

Introduction: The Need for Lesson Planning and Reflective Teaching Notes

Effective planning of classes and the compilation of reflective teaching notes are two aspects of a process that any serious teacher is both willing to engage in and can appreciate the importance of. Planning and reflection should represent an ongoing cycle, in application to specific classes and in a general sense for any given teacher. Planning helps us to plot some sort of course to follow, and subsequent reflection following a class reveals how effective we were in our classrooms and what we might need to consider or experiment with in future lessons. Of course, showing adaptability and engaging in spontaneous, effective decision making during the course of a class are traits any good teacher should both develop and utilize. Reflective teaching notes will help us to identify and understand more fully such decision-making, and create positive flow-on effects for our ability to create versatile lesson plans in future. During the course of a busy day teaching a number and variety of classes, some of our greatest (or potentially greatest) in-class revelations run the risk of quickly slipping from our immediate memory, perhaps resurfacing some other time, but perhaps not. From a teamwork and skill/experience-sharing perspective, compilation of good pre- and post-lesson notes can be a valuable tool for discussion amongst colleagues and even an inspiration for those colleagues who may be new to the EFL/ESL teaching profession and are desperately looking for some kind of initial guidelines.

Those EFL/ESL teachers employed in the private language education industry ought also to appreciate the importance of professional planning and note taking. In this case, education is a “product”, and the services we provide are very open to scrutiny and criticism - whether it comes from students, parents of students, or school management. It is important to document what we are doing, how we are doing it, and why.

An Approach to Lesson Planning and Reflective Teaching

The downloadable lesson planning and reflective teaching notes supplement from English Raven is a simple, compact, and thorough approach designed to allow teachers flexibility without having to produce and fill out endless reams of notes. It is meant to guide and cater to teachers' needs, not restrict them or dictate to them what “good” lesson planning should be about. This supplement is generally geared to teachers of young learners. The first side of the supplement includes general details concerning teacher, session, date, etc. Following this are three lesson plan templates, with gaps to include details about textbook page numbers, key communicative language to be applied, and some suggestions for “elements” that might be put together to create a general lesson plan. How this template works (or how it can be applied) is described in the following pages of this document. The flip-side of the supplement contains three sections for reflective teaching notes and teacher self-evaluations, and these could be directly applied or linked to the three general lesson plan sections featured on the 1st page of the supplement. Guidelines for applying the reflective teaching notes section are described later. Using this supplement, a typical teacher conducting up to six classes a day would be able to include all of their basic lesson planning and reflective notes on two double sided pieces of paper. Filing this away and constantly referring back to previous lesson plans and reflections will help teachers keep in touch with the goals and challenges they have set themselves, as well as create a sort of ongoing action research diary.

The Lesson Planning Sheet

At the top right hand corner of the supplement, the following boxes can be seen:

Teacher:	Date:	D.O.S:
Session:	Week/Day:	

This is fairly self-explanatory. The teacher provides his/her name, details about the month or session (if applicable), the date, any details about teaching week and/or teaching day (if applicable). Generally these sorts of details are useful for filing and reference purposes. The D.O.S box (Director of Studies) is for the teacher's immediate academic supervisor. It is a good idea to copy your lesson plan sheets and give them to your academic supervisor/director. Depending on your relationship with such person, the director may be able to give you valuable feedback, or, in the case of any dispute or problem, you have signed evidence that you were providing professional documentation of your work. A D.O.S who is signing your lesson plans but hardly reading them or not giving you feedback is hardly in any position to criticize either your methods or work ethic later on.

Beneath this section are the three lesson planning grids, each of which looks like this:

Lesson:	Class Time:	Room:	SB:	WB:	Ph/V:	Story:
Key Communication/Language:						
<p><u>Teaching methodology</u></p> <p>Regular Textbooks:</p> <p>[E] = Engage</p> <p>[S] = Study</p> <p>[A] = Activate</p> <p>Story/Reading:</p> <p>[Sch] = Schemata</p> <p>[PhB] = Phonics</p> <p>[Act] = Activity</p>						
Group work/Mixed-Ability Application:	Session Test Preparation:	Special Note:				

The following page contains a reference guide explaining what each part of the lesson planning form refers to and how it can be utilized.

The English Raven Quick-Guide to Lesson Planning and Keeping Reflective Teaching Notes

This is for the teacher to indicate what lesson of the day the plan refers to, i.e., Lesson 1, Lesson 2, etc.

These boxes are for the class time and classroom in which the lesson takes place. Useful for follow-up and/or administrative purposes.

'SB' refers to 'Student Book' page(s), 'WB' to 'Work Book' pages, 'Ph/V' to any Phonics or Vocabulary elements in the curriculum, and 'Story' to any dialog or accompanying reader/story page(s).

In a way, this refers to the general "target" of the lesson or what is being taught. It may be a language function, item(s) of grammar, some aspect of pronunciation, etc. Consider it the 'overall aim.'

Lesson:	Class Time:	Room:	SB:	WB:	Ph/V:	Story:
<p>Key Communication / Language:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Teaching methodology</p> <p>Regular Textbooks: [E] = Engage [S] = Study [A] = Activate</p> <p>Story/Reading: [Sch] = Schemata [PhB] = Phonics [Act] = Activity</p>						
Group work / Mixed-Ability Application:			Session Test Preparation:		Special Note:	

This is a key/guide to the ESA model. In documenting sequences of methods and activities, teachers may like to decide whether they are 'engaging' the students, helping them to 'study', or somehow 'activating' their new language skills. The sequence or presence of such elements may depend on whether the teacher is engaging in extensive practice activities, free talking, task-based learning, etc. For more details, see the 'ESA Guide' on the following page.

For story/reading classes, these abbreviations can be a quick guide to how the teacher intends to activate learner schemata, or utilize bottom-up/phonics-based building activities. See below.

This might list activities or language relevant to the end of session test.

Reminders or notes to come out of reflective teaching.

It is useful to consider how the lesson might also cater to group work, and whether the class has some mixed-ability issues that need to be addressed.

This is the general description and sequence of methodology and/or activities to be used in the lesson. It could incorporate some abbreviated terms such as those listed to the right (ESA, etc) to provide a quick-glance 'skeleton' of how the lesson is to progress.

Lesson Planning Using the ESA Model [Engage/Study/Activate]

ESA is a model first proposed by Harmer (1998) as an alternative to the rather linear and restricted approach known as PPP (or the 3Ps: Presentation, Practice, Production). ESA stands for Engage, Study, Activate - though the model is supposed to be flexible in that two or three of the aspects can occur and in a variety of sequences. This allows for teachers to plan "straight through" lessons much like the PPP model (in this case being ESA), but it also allows for task-based and deep-end approaches that might involve EAS (Engage-Activate-Study). Basically, the different lesson aspects can be applied to what is needed. For example, students may have already been introduced to some language but may need some extended practice and two doses of small-scale activation. The teacher could then sequence the lesson SASA (Study-Activate-Study-Activate). According to other class needs, students may be dealing with a particularly difficult piece of grammar, and the lesson may end up running ESSS (Engage-Study-Study-Study). Another class may be clued onto the grammar and functions but cannot use it effectively in natural communication, prompting the teacher to plan a lesson EAA (re-Engage-Activate-Activate). In this kind of flexible model, E stands for 'Engage' and refers to introducing students to the language and getting them 'involved' with it. S stands for 'Study' and can refer to any number of different kinds of focused practice activities, as well as determining how the language is constructed. A stands for 'Activate' and refers to any kind of activity whereby the students are being encouraged to use all the language they have access to. Teachers can use this kind of model to apply to all sorts of teaching, whether it be focused on structural awareness, communicative practice or 'discovering' new language through tasks. It can also be used to plan lessons that are 15 minutes or 1.5 hours in duration.

Lesson Planning for Story/Reading Classes [Top-down Schemata Activation and Bottom-up Phonics Approaches]

Planning interesting and effective lessons for classes involving stories or the reading of texts can often be problematic for teachers. While this is a very brief outline of the sorts of activities teachers might consider, it is useful for teachers to remember that useful reading classes should always involve some degree of Schema/Schemata activation in combination with bottom up approaches that focus on lexis and word and sentence building. Neglecting one or the other can make story classes rather one-dimensional and even ignore some of the opportunities students have to learn new language. Schemata refer to the experience and knowledge students bring to a new text, whether it be cultural knowledge or general life experiences. According to what students already know or have already experienced, they will either be able to relate to the general idea they are reading about or it will mean very little to them at all (in terms of relevance and/or emotional connection). When reading stories in the L2, students are often being exposed to new aspects of culture and different ways of thinking. It is worth spending some time to "activate" whatever life experience or general knowledge the students have that might help them become closer to and more involved with the text they are reading. Knowing the "gist" of something can often help students guess the meanings of new words or expressions. At the other extreme (working from the "bottom up"), teachers need to take advantage of the opportunity to help students build their vocabulary and structural skills. This has also been referred to as the "Phonics" approach. Various schools of thought have tended to champion one or the other of these considerations (i.e., "top down" or "bottom up"), but most advocates of contemporary theory now support the existence of both. In some ways, Schemata activation could be considered similar to "Engage" mentioned above, whereas "Phonics/Building" could be considered similar to the "Study" element of the ESA model.

