

Web-Chat Date: January 10, 2012

Topic: Learning – Focused Instruction: “Planning for Activities” or “Planning for Learning Outcomes”

Abstract:

An experienced American ESL/EFL author and teacher-educator, Prof. Anne Reeves, mentions in her recent ASCD publication “Where Great Teaching Begins: Planning for Student Thinking and Learning,” that “the most challenging feature of instructional design is creating objectives that focus on appropriate student learning instead of on classroom activities”. In the new academic year, as teachers plan for semester EFL curriculum, what in particular comes to mind when educators and curriculum planners think about lesson planning? Do teachers spend more time thinking about what they are going to say and do, ask students to do, and the assessments they will create and administer? Or do they think more about the differentiated linguistic needs of their students? Often, teachers know what it is like to be disappointed when (what one believes to be) the carefully designed curriculum planning does not always lead to the deep understanding and mastery they intend for their students.

In this web-chat, we would like to discuss and share some instructional approach ideas that could perhaps help EFL educators mentally shift their pedagogical paradigm from “Planning for Activities” to “Planning for Learning Outcomes” that could ultimately be better suited for our target EFL learners.

Transcript:

Damon Anderson: Happy New Year everyone! Welcome to our first English Roundtable Web Chat of 2012. We look forward to a full year of great discussions on topics of importance to you and your professional growth. As we plan for our classes in this new year, we hope today's discussion will be useful. To see the small print in the ppt above, just click in the upper right hand corner of the ppt box and select full screen view. This should allow you to view all the print easily. To exit the full screen view, just click on the full screen view button again. Please feel free to post any pre-questions or comments. We look forward to chatting with you.

Brigitte Miller: First of all thanks for proposing this topic which is one I think all of us, even the best-intentioned teachers, struggle with. There are many interesting points which relate to this. HOW do we address the gap between what teachers teach and students learn? How can teachers think in realistically about student learning vs. teacher teaching with the various constraints or gaps in knowledge they have. I think some of the constraints are the following: too many students to really know the needs of each let alone address them, available materials don't reflect style, needs and or interests of learners, curriculum exists before the learners do, and teachers need to plan something amidst all this ambiguity.

Bill Templer 2: Hi from Eastern Europe

Damon Anderson: Hi everyone. Sorry for the late start today. I hope you all had a good start to 2012. Happy New Year.

ThuyHanoi: Hello everyone, I'm training some primary teachers now how to adapt activities in the course books to make them more child-friendly. Pity i cannot chat now, just read your notes, ok?

Damon Anderson: Thuy Hanoi. That is OK. Glad you can participate some at least.

Phil Owen: Hi.

KhanhPham_Thailand: happy new year Damon

Brigitte Miller: It is a pity!

Thu Zar 2: Happy New Year!

Phanisara Logsdon: So many times I don't think teachers even realize who their students are.

Phanisara Logsdon: In Thailand, we used to be called by NUMBER not names.

Phil Owen: OK -- I don't plan for learning outcomes because I can't really define them. I know what classroom activities are -- so I can plan for them.

Damon Anderson: Phil, I think if you focus more on what you would like the students to do with the language, rather than on the language itself, that would be a start. Of course there will be classes and times where you do focus on the language, but then move quickly into how to apply that knowledge in a meaningful task.

Phil Owen: Help? Suggestions?

Damon Anderson: Brigitte, to go back to one of your questions: I don't think we need to address all the needs of each student, but to find out some general needs that they all share and focus on those. We can do some projects and tasks to help address some of the more personal needs throughout the course.

Brigitte Miller: Yes, I agree.

Brigitte Miller: When we start looking at trying to make our lessons learner-centered it can sometimes be overwhelming all the things that need to be taken into consideration.

Phanisara Logsdon: What Khun Brigitte and LMI team are doing with learning assessment is a great idea. To ask in the beginning what students would like to see themselves learn and develop linguistically.

Brigitte Miller: However, starting bit by bit. It can really improve the quality of learning if we think about learner needs, styles, issues.

Phanisara Logsdon: The sense that teachers feels "overwhelming" will show across to the

students. Teachers need to focus more on students in the classroom; not only their own performances. When teachers can relax, students can too.

Brigitte Miller: Yes, but I think one of the reasons I can relate to this question is that I find myself trying to predict learner needs ahead of time in order to start with something

Phanisara Logsdon: Some of the best teachers I have in the past was actually ones who in the beginning--really talk less and observe and listen more.

Phanisara Logsdon: Probably me, clicking the wrong button. Sorry Khun Brigitte.

Brigitte Miller: Hey I don't know why my comments keep getting repeated. Sorry ;)

Phil Owen: Damon, of course -- use in a meaningful task. YES!

Miranda: Sometimes it be frustrating when students only see themselves learning if teachers focus on the language; they may not be able to immediately see the benefits of the meaningful tasks.

KhanhPham_Thailand: One of my pass mistake was being over confidence with my ability to predict what the student thinks, and what the student needs. Sometimes it will be very hard but if we practice we can get better

Thu Zar 2: I also think that teachers need to talk less and listen to the students more in order to know their needs, their learning styles, and issues!

Brigitte Miller: Anyway, I agree with Phil that we often do think about what we'll do

Brigitte Miller: But also, Khun Nina, you have a point that a learner-centered teacher is LISTENING. One cannot learn anything without listening, especially anything about students

Damon Anderson: What do you think about the ppt second slide? Which column do you tend to fit into most of the time you are planning a lesson? Take the poll.

Phanisara Logsdon: Teachers need to avoid being too restricted with time and materials they have to cover. If they look ahead and see what level and exactly where the students are, the teaching unit could even be combined, skipped, or expanded as a project based learning with integrated activities.

Phil Owen: Can I go "Half-and'half" on the poll?

Damon Anderson: Unfortunately no. Which one do you find yourself most doing?

Brigitte Miller: Honestly I find myself in both of those columns.

Liang, Shu-min: me, too

Bill Templer: I am working with teachers who have to cover a syllabus set by the Ministry. It has a stranglehold on how learning outcomes are defined. There is too much material to cover. So students really are not mastering the basics. This is a major contradiction in many places, including Thailand.

Teachers are not free to spend far more time with students on the basics. This torpedoed learning, and learning outcomes. How can that problem be addressed?

Thu Zar 2: I need to think of unit planning tool

Phanisara Logsdon: IDEALLY teachers should be in column 2

Miranda: Mostly 1 ...

Brigitte Miller: When planning a course I'm thinking of column 2, but sometimes in the lesson planning I'm thinking a lot about column 1

Liang, Shu-min: I'm from Taiwan

Bill Templer: I want teachers to use a completely different and easier textbook. They can't.

Michael: I tend to be in column 2, yet students often expect column 1.

Bill Templer: So they cannot redefine "long-term learning outcomes" in Reeves' sense.

Miranda: I am from Macau :)

Brigitte Miller: This is maybe because we have the luxury of planning many of my own courses. I really think that a lot of this is determined when setting curricular goals

Brigitte Miller: And that teachers should be more involved in curriculum development

Brigitte Miller: I think there is a big disconnect between what teachers are mandated to teach and what students need/want to learn.

Bill Templer: Most teachers cannot plan their own courses in high schools in a number of countries. This is the case where I am. The results are disastrous, especially with working-class rural students.

Brigitte Miller: in many cases, I should add

Damon Anderson: I think that there is a difference in a course that we design ourselves and one that is dictated by an assigned text. Would you agree?

Brigitte Miller: Absolutely, when we design our own courses we often do know the needs of our students, especially the teachers in Bill's case, I'm assuming. They probably know the needs of Ss much better than text designers.

Tony: Hello to everyone from China...happy New Year! Comment: I don't think the columns are mutually exclusive. For example, you may start with a focus on 'what will we be doing today' but your teaching intention is 'what will my students be learning'.

Damon Anderson: Half of the current participants in the room have taken the poll. As you can see, most

are in column 1. How can we move more people to column 2?

Liang, Shu-min: in EFL area, teachers tend to be in column 1, though we know it's quite important to be in column 2

Miranda: agree with Brigitte

Phanisara Logsdon: I agree with Khun Bill. Some teachers don't really have the competency themselves. They just want to kill the class time.

Brigitte Miller: Khun Nina, I agree with you. I think that is due, though, to fear of being inadequate to the task.

Liang, Shu-min: plus students language skills are not that good to be in column 2

Phil Owen: The problem I have with the two columns in the PPT is it talks about "kinds of thinking" and "intellectual skills." I find that hard to work with.

Bill Templer: This is what is going on in many of our high schools in Bulgaria, and most certainly in the Thai teaching environments I know. Lots of kids are not learning the basics, and are being passed even though they have 30% on assessment.

Phil Owen: I can work with "fluency" or "affective filters" or "asking questions" etc.

Damon Anderson: Tony, how do you see focus and intention linked? Is there a natural link?

Tony: Also, you might be thinking within "long-term outcomes", but planning those outcomes within your specific time with the students.

Phil Owen: affective

Phanisara Logsdon: "Good Teachers" do and should know their students better than the text designers. And adapt the materials to fit their students' needs.

Brigitte Miller: Professionalizing teachers makes them much more proud of what they do and HOW they do it. I think that to make teachers go the extra mile to do more than entertain or babysit students they need to feel that what they do matters

KhanhPham_Thailand: i check my answer on the poll but it did not go away yet

Bill Templer: But our topic today is how to aim teaching toward long-term outcomes. I think in language teaching this means getting learners to teach themselves the language especially through extensive free voluntary reading. Outside any classroom. How to get that ball rolling is a long-term outcome of key importance.

Brigitte Miller: Coming back to the powerpoint... I think we do these things at different stages in the planning process.

Brigitte Miller: First column 1, then later column 2 as we're going into the classroom

KhanhPham_Thailand: the poll do not bother me. was wondering if it worked or not.

Tony: Damon, I think intention is determined before the activity; while focus is happening during the activity. In other words, your intention will define your specific focus.

Phanisara Logsdon: Agree with Khun Brigitte. What teachers do in class matter a great deal. Teachers can bring in resources to help if they don't feel that their own linguistic ability is efficient. Help students to help themselves in learning.

Phil Owen: I would think first column 2, then column 1

Brigitte Miller: Yeah, back to the How...

Brigitte Miller: I think that motivating learners to take things into their own hands is one of the best ways to help them with their goals.

Phanisara Logsdon: AGREE with Phil. First IMAGINE, ASSESS, the actual needs of the students then plan the activities.

Brigitte Miller: Phil, oops I reversed it. Yes, that's what I meant

Bill Templer: In my experience most important is what learners do outside classroom. as Brigitte says, taking things into their own hands. Massive comprehensible input that students themselves have to access

Tony: Hi Brigitte...how do you motivate your students to do that?

Phil Owen: Hey, I got one right!

Phanisara Logsdon: Agree also with back to the how.....is to guide students to the resources. Yes teachers can be the model at the time; but we won't have the privilege of following them home and to the rest of their lives. So facilitate the learning; so they can continue learning and improve their linguistic competent.

Bill Templer: One big motivator is extensive reading of graphic stories and novels. I'm sure of that.

Brigitte Miller: I have seen amazing instances of students making great strides in a language completely through their own efforts. I think finding a way to motivate students to practice and work on the language is key.

Thu Zar 2: Most students like to have hands on experience by getting involved in activities

Bill Templer: Another is getting students to do simple drama. I found this motivated students more generally in Thailand, kids who believed they could never learn even simple English.

Bui: Hello everyone. I'm Bui. I agree with Phil. Column 2 decide column 1. Column 2 covers all the

objectives of one lesson which build up the long-term outcomes.

Brigitte Miller: Well, it mostly depends on the student. But I think a lot of it is finding out about what the learner is interested in and then helping them find ways to do that in English.

Damon Anderson: Brigitte, when teachers have 50 or more students in a class, they find it difficult to figure out what they are all interested in. Are you suggesting that teachers do things like surveys, hold discussions on what interests them, and such activities?

Brigitte Miller: But again, it comes back to listening and knowing one's students

Bui: Yes, Bill, drama is a good way to motivate ss be active

Bill Templer: I tried hard to get students to be 'active' outside the class among themselves. But that never worked in my classes in Thailand. Anyhow, reading by oneself or in a small group is a great 'activity'.

Brigitte Miller: which one can do in interactive classrooms which allow for members to get to know each other.

Phanisara Logsdon: Active learning activities, with hand on epistemology will definitely stick with the students. The more they choose, the more they involve, the more they will take the ownership in learning.

Phil Owen: Are we still hug upon LANGUAGE learning?

Brigitte Miller: Hi Bui!

Bui: another way I used to do is help ss do project

Phil Owen: as opposed to "intellectual skills" or am I reading too much into that?

Brigitte Miller: Drama is very motivating. I agree. For me, it's been very good for teenagers and university level.

Bill Templer: Unfortunately many learners are not too 'interested' They want to pass the course. This is what Reeves is addressing in her book.

KhanhPham_Thailand: on the how, one way to figure out what motivates an individual is to ask what that individual spent their times on. We only have 24hours a day, so we surely will spend it on things of high priority to us.

Bill Templer: It is student resistance to routinized activities in the classroom, routinized assessment.

Damon Anderson: Actually, many students prefer routine because then they know what to expect and what and how to prepare. They feel anxious with too much non-routine work. Would you agree?

Bill Templer: What is OWNERSHIP in learning? That is a big question in language teaching, which

involves mastering skills.

Brigitte Miller: Yes, in a class of 50 you can still have interactive activities which focus on ss interests with some sort of product one can look at then end.

Brigitte Miller: I really believe in rubrics for that.

Phanisara Logsdon: Good point KhanhPham

Brigitte Miller: I mean Bill's comment.

Tony: I want to post a site that I think gives a great rubric for learning outcomes. It is clear and specific, and lends itself to classroom/student-teacher (mutual) analysis and discussion.
<http://ip.wsu.edu/education_abroad/outcomes-program-assessment/education-abroad-learning-outcomes.html>

Brigitte Miller: When one creates a rubric as an assessment instrument with the students, they buy in more to the task, they know what's expected of them and they believe they've defined it. I think creating rubrics with students is a wonderful way to get them involved.

Bui: Yes Bill. Pass the course is one issue that ss aim at during learning process. Progress assessment would be focused so that ss see the active learning is meaningful

Brigitte Miller: or rubistar.org is good too with lot's of teacher-created rubrics to get one thinking

Damon Anderson: Folks, we are almost out of time for today's discussion. I hope you have enjoyed it and learned from it. what would you like our next topic to be? Any suggestions?

KhanhPham_Thailand: Routine is good for learning, I agreed. There are times when routine does not have to be boring. It can be routine fun and interesting

Brigitte Miller: Alternative assessment?

KhanhPham_Thailand: teaching adults Language. Adults of various skills in the same class

Brigitte Miller: Nice chatting with all of you. Talk to you next month!

Liang, Shu-min: like what?

Phil Owen: I don't know about next time, but this was a good topic.

Tony: How about strategies to move from column one to column two.

Brigitte Miller: Yes, we could even continue the debate.

KhanhPham_Thailand: is this chat session downloadable?

Phanisara Logsdon: Thank you for your comment Phil.

Brigitte Miller: Sounds good to me. We didn't spend that much time on the HOW.

ThuyHanoi: How can I read all this notes? I have been busy teaching. Just stop now. Thanks

Bill Templer: Part of the problem is that teachers strive to make class 'fun' but it is unclear if students have learned and internalized more language. They can sing songs but do not know the difference even between 'am' and 'is' I see this where I am. Again, what students do outside class to learn is what we should be most concerned about.

Tony: Thanks everyone...Nina and Damon!

Damon Anderson: Khun Nina will post the transcript on the RELO web page.

Phanisara Logsdon: THANK YOU everybody. See you next time. Have a great New Year :)

Thu Zar 2: Thank you very much.

Damon Anderson: Thank you everyone for your participation today. There were a lot of good thoughts.

Phil Owen: So long.

Bill Templer: Reeves' book WHERE GREAT TEACHING BEGINS Introduction + first chapter accessible on Amazon: tinyurl.com/82crbgo ASCD study guide to this book accessible here: tinyurl.com/6p69ul3 Useful to look at that.

ThuyHanoi: I think personalise the activities are difficult but very good for students. They can have reason to use the language, talking about their own life

Damon Anderson: That is a very good closing thought ThuyHanoi. Thank you!!

Brigitte Miller: Thanks. Bye!

ThuyHanoi: Thanks Bill, useful information

Damon Anderson: See you all in February for our next chat. Invite your colleagues to join us.

ThuyHanoi: Thanks, Damon. Good bye for now. Happy New Year!
