

Sugerencias para planificar e impartir una clase de inglés en la especialidad

Tips for Planning and Teaching an English Lesson in the Specialty

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Resumen

En el presente artículo el autor reveló puntos de vista teórico-prácticos que sustentan la enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés en la especialidad. Se tuvo como objetivo analizar desde la teoría y la praxis concreta la preparación del profesor en función de una clase hacia un aprendizaje integral, dadas las insuficiencias detectadas desde la dirección del trabajo metodológico y su cristalización en la clase. Se emplearon métodos teóricos como análisis-síntesis e inducción-deducción. De los métodos empíricos se emplearon el análisis documental, el cual complementó las generalizaciones teóricas del autor sobre la relación profesor-alumno-aprendizaje y sus criterios valorativos sobre la enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés en la especialidad, y la modelación de indicaciones teórico-metodológicas para optimizar el aprendizaje en los estudiantes. Los análisis realizados sobre el tema permitieron elevar los niveles

Abstract

The author revealed his theoretical and practical views on the teaching-learning of English in the specialty. The objective focused on analyzing from theory and practice the role of the professor of English in the planning of a comprehensive lesson, so as to palliate insufficiencies detected in the methodological mapping of the discipline and its concrete realization in the lesson. Analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction were methods used theoretically. Documentary perusal and theoretico-methodological modelling were part of the empirical methods. The material presented and the debates therefrom allowed the activation of an awareness of the problems discussed and the rendering of a theoretical and methodological corpus to crystallize in the actual lesson of English.

Key words: higher education, pedagogical higher education, English, learning, lesson planning, self-preparation, methodological

de concienciación por parte de los suggestions profesores de los aspectos tratados. En segundo lugar, se presentó un cuerpo teórico-metodológico de trabajo para su modelación en clases.

Palabras clave: educación superior, educación superior pedagógica, inglés, enseñanza-aprendizaje, planificación de la clase, autopreparación, indicaciones teórico-metodológicas

Introduction

The objective of this article focuses on the analysis from theory and practice of the role of the professor of English in the planning of a comprehensive lesson, so as to palliate insufficiencies detected in the methodological mapping of the discipline and its concrete realization in the lesson.

Today's conceptions in the pedagogical process at any teaching level are a repository of historical approaches, methods, tendencies, which have prevailed, overlapped or smelted in an unending effort to extract the best of each, and mould it into a solid produce.

The university applies a didactics for higher studies that harmonizes traditional and contemporary views on teaching, whose corpus is an optimized version of both to improve learning. The teaching of English as a major at the University of Pedagogical Sciences (UPS) enters too the realm of integration of methods, styles, notions. Specialists in the field like Abbott [et al.] (1989)¹, warn that there are no royal roads to language. Only an efficient, adequately sifted combination of these would bring about quality lessons and quality learning. It goes without saying that the role – and the responsibility – of teachers and professors is paramount, no matter what their actual prominence in a classroom may be. Whichever stance is followed, the professors are there, they guide the route even when the activity is

¹ Abbott, Gerry [et al.]. The Teaching of English as an International Language. A Practical Guide, p. 9.

predominantly student-centered. How the students react, participate, get involved and learn is not necessarily nor fully conditioned to whether a lesson is teacher-centered or not.

The remembrances of many students of English cherish the image of grand professors with grand styles. Back then the premises of teaching accentuated the teacher's role, and language teaching was mechanical and repetitive. But they remember, though, active professors proposing mechanical drills for the discrete elements of the language, dialogs learnt by heart, lab headphones that chimed prompting them to respond, etc.

Those professors prepared lessons marked by the paradigms of the moment. The “public” secret of accomplishment was in their attitudes and styles so when they entered the classroom they regaled their students with their gifted teaching. Those teachers' lesson plans are in many aspects different from today's, but students did learn their bit of English in that context, and were proud of the way they did it and of the teachers they had.

That is the core of this article: like teacher, like lesson. A good teacher will beget a good lesson; a good lesson will beget good learning. The aim is then to ponder on the fact that appropriate learning comes from an appropriately-planned lesson, and such lesson comes from a devoted, flexible, fun, informed professor. That notion is discussed here and enriched by tips to be followed in planning and teaching a lesson.

Materials and methods

Analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction were methods used theoretically. Documentary perusal and theoretical-methodological modeling were part of the empirical methods. The former paved the way for critical analysis and theoretical generalization from authorized sources; the latter led to the presentation of a theoretical and methodological guide for professors and readers in general.

Results and discussion

Times gone by have bequeathed to the new generation a hall of fame of outstanding teachers, each with his or her style. Take one lesson plan, hand it over to three teachers and visit, unseen, their class. None will teach the same, none will get equal responses, none will focus it similarly. It means that they stamp a unique print on the act of concretizing what is written on paper in a live instant of interaction with the recipients of the thought-out model in hand: they have their own style.

In the closing sentence of the introduction were outlined some qualities that might define a good teacher. They are not the only ones, yet a review of these would be healthy:

1. Devoted. Teachers must commit brawns and brains to the task of planning a lesson. The deterrents to a complete dedication to that moment are multifarious and tiring. However, only devotion will bear fruit. He who applies himself to a task will concentrate, will shut out interferences and will make time and room to write; let alone that they will find it rewarding from a personal and professional perspective. Devotion is, in the words of Leblanc, about caring for your craft².
2. Flexible. Teachers must be open to change and options. Their flexibility will enable them to accept differences, to choose wisely from alternatives, to re-study critically sources of knowledge and doctrines, to discern the possibilities and limits of the existing reality. Flexibility is by no means unleashing. It is being aware of the tension of the leash, knowing when to tighten it, knowing when to loosen it up. Or as Leblanc³ puts it, it is not always having a fixed agenda and being rigid but being flexible to react and adjust.
3. Fun. For Leblanc⁴ good teaching is about humor. A lesson running on entirely strict terms, with students regarded as robots, not just embraces authoritarian precepts of teaching, it also knocks out the motivation they ought to encounter in relaxing, smiling and enjoying inside a classroom. That they laugh in class from time to time is not a breach of discipline: administer fun in productive doses.
4. Informed. The introduction made a pass at traditional and contemporary teaching. The boundary between them seems diffuse and hazardous if improperly assessed. The bulk of data at a person's disposal is immense and timeless. So, a carefully-selected theoretical, academic, methodological posture out of conscientious, analytical reading will turn that person into an informed one, equipped to make decisions in the direction of the teaching-learning process.

² Leblanc, Richard. Good Teaching: The Top 10 Requirements, p. 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

Now, how do teachers lay down in black, white and hues of gray that avalanche of rationale? What general – ever incomplete – tips could guide them into do’s and don’t’s while planning and teaching a lesson? Mind these:

I. Plan everything you write down

Whatever you finally write on your lesson sheets must have been thoroughly planned. Once the ink dries you might have to live up to and account for it. Planning is what separates humans from animals:

- a) Professors mentally conceive and organize strategies and tasks before they articulate them or zap them into a screen in this computer era.
- b) Professors mentally ready themselves up to champion what they write. What is on paper should have a reason, a platform, and a foundation.

So, plan what you write is translated as: “Be sure you know well what’s underneath the skeleton of your lesson”. You already burnt your ships: there is no coming back.

II. Write down everything you plan

No wordplay. Brainstorms in you will need to be materialized literally. If language is the material realization of thought, consequently, your planning must be a reflection of that. The more your planning is blueprinted and enriched, the less you leave to incidentals.

Truly enough, a bustling class will always be far more teeming with an infinite range of probabilities and multiplicities of situations than a lesson constricted by space and frozen in a few hundred terms; nonetheless, the more your preparation allows you to write, the more you tread into that range and reduce it by mastering it.

III. Guarantee your students are warmed up

Motivation has to touch every minute of the lesson and every heart of every student. It cannot be an ingredient separately inserted into the *hors d’oeuvre*, or the main dish, or dessert. It must be added to all the courses and during table talk too. Abbott [et al.] (1989)⁵ mention that a teacher must create motivation by providing interest, fun and a sense of achievement.

⁵ Abbott, Gerry [et al.]. The Teaching of English as an International Language. A Practical Guide, p. 16.

Attention here must be directed to the need of influencing the individual – the student – so that he or she willingly performs a task, and behind his or her acting there are factors such as interest towards the activity, fun, sense of success.

IV. Do not linger solely on top students

It is well known that professors want their lesson plan to be on the hit lists. So, they constantly return to the active students and relegate the shy, silent, C ones. They are ignoring that the first flaw is precisely that.

Keep your “invisible” students in permanent check, move around, ask directly, encourage when mistakes are made, praise when they are ok. Do keep in mind that timid and C students need special attention occasionally, although they must increasingly be treated to the feast that is a language lesson.

If the professor always recurs to the salient students, the others will slowly recede into oblivion, false sense of safety (or the contrary: they might feel neglected), and into lack of language practice.

V. Organize and exploit the blackboard

These are apparently simple actions that escape main concerns in class. They imply three things:

1. The blackboard is a frequent source of reference to the students. Keep it organized, exploit it to emphasize the landmarks of your lesson, erase what was already discussed and when you are moving on; except for reinforcement points you would be willing to leave on it at all times.
2. Use it for the professional “hatching” of your students. Send them to the blackboard (on a useful assignment), let them feel they are teachers too, tell them to write on it and socialize as teachers-to-be.
3. A note of advice: After you or they wrote something on the blackboard, walk to the end of the classroom, re-read what is on it in search for possible mistakes. This procedure has proven to be effective to many teachers for years.

VI. Make the heading of the tasks crystal clear so they strike home

A heading is a guide. Experience has shown that even after presenting the heading in detail, students ask, minutes into the task, about what they have to do and what the heading means. For this and many other reasons, make sure that:

1. The verb opens the statement (you can underline the verb, CAPITALIZE it put it in *italics*, etc.).
2. The statement is brief and precise. Briefness also implies simplicity: use one verb per heading, one command.
3. Preferably, the heading stays on the blackboard for students to turn their eyes to every time they need feedback.

VII. “Wean” your students progressively

Get your pupils off your hair gradually. They will never be a nuisance to you, but they need and deserve to grow as independent and future teachers themselves: the lesson is the best culture broth for them to rehearse.

You should shift your lesson from teacher-centered to student-centered little by little – not because teacher-centered is irreparable sin; rather because student-centered involves them too, it glues and engages them personally to the tasks. Also, a student-centered lesson provides much practice on their side, much dynamic from the true protagonists of the activities: they will always be the ultimate *raison d'être* of the process.

Sit among your students, become one of them. Mingle so they feel confident; do not sit at your “throne” during an Integrated English Practice lesson. Even when you notice that your age is proportional to gravity and your teacher seat tantalizes you, do stay on the move passing on to them tasks, assignments, things you usually do and they can do instead.

A list of what students can do in class:

- Write date, topics and tasks on board.
- Read out headings, items, examples, texts, etc.
- Give out cards, arguments.
- Circulate around tables helping out others.
- Prompt classmates.
- Explain doubts.

- Make corrections.
- Act as teachers during segments of the lesson.
- Present situations.
- Captain teams.
- Monitor the process.
- Volunteer information from extra sources (books, dictionaries).

VIII. Apply zealously and timely apt corrective techniques

A self-respected teacher has to study for ever. Knowing the grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, and culture of your lesson – and a bit beyond these – is unavoidable, and unforgivable if you don't do it. Wisdom is an ever-moving target you are relentlessly aiming your sights at and certainly not always hitting.

Translation: Never say never, consult books and sources, admit what you don't know and admit it when you are wrong.

Corrections of phonetic and grammar mistakes can be made public on the board – with extreme tact and treatment – and generalized from a professional angle. When you correct and how you correct will largely depend on the students' characteristics. Diplomacy and opportunity ought to be weighed by you; and your zeal to do it justly must accompany the act. The English language is very rich and supple, open to variations, variants, turns and acceptations that professors have to continually cross the threshold of by studying, so they hardly make themselves the mistake of telling a student something is wrong when rules decree it is not, or of ignoring two (or more) alternatives of grammar and pronunciation approved of: your student knows one, you know only the other. Of course, professors are not walking encyclopaedias, they do not know all, but the bull's eye must be pierced time and again with attempts at scoring points in this peculiar archery quest. Do professors do that?

IX. Identify, positively, the objective of your lesson

Are you sufficiently clear on what your students are really going to do in class? Is your lesson a reading, listening, writing or speaking one? Which ability prevails over the others?

First and foremost, it is clear that there is no such thing as a pure one-skill lesson. The students will take on tasks of all types and will navigate back and forth the skills of the language during the hours allotted. However, there is always a beacon skill that

predominates because that is what you seek as a teacher and that is what the syllabus dictates as contents to be taught. That skill is the header in each lesson.

This vision cannot be blurred in your resolution on what to formulate as the objective of your lesson. Be careful; think hard about what you will achieve in your students at the end of the lesson, the system of lessons, the unit, and the course. The four skills will be maximized and minimized at intervals, but one will be the ruler.

Conclusions

The need to carry out efficient and successful methodological work in the disciplines of the specialty of English is disclosed and justified in the paper. Insufficiencies detected in the methodological mapping of the discipline, and its concrete realization in the lesson, were put to analysis and discussion.

The professor's qualities and tips proposed are not a straightjacket for the general reader but they are a must for the ones in charge of implementing didactic and methodological goals in the lesson. What remains a truth is that the theoretical and experiential notes poured on this paper are a clue for teachers to see the necessity of reflecting on and exploring ways to plan and teach better lessons and motivate students.

These tips are a guide for those willing to embark on the adventure that is teaching a foreign language lesson to young people. They are experienced-based suggestions that can be followed. The far-sighted professors will tailor them according to their reality.

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