

In the Classroom 110

What Should a Good Lesson Plan Include?

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things. Perhaps you are, but you're still hanging out with me and I really do appreciate it. Have you ever walked out of a class thinking to yourself, "Well, that didn't go as I hoped?" Did you plan your lesson or did you just wing it? I'm confident that if you write out your lesson plan, you're going to have a much more cohesive and effective class. Basically, you're going to deliberately identify what you should do to get the results you want. This is your script. Once you've got your class, you can then review what you did, make adjustments for the next time, each iteration becomes better.

I think lesson plans are essential to what you do. Why use a lesson plan? A lesson plan is a roadmap of all the key points you want to visit in your travels. It will help you ensure that you get to each one in the right order. It's an effective way to organize your content and ensure that you have time to cover all the essentials. It's just basically to keep you on track. A lesson plan is a continuation of this idea of backward design. If you remember backward design, you outline your objectives and course goals. You then create your assessments, your activities, and content to help students meet those objectives.

In your lesson plan, you will use it to help you present these interconnected elements in a logical flow. In addition, a lesson plan helps you identify all the items that you need to have on hand to create a smooth-flowing class. Basically, they're like scripts that you would use for a play, that identify the scenery, identify the lighting, identify who says what when, or if you're creating a video. A video typically develops storyboards and scripts so you're showing the right things in the right order. This goes for a lot of different performing arts. Basically, it means you care about the results. If you're just winging it, you may care but you may forget things so did you really care as much as you could have?

A lesson plan will help you identify those things, keep you on track and so you present a polished presentation. They don't have to be extremely detailed, but they're like memory joggers to help keep you on track. When creating a lesson plan, it's entirely up to you how you wish to document your lesson plan but I do recommend documenting. Working from memory, memory as we have come to learn in our research is not really a good tool. You really need to get it out on paper in order to capture it and make sure that you're not missing anything.

When I do a lesson plan, I use a spreadsheet to create my lesson plan. I use separate columns to identify key elements on my lesson plan and I'm going to tell you more about this in a second. Other common ways that individuals create lesson

plans are using a Word document or a Google document. Some even use bullet journals. I'm a fan of bullet journaling and I may even consider moving to bullet journaling for future lesson plans, but right now I use a spreadsheet. If you're using a Word or Google Doc, basically, you are creating an outline of your lesson plan, identifying what the key points are.

It's good to use headings to identify those key sections so you know that you have everything identified and what you're going to do in the order that you're going to do it. Nancy Chick uses bullet journals to document her lesson plans so she has all her lessons in one notebook. She can find them with a table of contents, which is common to bullet journals. She also uses a legend to identify any readings or notes or assignments, activities, all that stuff. She has a special legend that she uses to identify those things. In her bullet journal, she also includes seating charts so she knows where everybody's sitting and can call on them with their right name.

She also highlights specific things from her syllabus based on what month that she's in or any goals or tasks. Then for her actual lesson plan, she has it on two facing pages. When she opens up her book on the left side, she has all her preparations and order of activities that she's going to go through. On the right side is a place where she captures notes, any question students are asking, any follow-up tasks that she needs to do or they need to do, and any reflections. Finally, she does a wrap-up exercise and a reflection at the end of the month and pulls it all together. For me, I happen to be in the spreadsheet camp for creating lesson plans. On the top of my lesson plan, I have a date.

Other times I've done this creating a separate tab with my lesson in it but somewhere I identify when I'm doing this and then I have seven columns that I use to identify essential information. These columns include the time, how long is it going to take for that particular activity or that part of the lesson plan? I give the session a title. I may be focusing on one particular activity so I'll give that activity a title so I can later find it or maybe use it in a different lesson, in a different way. The next column is my learning objective. What is it that I want students to walk away with?

What do I want them to specifically be able to know or do? I have a column for that. The next two is motivational purpose and motivational strategy. Both of these come from Raymond Wlodkowski's book, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, a comprehensive guide for teaching all adults. Wlodkowski has arranged motivational purposes into the following groups. When I'm identifying a purpose, I'm going to look at, does it establish inclusion, develop attitude, enhance meaning or engender competence? Those are the four major groups.

Then the specific strategy in Wlodkowski's book, there are 60 different strategies for enhancing motivation arranged by their purposes. What it does is it forces me to be intentional by including these particular strategies. Some of them are quite easy so at the beginning of the term, I'm going to introduce myself and I want students to also introduce themselves and why they're taking that particular class or that workshop that I'm giving. That's developing inclusion, but it's also letting them know why I am a good person to teach this particular class. Those happen to be a couple of the strategies.

My next column focuses on the learning activity or instructor behavior. These are specific questions I'm going to ask, instructions for student activities, or instructional content I'm going to walkthrough. Then finally, the last column is materials. What resources do I have to have on hand? These resources could be handouts, websites, applications, anything. That way, when I come into a lesson, I know to bring those things up and have them available. That's the column headers. After that, each row is going to be a step in my lesson, and I'm going to just fill out the appropriate columns.

Not all columns have to be filled out for each row but it helps me walk through each step of my lesson and make sure that I'm addressing everything and it has a purpose. When you are creating a lesson plan, you may want to consider overall learning and teaching strategies and be able to weave those into your instruction. There may be certain learning and teaching strategies that you subscribe to. By having a written lesson plan, you can ensure that you're baking these into your lesson. Here are some of the things that I consider when I build out my lesson. When I was working on my doctorate program, I had taken a class on teaching adult learners.

The center of this class was this book called *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn, a Comprehensive Guide for Teaching all Adults*, and I'll put the link in the show notes. Wlodkowski believes that one can improve courses by attending to motivations that are important to adults. During this class, we use this book to develop lesson plans, and we had to weave these in. That's where I came to use it and how I found it to be important to my instruction. When adults attend a learning session, they rapidly take on a positive or negative attitude towards learning. It's up to us to set the tone for the lesson by making the lesson relevant to the learner.

Wlodkowski adds that the learner's attitude is driven by one or more of these points, their attitude for the instructor, the subject, the ability to learn, and the learning goal. The ability to learn, that could be a fixed or a growth mindset, that they may come in with preconceived notions on how well they're going to do on a particular subject based on what their mindset is regarding that particular lesson. For learners to be successful, we want them to take a positive attitude towards these four major points. If they take a negative stance to any one of those points, their learning will start to diminish.

This book, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, provides 60 motivational strategies for helping adult learners get the most from a lesson. I plan to talk about that in a couple of weeks, I'll walk through the different sections of that. Maybe I'll break it up, I don't know. I try to weave these strategies into my lessons for intentional effect, and make sure that I am thinking about motivation as I'm building out my lesson plan. Another strategy could be around Universal Design for Learning. If you're looking to provide more choice and supports for your class, then take a look at Universal Design for Learning. I had talked about UDL in episodes, ITC 8, 9, and 10 so go check those episodes out.

Basically, UDL is a framework of nine options arranged into three networks. Those three networks are providing multiple means of engagement, also known as the

effective network. It really provides the why of learning. Then you have multiple means of representation, also known as a recognition network, which provides the what of learning. Finally, multiple means of action and expression, or strategic network, which provides the how of learning. Each one of these networks provides three options that you can weave into your lesson. For example, when providing options for language and symbols, which is under the representation network, you can intentionally clarify vocabulary and symbols.

When we talked about vocabulary in a previous episode, if students struggle with the vocabulary then they are going to struggle with your lessons. By going over the vocabulary first before you dive into your lesson, will help develop that prior knowledge that you're going to later tap into. Being intentional in your lesson plan, you can weave those in. Another UDL strategy is enhancing your instructions with multimedia representations. Perhaps selecting a video rather than just lecture on it could be one of those strategies, but just being intentional about it allows you to dial into that.

Another strategy is community of inquiry, and I'm going to talk about this strategy next week. As I have noted often, learning happens through dialogue. This dialogue can be between the students and the course material, so yes, you can have a dialogue with a textbook. This is known as cognitive presence. It can be between the students and themselves, through course discussions or group projects. This is the social presence. It can be between the students and the instructor, and this is the teaching presence. Basically, it helps to humanize your instructions, so that is a strategy.

In episode ITC79, I talked about Gagne's nine events of instruction. According to Gagne, learning occurs in a series of nine learning events, each of which is a condition for learning which must be accomplished before moving to the next in order. Similarly, these instructional events should mirror the learning events. Those nine events are gain attention, inform learners of objectives, stimulate recall of prior learning, present the content, provide learning guidance, elicit performance or have them practice, provide feedback, assess the performance, and enhance retention and transfer to the job.

That sounds like a pretty much typical lesson plan that you're coming in and trying to get their attention, and then what do they already know about this. Then you're going to provide them more information, you're going to have them practice, you're going to assess them. All those pieces are in there. Weaving them into your lesson plan, you can be intentional. Gagne's nine events of instruction can be applied at the course level, a module level, or in individual class session. You can use a lesson plan to outline each of these learning events and how you will tend to them.

Naturally, one must also consider accessibility when developing instruction in course content. it may not be a separate item on your lesson plan, but it's something that you should consider when you're building objects for your lesson. This could be any multimedia objects, so just thinking about accessibility. Is there a closed caption? Is there a transcript for video preps, or your handouts? If you're providing a digital artifact, do they have headings? Are lists properly identified? Same goes with your

presentations. Basically, anything that's part of your course, make sure that you're attending to accessibility.

Active learning. This is another strategy that you should maybe consider as part of your lessons. When it comes to activities, active learning strategies are excellent tools for getting students involved in their learning. Fortunately, many of these strategies are easy to implement. They don't take much time in your lesson, and you can weave them right into your lesson plan. Before you even start sitting down with your lesson plan, you should have mapped this all out with backward design and just have a general idea what you plan to do. Now with the lesson plan, you're just going to another level. You're just going to be more specific in your outline where you're actually identifying the questions, you're actually identifying how you're going to implement an activity, at what time you're going to do that.

You're just getting those things on a document that you can work with and just run down this document. What are you going to include in your lesson plan? Keeping all these teaching and learning strategies in mind, and you may have different ones that you are attending to, and that's great, just thinking about them as you're building up your lesson plan. Here's some things to consider when you're building up your plan, and most importantly it has to work for you. That's why there's no really definitive way of doing it but just try it, experiment with it. Does this does work for you? If not, make tweaks. Find the one that's going to work for you.

One of the things that you should consider to put in your lesson plan are the objectives. What do you want students to be able to know or do at the end of the day's lesson? You're going to want to sequence these objectives in terms of importance, identifying which ones you can discard if time runs out. Maybe there are certain objectives that may have been great if I had time, but if not you scratch them off. Also, you are identifying not only in terms of importance but also scaffolding, that are certain objectives build on the prior objectives. As you're rolling these things out, you want to be able to build on prior knowledge.

Also, don't have too many objectives, right? Two to three objectives during a class period should suffice or you're going to run out of time. Next, think about materials that you will need for your class. Having the materials list will help you identify what materials you need to bring to the class, whether it's handouts or props. This list can also identify any websites or applications that you need to open at the beginning of the class. I recommend opening up websites in the order that you're going to use them on your browser so you can just move from left to right with each tab and open them in a fluid manner.

You may also want to get digital documents in the hands of your students before the class begins. You can front-load these things in a learning management system, for example, and then have them released, instructing students to bring them to class. Classroom arrangement is also something else that you need to consider. If you have the luxury, you may be able to reconfigure your classroom to get the desired environment that you want. If so, document this in your lesson plan. Unfortunately with COVID, classrooms are typically locked down and seats are assigned. Also, a

lot of colleges tend to frown upon moving classrooms around, but that's something we can talk about on another day.

Now it gets into the sequencing of your instruction. How will you move through your content through the class? Your lesson plan should prompt you for the next item as you're walking down. It should be linear in nature. One of the sequences that you might want to weave in there is review. In episode ITC89 I talked about strategies for activating prior knowledge. In your lesson plan, you may want to consider opening your class with a review of material you introduced in a previous class, or what they were required to review prior to coming to your class.

Next, your content. How will you introduce new content? Are you going to have a presentation or a lecture? Will you use the Socratic discussion method? What questions will you ask? What stories or examples are you going to use? Have these all written down so they are a memory jogger that you can go to and know what you are going to talk about next. Do your students need to have a handout as part of the discussion? For this part, I recommend keeping your instruction sessions short, followed by a hands-on activity. You can then have another session followed by another activity, and these activities can be completed individually or as a group. It's entirely up to you.

Activities. How will your students practice what they know or can do? Will the activities be written? Will they be oral? Will they have to build something entirely different? Will they be individual activities or will they be group work? What is the deliverable that they are going to present at the end of this activity period? Ideally, your activity should reflect what you're going to do, or have them do during the assessment. When you're thinking about activities, always have out alternative versions of varying lengths, this will provide you with options depending on the time that you have available to you.

Then we also have assessments. Assessments are typically separate activities designed to measure student progress in a course. You may want to dedicate an entire class to an assessment activity, or it can be only a portion of the class. In some cases, you're going to have them work on the assessment maybe as a homework activity. How are you going to measure the objective to see that they know it? Another section you may want to weave in there is next steps. Before the class ends, you should consider outlining what you want them to do next. It's always prudent to include reminders in your class. Just let them know, "Hey, for next class I want you to do X,Y and Z."

Finally, weave in a summary. At the end of the lesson, you should do a quick review to highlight the main points or key take-aways. This is also a great opportunity to preview what's going to happen in the next class, and in order to do this, you're going to have to plan ahead. Sorry, time needed. When creating your plan, estimate how long that you're going to use for each part of your lesson and really try to stick to it. Naturally, if students are confused, it's more important that the students understand the content or the concept before moving on. So, buffer your time. That's where those alternate activities can come into play, you want to make sure that you address student understanding first. If you have time leftover, you can also have

students ask questions or conduct a review session. One strategy that I use in the classroom. If I'm doing a group activity or a student activity, I bring up a timer on a web browser and I put in the time. If the activities five minutes, 10 minutes, I set the timer and you'll see it up on the screen as a countdown so students know how much time that they have throughout the activity. Sometimes time goes by quick. Sometimes it doesn't. It's just nice to have that information available. That's the general idea or general things that you want to put together in your lesson plan. Once you figure out how you want to do your lesson plans, I recommend that you create a template so that you can quickly develop future lessons.

Predefined with headings and what essential elements that you want in your lesson plan. I've done it with my spreadsheets. I know other people have done it with word documents, that if you do a search for lesson plan templates, I'm confident that you will find all kinds of different ones that you can use. Having a template helps you speed up the process. Ideally if, say you're using Microsoft Word, that you can save it as a template and call it up as a new document. It pre-populates your document. After your class is done, one of the things that you're going to want to do is do a quick self-assessment to see how you did.

What worked well, what needs improvement? What could you do better? Did you have enough time? Were the instructions clear? Take that information and weave it back into your lesson plan while the information is fresh in your head,, and make any adjustments. The next time you teach this class, you'll have a better version of it. Well, that is a down and dirty podcast on lesson planning. Basically, it's a roadmap to help you cover all the essential points. A good lesson plan allows you to intentionally weave in sound learning and teaching principles. I recommend that you check it out. Before I let you go, here's a quick plug for my book.