



Getting to Know the WELS Teaching Standards

Standard 7: Christian teachers know how to plan a variety of effective lessons.

“Lesson Planning: A Basic Professional Tool” Reflection Questions

As you read the article, consider the following questions. Jot down some thoughts in preparation for a faculty-wide discussion on this article.

1. This article was written nearly 40 years ago? Which, if any, of the thoughts in the article are out-of-date? Which still ring true today?
2. What sentence/paragraph/thought in this short article struck you as noteworthy/reflection worthy?
3. Friedman implies that effective teachers are willing to admit lessons aren't always 100% successful. How can a teacher ensure that there will be more success the next year (i.e., how will they guarantee they'll remember this year's lesson a full 12 months from now?)?
4. In his motivation section, Friedman says "The good teacher has frequently been considered a good actor, with much justification." Is that still true today?
5. How does today's technology change the planning process?

LESSON PLANNING: *A Basic Professional Tool*

By AARON FRIEDMAN

AMONG THE MORE POPULAR topics of conversation in any teachers' room is the lesson plan. Various referred to by such a pejorative as "the supervisors' hang-up," this responsibility is all too frequently considered by teachers to be demeaning. Indeed, some teachers consider lesson plans to be a slur on their integrity, as though the inference were that but for the plan they would do no teaching.

In truth, part of the blame for this negative view rests with the supervisor. Many times the supervisor gives only the scantiest perusal to the teacher's efforts (and many teachers devote considerable time and thought to these plans), make inane comments, or, worst of all, merely initial these plans without checking them. Such unconcern lends credence to the claim that lesson plans are a waste of time.

The fact is, however, that every teacher recognizes the need for some form of plan. A good teacher would no more teach a class without a plan than would an engineer build a bridge without a

blueprint. Listen, sometimes, to the angry tone of a teacher speaking of a colleague who comes to school unprepared. The question, therefore, resolves itself around the following: (a) As a teacher who knows exactly what I plan to teach, is it necessary for me to commit that plan to paper? (b) If I am required to write plans, what should be the format?

Let us scrutinize these questions with care. First, is the teacher who "knows exactly what I plan to teach" really prepared? In the junior high school, particularly, the teacher will meet four to five classes and perhaps 150 pupils of varying ability during the course of each day. Will his plan be the same for each class? Will there be variations of questions or activities geared to the discrete needs and abilities of these pupils? Does the good teacher, in fact, know exactly what he plans to do without careful thinking, pre-planning, jotting and correcting of notes resulting in a final plan?

An argument that I have heard from some experienced teachers runs something like this: "I've taught (math, English, world history. . .) for X years now. The material doesn't change. I remember last year's lesson, so I'll just recopy that plan." Again, some careful analysis gives the lie to this illusory thinking. Assuming, even, that the material has in fact not changed substantially—what about the pupils? Are they the same? Are they also carbon copies of last year's class, or, perhaps, are their backgrounds, interests, needs, and abilities different—thus requiring an adjustment in the teacher's

EDITOR'S NOTE

There are those who regard lesson planning as an exercise for the beginning teacher or a unit of work assigned by a professor of education to his students. Not so according to the assistant principal of Walt Whitman Intermediate School (I. S. 246) in Brooklyn, New York, who views lesson planning as basic to good teaching.

approach? And what about the teacher himself? Has he not grown professionally? Perhaps he has acquired new ideas. Perhaps, also, last year's lesson was not 100 per cent successful. Did the teacher learn from it? Would he not seek new insights into ways of presenting the lesson?

Actually, it is common to find that many outstanding teachers think through each plan very carefully. They will "live through" the plan by visualizing themselves in the classroom. They will ask themselves, "If I (ask, do) this, what reactions can I expect from my class? Such careful thought will help the teacher avoid pitfalls in his lesson, and will usually yield a carefully structured plan.

Which brings us to the second question. Must the teacher write out each question, each thought that goes into his plan? The requirements with regard to the amount of detail in the plan will vary from district to district and from school to school. There is no single answer for everyone. One teacher in my department, a lady of considerable experience and competence, writes extremely detailed plans although this is not required of her. She just feels better prepared this way. Other teachers succeed with much less formal plans. But there are certain common denominators which should be required of all:

(1) *Aim*. Obviously, every lesson must have an aim. The teacher must know *precisely* what he expects to teach in each lesson. He must ask himself, "What do I expect my class to know at the end of this period that they didn't know when they came in?" For this reason, the aim is generally phrased in a single, succinct sentence, usually in question form. At the end of the lesson, if the teacher has been successful, the majority of the class should be able to answer the question posed by the aim.

(2) *Motivation*. Too often, teachers forget the real purpose of a motivation,

and they settle for an artificial, unstimulating question with which to introduce the lesson. The essence of a motivation is to create for the pupils a real interest in the lesson. This can be done by demonstrating to the class that they have a need for the lesson. (The child whose mother scolded him for being shortchanged at the store will likely be attentive during a lesson on making change.) Or, the teacher can appeal to the natural interests and experiential background of his class. (Consider how many good lessons in various curriculum areas could be motivated by Hank Aaron's quest for Babe Ruth's home run record.) At the very least, even when the type of lesson almost demands an extrinsic, artificial motivation, the teacher can attempt to stimulate interest through the use of an anecdote, visual aids, or other attention-getting devices. (The good teacher has frequently been considered a good actor, with much justification.)

(3) *Development*. This, of course, is the heart of the lesson. How are you planning to get your aim across? What materials will you use? What are some pivotal questions? How will you provide for pupil participation in the lesson? What about individualization? How will you differentiate according to ability levels even when you are teaching the same material to several classes? A lesson is a delicate item in which the teacher juggles diverse elements eventually culminating in a meaningful experience to a group of children. While the teacher will not indicate such activity, nor each question in specific detail (in fact, he could not do so—he must allow himself some flexibility for adaptation), he does outline his direction.

(4) *Summary*. How will you crystallize the myriad activities which served to teach a knowledge or skill? Can you plan for your pupils to summarize? Can your class, in effect, answer the question posed

by the aim? This is a most significant method for evaluating the success of your lesson.

(5) *Homework*. Is it merely a page from your textbook, or is it designed specifically for *your* pupils as a direct outgrowth of *this* lesson? Is it just busy work, or will it serve its primary function—to reinforce the learnings of your lesson?

* * *

Needless to say, the specific format of

the plan as well as the amount of detail to be required will not be identical for all teachers. The ingredients of the plan will likely vary according to the teacher's own background, experience, and ability. It is each teacher's responsibility to prepare an adequate plan, and each supervisor's responsibility to help the teacher, through planning conferences, observations, and other training devices, to successfully carry out those plans.

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