

North Carolina ESOL Specialty Certificate

ESOL 04: Effective Lesson Planning for Adult English Language Learners

Effective Lesson Planning: Background Information, Part 1

- As you read, think about your answers to the questions.
- After you read, highlight the answers in the text.

Planning Lessons to Meet Students' Needs

Lesson plans help teachers provide an effective learning experience for their students. These plans ensure that students' time in class results in learning that will help them achieve their goals. Lesson planning also enhances the teaching experience by helping teachers save time, avoid frustration, and analyze and improve their lessons.

There are many ways to plan an effective lesson—the important thing is to make a plan. Writing out a script, completing a chart of lesson stages, matching lesson steps with textbook pages, or visualizing lesson activities are all examples of lesson planning strategies that successful teachers use.

Effective lessons emerge from specific learning objectives and contain a unified set of learning activities. Learning objectives for adult English language learners are based on the needs of the students as well as existing state standards and program curricula. Needs assessments help teachers determine the communication needs of their students, i.e., the situations in which students need to understand, speak, read, and write English. For beginning-level students, a simple needs assessment can be accomplished by showing learners pictures of various situations, like the doctor's office or a job site, and asking them to number the pictures in order of their need to be able to understand, speak, read, or write English. Intermediate and advanced students can be given a questionnaire asking them to identify the situations in which they need to use English.

In addition to students' needs, teachers have to consider other information about the students, such as English language proficiency level, educational background, and language of origin. This information can be gleaned from students' registration materials or from informal discussion.

- According to the reading, what is the value of lesson planning?
- How does knowing about students' language needs and background help teachers plan effective lessons?

Five Components of Effective Lessons

Once teachers know students' language needs and something about their backgrounds, teachers can begin to plan lessons. There are many teaching styles and many ways to plan lessons. However, the following five components can be found in most effective lesson plans:

- **Topic.** Communicative or real-life contexts or topics can be gleaned from student needs assessments. If in a needs assessment, beginning-level students select a visual that depicts a doctor talking to a patient, the teacher could choose *Communicating with health personnel* as the topic for a group of lessons.
- **Lesson objective.** An objective is the goal for a lesson or group of lessons. A well written objective tells what students will be able to do, rather than what students will know, by the end of the lesson. Learning objectives should relate to the topics chosen by the students during the needs assessment. If the topic of the lesson is *Communicating with health personnel*, one appropriate beginning-level lesson objective might be, *By the end of this lesson, students will be able to describe symptoms to medical personnel.*
- **Enabling skills.** These are the skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, that support the students' ability to accomplish the lesson objective. For the topic *Communicating with health personnel*, the vocabulary might be *headache, fever, cough, etc.* The grammar could be the simple present tense of the verb *to have*, and the pronunciation work might focus on the *ch* sound in *ache*.
- **Sequence of stages.** Research has shown that including a series of stages in lessons will help students achieve the lesson objective? Most lessons include warm-up/review, introduction, presentation, practice, evaluation, and application stages. A comprehension check is always included in the presentation stage of the lesson and may occur at other stages as well. (See the chart below for a description of terms.) As teachers plan lessons, they can select activities for each stage that will move the students toward accomplishing the lesson objective. For example, with the health objective *Describe medical symptoms*, a teacher might demonstrate a dialogue between a patient and a nurse for the presentation stage, have students work with the dialogue (substituting various symptoms) as part of the practice stage, and then do a role play activity (working without the dialogue in front of them) for the evaluation and application stages of the lesson.
- **Materials, equipment, and technology.** Anything needed to execute the lesson should be identified and secured well before class time to ensure that activities can be carried out as planned. This may include realia (real-life materials, such as an appointment card and a medical history form), visual aids, teacher-made handouts, textbooks, flipchart and markers, overhead projector, CD players, and computers.

While planning a lesson utilizing these five components, a teacher should also consider other things such as the length of the lesson, the sequencing of the activities, and the amount of time that should be spent on each stage or activity. Other considerations include whether the class is a single-level or multilevel class and whether it is an open entry/exit class (where students can enter and leave at any time during the semester, or whether students are required to attend class on a regular basis [managed enrollment]).

Experience Makes a Difference

The lesson plan is an aid for both new and seasoned teachers. New teachers often find that it is helpful to write down the details of each activity—perhaps even script each activity. Eventually classroom experience determines how detailed a lesson plan needs to be. Experience also helps teachers decide which types of lesson plan formats work best for them and their students.

The more lesson planning a teacher does, the more efficient the process becomes. Reviewing and evaluating lessons at the end of each class period helps teachers improve their instruction and recycle successful elements from those lessons into future lessons.

- How does experience with lesson planning affect the planning process?

A lesson plan acts as a road map for a class session. It identifies the destination (objective of the lesson) and marks out the route (activities for each stage of the lesson). Sharing this road map with the learners (e.g., by writing the objective and listing lesson activities on the board) keeps both the teacher and the learner focused not only on where they are going, but also how they are going to get there. Perhaps most important, it also helps them know when they have arrived.

Follow-up questions:

Answers vary.

- What are some of the challenges of planning a lesson?
- What things are helpful to know about students before planning lessons?
- If any one of the five components of an effective lesson plan were missing, how do you think the lesson would be affected? Why?
- What are advantages and disadvantages of recycling material and activities?

References/Resources

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