Course planning

Being able to plan well is one of the key skills that a teacher needs to have.  It involves being able to imagine what is going to happen in the classroom and to make choices based on this imagined experience.  Planning also involves the ability **to zoom out**, to see the bigger picture, and know how a 2-hour lesson fits into a 100-hour course, but it also involves the ability **to zoom in** and work out the mechanics of how a 15-minute activity will work best.

**Why do we plan our lessons?**

I think that most teachers plan lessons in order to **feel more confident** in the class itself.  If we know what we’re trying to achieve in the lesson, we are freed up to spend more time with the learners rather than worrying about our next step.

The aim of planning is also to map out learning activities in a logical way in order to help students understand, learn and practice concepts and skills which will develop their abilities in English.

When it comes to planning a whole scheme of work, it is important to ensure there is a balance of different skills work over the course.  We might also want to map out the areas of grammar and vocabulary that we intend to teach over the year and plan a **rough** timetable for when we will introduce these concepts.

**Why, What and How?**

At the start of a course, we need to sit down and think about ‘What’ we intend to cover in the course, and ‘Why’. These two concepts go hand in hand; we will be able to decide ‘what’ to teach, when we know ‘why’ we want to teach it, and this will depend on the group of learners that we have in front of us in the classroom.

Even if we are teaching from a course book (as many of us will be), decisions still need to be made about ‘what’ is really important to cover.  Once this is mapped out over a series of lessons, the learning journey starts to acquire the look of a road about it... Some schools and institutions will provide their teachers with **a syllabus** from the start of an academic year, which maps out exactly what they expect their teachers to cover. In those cases, this process of working out the ‘what’ and the ‘why’, has largely been done for the teacher (for good or for ill!).

**What about the ‘How’?**

There are 3 important ingredients in lesson planning**:  Engage** (the students); Study (the new content for the lesson); Activate (getting students to do something with the content).

I think that the question of ‘how’ we plan the activities in our lessons is closely related to the first ingredient that he mentions: student engagement.  Students need to be fully engaged in the lesson because without this engagement, interest, and concentration, it will be very hard for them to learn effectively in the class.

One important criterion to have in mind is that we want to **provide variety** for our students because, as soon as they become bored, we have lost the crucial attention that students need to learn.  However, if we were to constantly spring new ideas & activities on them, students might feel disorientated and confused. Therefore, we should also aim to **use familiar routines** and activities that students already know, in order to provide a familiar structure to the lesson.

Variety can come into the lesson in many different ways. It might mean that the teacher decides to take a test-teach-test approach to grammar, rather than a presentation-practice-production approach.  It might mean that students generate their own questions to the reading text, rather than using the true/false ones in the book.

Variety can also come into the lesson with the deceptively simple change of varying the way that the tables and chairs are set up, if your classroom allows for this. The position that individual students sit in can also be changed regularly, by mixing up pairs and groups, so that students aren’t working with the same people.

Essentially, planning is an art, not a science, but applying systems and strategies to the process can be very helpful.  This allows us to map out in our heads (and on paper) a learning path for ourselves and the students on our courses that will make the journey both **purposeful** and entertaining.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| To make something bigger/smaller |  |
| useful |  |
| Something that is done every day |  |
| To involve |  |
| A timetable |  |
| To do different things |  |
| To feel sure |  |
| Approximate, not smooth |  |

Amswer the questions:

1. What does zooming in and out your classes mean?
2. Name three reasons why we plan our classes.
3. Why “what”, “why”, and how questions are important for the teacher?
4. Do we have to plan a lesson if we use a textbook?
5. Name three activities we have to think about when planning a lesson
6. How can a teacher combine variety with routine?
7. Why planning a lesson is compared with art?