

## Getting Your Head Around... Lesson Planning

The 'spending-four-hours-planning-one-lesson' experience is almost a rite of passage for the trainee teacher, but it does not and indeed, should not, become a persistent problem. Everyone is going to find lesson planning a labourious process at the start. Think of it as a lot like driving. Much like teaching, during your first few lessons you will need to deliberately think about every little action and every single decision (the obvious difference being the need to document every detail ad nauseum in a lesson plan!). Eventually, everyone finds a way through lesson planning to streamline the process. The following five top tips, from our School Direct Professional Studies sessions, offers some advice on making your planning time is spent effectively and efficiently.



### Tip 1: Know the big-picture

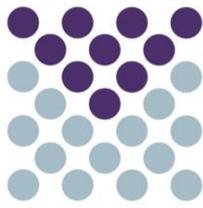


Planning sequences of lessons at the start of your training year is difficult and is certainly not expected, but knowing clearly where the lesson you are trying to plan fits within a broader scheme, or where the learning fits within a broader enquiry, will help you determine the focus and outcomes of your lesson. Think of learning like a roadmap and each lesson like a junction. If you set off on a journey without a clear sense of direction, you will hesitate at each junction and probably make a few wrong turns along the way.

### Tip 2: Don't reinvent the wheel!

Many trainees are under the impression that they need to spend hours creating beautifully presented resources or intricate card sorts. Not the case! Focus your time on making sure the important aspects of your lessons are carefully and meticulously planned (outcomes / explanations / questions / transitions). You can have the most on-trend, design-forward resources as you like, but if you've forgotten to plan what questions you're going to ask, or you're too tired to deliver the lesson with energy and enthusiasm, things will quickly unravel and you'll be left feeling demoralised and that your efforts have gone to waste. Use that department worksheet, hand out that textbook IF it does the job you need it to do.

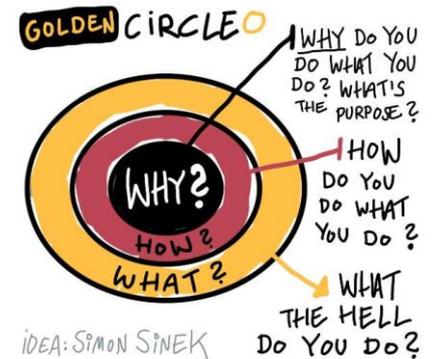




## Tip 3: What's your why?

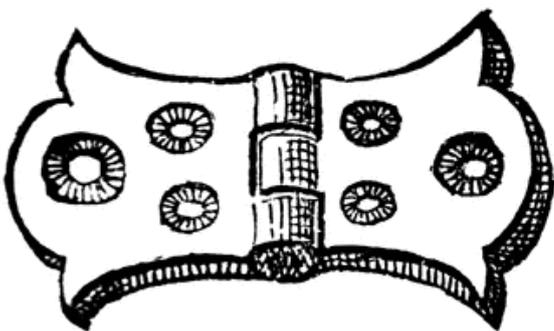
Having just said 'use that textbook', it is not good practice to start your planning with a specific resource or activity in mind. Many people will try to help you through your training year by giving you resources, ready-made activities, power-points etc, but this help, whilst well-intentioned is often misguided. Peps McCrea, author of 'Lean Lesson Planning' describes two teaching traps that you could fall into as a result of trying to use other people's planning.

- i. **Activity-orientated planning** is where you start with activity and try to reverse-engineer the learning objectives. Our Deputy Head describes this as 'pointless busy work' as the emphasis is on shoe-horning the activity in, instead of really determining its purpose.
- ii. **Coverage-orientated planning** is where your planning is focussed on a set of pre-determined learning objectives. Here your effort goes into making sure you cover the required content, rather than focussing on the lesson outcomes.



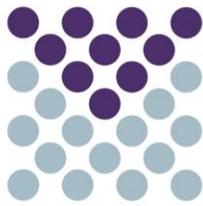
Starting with your why means being absolutely crystal clear on exactly what you want the students to know and understand by the end of the lesson (i.e the purpose of the lesson). Breaking this down and thinking carefully about route through the learning will ensure that your lesson has clear purpose throughout and will help you determine how you will assess the success of the lesson and what you will ask pupils to do.

## Tip 4: How will you know they 'get it'?



Never neglect to plan the most important aspect of any lesson... the bit where pupils actually demonstrate whether or not they actually get it. Deciding when to move a lesson on, or when to spend a little more time on a particular concept or explanation cannot be determined by the clock or a lesson plan. It can only be decided by you, the teacher, guided by the pupils in front of you. Planning how you will monitor and assess their progress towards your learning objectives is an

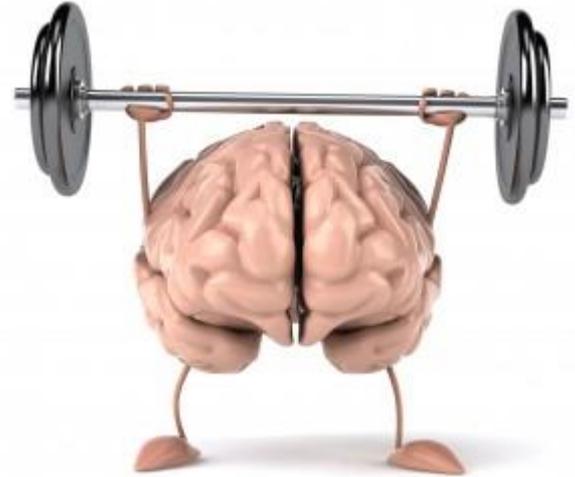
important aspect of your lesson preparation and will ensure you are pitching your lessons appropriately and creating the right 'pace' for your groups. These points in lessons are often described as 'mini-plenaries', but it is useful to consider them using the analogy of a hinge on which the rest of the lesson hangs. The hinge determines whether the 'door' opens to new learning, or remains closed until everyone in the group is ready to move on. For this, you will need to think hard about activities that will provide you with enough information to make this decision. A simple traffic light, or thumbs up/down/side-ways activity won't provide anything like enough feedback on your pupils' learning. A well-planning multiple choice activity, however, can reveal a lot about how much pupils know and understand. It can help you identify misconceptions and judge pupils' confidence in their learning.



## Tip 5: Recaps are your friend

Many teachers feel that every lesson must start with a bang and that somehow pupils need to be tricked into learning by some all-singing-all-dancing, kinaesthetic, movement and discussion activity within the first five minutes. Planning for this sort of activity can soak up hours of potential evening telly time as strung out teachers scour TES resources or twitter for an activity that will probably only account for around 5 minutes of lesson time. And to what end?

A good old-fashioned recap on prior learning activity can prove to be a win-win (actually it's a win-win-win-win) in terms of your planning for several good reasons.



- i.* First the BEST reason is that it is supported by research as an effective tool to improve long-term memory. Retrieval practice (asking pupils to recall information) and spaced practice (recalling learning a long time after the event) are shown to improve both the storage strength of learning and the recall strength, even if they get some of the answers wrong. **WIN!**
- ii.* You will get a much clearer picture of what your pupils know and understand if you regularly revisit and test their prior learning. You will be able to determine what needs revisiting. **WIN!**
- iii.* You will provide your pupils with the chance to experience success early on in your lesson and you will have opportunities to give praise, thus boosting motivation. **WIN!**
- iv.* You could preserve even more evening telly-time by asking students to generate the questions for their next lesson recap starter. This would be a good plenary activity and you can select the best questions for your recap. **WIN!**

Planning, like driving, gets easier and more efficient with practice as processes become automatic and your 'brain-space' is freed up to be more creative and flexible. Keep these five principles in mind from the start and you will develop the right habits to ensure your planning and your lessons are purposeful.

There are several different templates out there to support you with streamlining your planning. You may be required to use the templates provided by your school or your ITT provider, but take a look at the following. They might help you frame your thinking.

<https://www.teachertoolkit.co.uk/the-5-minute-lesson-plan/>

<http://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-c-919-editable-individual-lesson-plan-template>