignments, the expected length of essays, and their deadlines. Give the examination dates and briefly indicate the nature of the tests (multiple-choice, essay, short-answer, take-home tests). How do the assignments relate to the learning objectives for the course? What are your expectations for written work? In setting up the syllabus, try to keep the workload evenly balanced throughout the term.

State how students will be evaluated and how grades will be assigned.

Describe the grading procedures, including the components of the final grade and the weights assigned to each component (for example, homework, term papers, midterms and exams). Students appreciate knowing the weighting because it helps them budget their time.

List other course requirements. For example, are students required to attend an office hour or form study groups?

Discuss course policies. Clearly state your policies regarding class attendance; turning in late work; missing homework, tests or exams; make-ups; extra credit; requesting extensions; reporting illnesses; cheating and plagiarism. Include a description of students' responsibilities in the learning process and the professor's and graduate student instructors' responsibilities. You might also list acceptable and unacceptable classroom behaviour (" Please refrain from eating during class because it is disturbing to me and other students").

You can also invite students with special needs to contact you during office hours. Let students know that if they need an accommodation for any type of physical or learning disability, they should set up a time to meet with you to discuss what modifications are necessary.

Provide a course calendar or schedule. The schedule should include the sequence of course topics, the preparations or readings, and the assignments due. For the readings, give page numbers in addition to chapter numbers-this will help students budget their time. Exam dates should be

firmly fixed, while dates for topics and activities may be listed as tentative. Provide an updated calendar as needed.

Schedule time for fast feedback from your students. Set a time midway through the term when you can solicit from students their reactions to the course so far.

List important drop dates. Include on the course calendar the last day students can withdraw from the course without penalty.

Estimate student work load. Give students a sense of how much preparation and work the course will involve. How much time should they anticipate spending on reading assignments, problem sets, lab reports or research?

Include supplementary material to help students succeed in the course. For example consider providing one or more of the following:

Helpful hints on how to study, take notes or do well in class

Glossary of technical terms used in the course

References on specific topics for more in-depth exploration

Bibliography of supplemental readings at a higher or lower level of difficulty, in case students find the required text too simple or too challenging

Copies of past exams so students can see at the beginning of the term what they will be expected to know at the end

Information on the availability of videotapes of lectures

A list of campus resources for tutoring and academic support, including computer labs

Calendar of campus lectures, plays, events, exhibits, or other activities of relevance to your course

Online Resources that may be helpful to students

Provide space for names, telephone numbers, and email addresses, of two or three classmates. Encourage students to identify people in class they can contact if they miss a session or want to study together.

Now as far as Greek learners of a public secondary school are concerned, you should design a syllabus that will fit their needs and demands. As non-native speakers the Greeks have difficulties in learning English. You should then help them overcome these difficulties. In order to achieve this you should firstly give them a sense of direction and automatically attract their attention.

The syllabus what students eagerly await on the first day; a record of the class; one of the only artefacts to remain after the students move on. Your syllabus represents both an end and a beginning a final product of your course planning and a valuable way to introduce yourself and the course to your students. Because your syllabus is one of the few formal, tangible links between you and your students and because it will be referred to throughout the semester, time and energy should be spent on constructing your syllabus. Research indicates that outstanding instruction and a detailed

syllabus are directly related. Students will appreciate and respond positively to a syllabus that bears the marks of being well planned.

The information you will need to include in your syllabus will vary depending on the course or section you are teaching as well as your responsibilities in the class. For example, GSIs teaching discussion sections will include different kinds and amounts of information than GSIs who are responsible for an entire course. Therefore, you will need to tailor the following description to your particular teaching duties. It is, however, a good idea in all courses and sections to hand out some form of syllabus on the first day. Examples of syllabi representing a variety of teaching responsibilities can be found on subsequent pages.

The syllabus is a contract between you and your students and should be treated much in the same way as a legal contract. It sets forth your responsibilities and those of your students. This does not mean that your calendar or your assignments are set in stone on the first day and that you have no flexibility. Those kinds of precautions can be written in (e. g., This calendar is subject to change.). What it does mean is that both you and your students are agreeing to a certain course of action, with specific expectations on both parts, and you are all accountable for maintaining the agreed upon route. Major changes like changes in the grading policy or additions of assignments are not fair to students and should be avoided.

In the initial planning stages, you may find it helpful to look at others' syllabi, especially if you can find past examples from the course or section you are teaching. This will give you a good idea of what has been expected in the

past in terms of the average number of pages of reading assigned per week, the kinds of texts used, average page length of papers, and general policies for the course or section. It is also useful to read the department's course description that can often be found on the Web or in the departmental office. Additionally, there are many Internet resources on syllabus planning that can be helpful in designing your syllabus. Get a feel for what others' syllabi look like and don't be afraid to use others' structure or language. Just remember that course material, like other academic writing, is intellectual property and the original source should be given credit.

Also, take some time to think about the tone you would like to establish in your syllabus. Usually the syllabus is the first document students receive from you and one which will be closely examined and continually revisited. Make sure to communicate the high expectations you have for your students. The tone you set throughout your syllabus should reflect your teaching style. For example, if you have an informal style of teaching you might wish to write your syllabus in a more familiar tone, maybe in the first person. If you would prefer to create a more formal atmosphere, a third person approach might be better.

You can work in your own way and give the students the opportunity to have a pleasant lesson. First of all you should give an overview of the course's purpose so that the students will be aware of what they will have to deal with. They will then be prepared to accept the knowledge you are about to give them in an easier way.

It would be wise if you could find out if there are any students who are weaker than the others. Making a revision before starting the new course will be useful for all of them.

You should also state how students will be evaluated and how their grades will be assigned. Provide your telephone number, fax or e-mail in case they need you. There are many students who don't feel comfortable to ask questions in front of the whole class.

Homework assignments can be really useful but you should give priority to the work that can be done in the class. Working or making revisions together can be as beneficial as you cannot imagine. Give the students notes and copies of past papers. This will help them know in what they'll be tested. On line resources for personal study can be very helpful too.

Make the introduction to each lesson in a pleasant way. The use of cd's , videotapes or dvd's on the topic can help you achieve this. Also encourage students work in groups and if possible use the computer labs.

Do not translate whole texts but just explain the vocabulary and the idioms you come across. Translation can be very boring and it's a waste of time. Students can do more creative tasks in more creative ways. Grammar and Syntax should play an important role in your teaching. Do not also forget to prepare the students for the following lesson. This is a tip that will certainly make you gain time.

Last but not least you can meet with students who want additional work or even help on the course.

A course syllabus can be a valuable organization, communication, and learning tool. The nature of the syllabus will vary by factors such as the instructor's philosophy, the discipline, characteristics of the course, level of student, institutional norms or policies, etc. Most of the time, faculty members make all the decisions about the course and syllabus, and have a final version before class begins. Another option that may be useful in some classes is to have a partial syllabus written (with key information and requirements or policies that are not negotiable), then to let students help complete the syllabus the first few days of the course. A third option, for some situations, is to have a syllabus that is complete except for one section of the course or one major assignment worth a certain percentage of the course grade. Students then develop "individual learning contracts" with the faculty member to complete those sections of the syllabus. Below is a checklist of items that might be included in a course syllabus.

Course information (title, number, section, time, place, catalog description, prerequisites...)

Instructor information (name, office location, phone, email, web site URL, office hours...)

A more elaborate description of your section of the course (formats, classroom strategies, example topics...)

Course goals

Behavioral course objectives

Any assumptions about needed background or preparation or current skill level for the course

Required materials for the course (what and where to get them; what they should get out of these readings or other materials, why they should read them...)

Optional materials for the course

Your expectations for the students (e. g., about amount of time to spend outside of class, about behaviour in class, about effort or participation...)

What students can expect from/of you (e. g., being prepared and accessible, respecting students, assistance for students...)

Course policies (check to see that yours fit dept, college or university policies) on the following: extra credit, make-up work, late work, attendance, participation, academic dishonesty, changes in the syllabus, cooperative or team work...

Course requirements (details on assignments, exams, homework, etc. etc. including objectives, requirements, due dates, grading criteria, common questions...)

Grading and Evaluation information (how will course grade be computed, what counts, how much, in what way...)

Ways to get the most from the course; Tips for studying, text-taking etc. for this course

Any extra or special assistance for the course (TA and his/her role, tutoring, supplementary instruction, optional review sessions...)

Course schedule or outline (dates, activities, assignments, readings...)

A brief statement of your teaching philosophy

Statement from the Office of Disability Concerns about accommodation

Your syllabus is an extension of your teaching self. It is more than a list of information. It is a way to get students excited about the upcoming semester and interested in the class. Personalize it by adding quotations or interesting facts related to the subject you will be studying. You can even add cartoons and other graphics. Put your syllabus on your Web page if you have one or post it outside your office. Like any learning tool, your syllabus can create new opportunities for students to consider and reconsider the subject you are teaching and their time spent in your class.

Keep in mind, too, that your syllabus demonstrates the kind of teaching you do. It is a record of your approach to learning. You may want to include your syllabus as well as other documents (like assignments, sample exams, student papers, and other handouts) in your teaching portfolio when you go on the job market. Begin collecting these documents early on in your teaching career.

To sum up we should say that creating a syllabus for a group of non-native students can be quite difficult but if organised carefully it can have great results. . . Your syllabus is more than a routine handout; it's a critical management tool.

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