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Programming and Planning

Planning language programs

KEY IDEAS

- Program planning for languages is more than a description of activities and goals and includes the planning of conceptual and affective learning
- Planning a language program centres around a focus on language conceived as interpersonal and intrapersonal meaning-making and interpretation

Programs as valuable planning tools

Approaches to planning in languages education are shaped by two key issues:

- how the substance or 'content' of planning is understood
- how the process of planning is understood.

Planning language learning involves a number of things. Content (mostly conceived of as grammar and associated vocabulary) is just one of them. It is also important to articulate the overall and sustained learning that the learner will achieve. Many learners cannot or do not persist in language learning to the point at which they acquire high levels of proficiency in the language. Planning for learning needs to consider the value of the program for such learners, as well as those who will pursue their learning further.

It is also important to recognise that programs are no more than artefacts, or documented representations of learning priorities over a period of time. They are only representations of intentions, and their relationship to the enacted or realised curriculum cannot be fully anticipated. This means that the planned program needs to be used flexibly to accommodate what learners and teachers need to do in the classroom to develop learning. The program should encourage learning rather than covering the predetermined content. Teaching and learning will always be characterised by the unpredicted and unpredictable and this is often the catalyst for deep learning. At times, students' interests, needs and questions will lead teaching and learning away from the planned learning: the planned program should not be a rigid framework. However, the plan itself should remain the focus point for learning and a way to reconnect episodes of learning to a broader educational perspective. Long-term planning recognises that in the enacted curriculum the interactions may develop different emphases in response to learners' constructions, questions and statements of understanding. The program which results from long-term planning should be a flexible frame that can only be elaborated in practice: that is, planning is an open process which is responsive to the unfolding of the enacted curriculum.

Notwithstanding its limitations, a program is a valuable planning tool to be used to articulate the scope and sequence of learning ('content', as concepts and interactions), and for discussions with students and their parents, while recognising that its use will lead to anticipated and unanticipated learning experiences. The actual teaching and learning of the planned experiences will necessarily continue to change in response to teachers' developing understanding of learners, and of their own engagement, identities and perspectives through their participation in classroom interactions and language use experiences.

The place of context in planning programs

Planning a language program involves planning the learning of individuals in particular settings. For this reason, planning is an activity for all teachers and cannot be replaced with a pre-prepared curriculum or textbook as these too have to be adapted for a particular class. Planning with a focus on particular learners entails understanding the individual learners' contexts, the school setting, and social, cultural and linguistic profiles of learners and their changing and developing nature. The process of language teaching and learning begins with teachers and learners as people. It involves decisions and actions on the part of teachers as they respond to their particular learners and to the realities of their particular classroom and school context. It also involves decisions and actions on the part of learners based on their evolving learning and understanding. In particular, this requires attention to the prior language and culture experiences of learners, both within the classroom and beyond, including the diversity of language and cultural knowledge learners bring to the language classroom. By reflecting closely on the context for intercultural language learning, teachers ensure that programs are developed that reflect particular learners and their linguistic and cultural identities, and their prior experiences with diverse languages and cultures.

Scoping and sequencing of learning

Scoping learning provides an overall view of the comprehensiveness of the planned program, ensuring that a range of different experiences is included for learners (Tschirner, 1996). Concepts and learning can be mapped over time to provide a useful guide to intended learning and the variability of tasks and contexts used. However, there are limitations, in that learning cannot be fully planned for or related to the individual learners and their experiences and interactions. The overall scoping of learning needs to be framed in connection with a planned sequencing of learning.

Sequencing of learning relates to ways of connecting learning over time (Tschirner, 1996). Language learning is a continuous process of making connections between learners' prior knowledge and new sources of language and cultural input, while deepening, extending and elaborating each learner's framework of knowing, understanding, valuing their own and other languages and cultures, and applying that knowledge in interactions across languages and cultures. The scoping and sequencing of content and concepts are typically integrated into planning and the interactions through which the scoping and sequencing are achieved, are also part of the planned elements of teaching and learning. Interactions are seen as occurring naturally and organically in the classroom learning process and are therefore viewed as spontaneous and responsive to learner input, and are thus not easily planned in advance. Interactions themselves are not adjuncts to a language program but integral to the learning process. In order to plan effectively for intercultural language learning, it is necessary to include starting points that begin to elaborate the classroom interactions.

Planning for connections

Developing a long-term program requires that particular consideration be given to ways of representing connections across the program as a whole. These connections need to be made both at the local, short-term level and also at the long-term level, including at the critical transition point between primary and secondary learning (Scarino, 1995). Connections can and should be made at a number of different levels.

- *Global level connections* are connections between the overarching concepts and the topic or theme through which the concept is investigated. They organise and shape the overall experience of learners as they progress through their language learning.
- *Local level connections* are connections between particular episodes of learning (units of work, lessons) and overarching concepts which relate each topic or theme to some larger learning and the links between the individual episodes themselves as each builds on prior learning and provides a basis for new learning.
- *Personal connections* are connections that students will be able to make with the material they are presented with through their learning experiences and include issues such as how learners will come to see global and local connections, how learners will display the connections they make and what space is available for making additional personal connections. Personal connections also involve the unexpected connections which students may draw between their personal experiences and the current learning experience. While these cannot be planned in advance, planning needs to allow opportunities for such connections to be developed and explored when they occur. At the same time, such personal connections need to be integrated into an overall scope and sequence of learning in ways which reaffirm the connections and develop desired learnings.

At all these levels connections can also be made constantly between languages and literacy, and between languages and all other areas of the curriculum.

Planning for conceptual learning

In planning for language learning, it is important to consider how conceptual learning is to be integrated into language programs. Conceptual learning has become a central notion in education: most state and territory curriculum frameworks integrate aspects of it. More specifically, conceptual learning means students coming to:

- understand language, culture and their interrelationship and be able to discuss and describe these
- understand how language in context constructs, interprets and communicates meanings
- engage in reasoning and problem-solving on language and culture related issues
- pose questions about, and find personal responses to, linguistic and cultural diversity
- transfer their learning from the context in which they learned it to other contexts.

In focusing on conceptual learning, planning needs to foreground the concepts being dealt with in the program (Perkins & Unger, 1999). The concepts become the overarching focus of the long-term program and topics are selected as ways of dealing with the concept from different perspectives.

For example, a concept such as 'ways of understanding and using space' might be addressed through topics such as:

- ideas of personal space: private space and shared space in homes; how living space is organised and what this says about ways of life; whether people have private space (eg their own room) or whether they live in shared space; whether private space is made available to others (eg guests' access to the house); leisure activities at home, etc
- ideas of public space: what public spaces are available; how much public space is available; what are the expectations and obligations for using public space; leisure activities in public spaces, etc
- ideas of space in specific locations, eg schools: what are the expectations about space at school and the ways it is used (eg classrooms, sporting areas; space for leisure); how much of each sort of space is available and what does this indicate about how people use space; how is space organised at school, etc
- ideas of proximity and distance: what is considered geographically close or distant; how does this affect travel; what is considered to be a long way to travel; when, why and how often do people travel a long way; what is seen as a local, etc.



Conceptual learning involves deep learning and seeks to engage learners in more advanced, abstract thinking. In languages, this means thinking about language, culture and their relationship. Such learning needs to be planned if it is to be successful. Moreover, such learning needs a long-term consistent focus, which is developed through the process of planning.



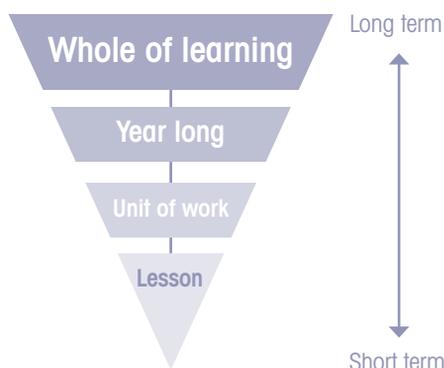
Long-term and short-term planning

KEY IDEAS

- Planning a language program is planning for long-term development of learning
- Planning involves making connections between learning activities and learning goals
- Planning happens at a range of different levels

Planning for language learning involves planning at a number of levels and these levels mutually influence and inform each other (Scarino, 1995).

At the broadest level of planning there is the level of the entire learning experience of a student over a number of years, from their entry into language learning to their exit from it.



Ideally, planning should take place at all these levels to ensure that students' experiences of language learning are developmental, coherent and consistent. In reality, longer term planning may rely on external sources such as textbooks, syllabuses or curriculum frameworks. While such documents may have some role in supporting such levels of planning, they are not in themselves plans of programs for particular learners. Adopting a textbook to cover a year or more of teaching does not equate with planning the same period of learning. The writers may have undertaken such a plan in developing the text, however simply following someone else's plan does not mean that the teacher understands, is aware of, or aims for, the learning goals of the original writers. The short-term or long-term use of any external plan requires adaptation to the purposes, needs and interests of teachers and students.

In planning, it is important to articulate how the experiences afforded to the learners in the program develop the intended learnings. This involves considering what learners will do in the program and how these activities will contribute to the learning that is being planned. Planning of activities needs to consider a number of dimensions.

- What concepts will learners explore?
- What language do they need for this exploration, and what language do they already have to build on?
- What tasks will the students undertake?
- What are the connections among tasks?
- How do the tasks individually contribute directly to learning goals?
- How do the tasks collectively contribute directly to learning goals?
- What interactions will the learners engage in? (For example, what questions will they explore, how and in what language? What meanings will they be asked to construct, interpret and communicate, how and in what language? What will learners bring to each interaction and how will they have the opportunity to use, question and reassess this?)
- How does each task or interaction build on previous learning and provide a platform for future learning?
- What support, scaffolding or other assistance will learners need to undertake tasks and interactions?
- What resources will be made available to learners to shape their experiences of language and culture?

All these dimensions are integrated in the practice of teaching and planning, but each also needs focused attention at all levels in the planning process.

Unit of work

Within the long-term plan, there are sequenced structures in which a group of lessons are developed and related to each other. For many teachers, this planning takes the form of a unit of work, which may span a few weeks or a whole term. The unit gives a focus to a series of lessons through a topic or theme which shapes choices about vocabulary, grammar, content, skills, strategies and communicative activities. Units of work are a way of ensuring that a series of lessons have a common thread and construct connections among lessons in terms of the overall content and focus of attention. Units of work themselves need to be framed in a broader context of teaching and learning. A year-long plan would provide a structure for planning units of work to ensure that the ways in which they are put together develop learning progressively over the course of the year. Such plans establish a coherent, connected focus of learning, with an emphasis on development of learning over time (Kohler, 2003).

Lesson planning

Lesson planning focuses on a single episode within a larger program of learning. Lesson planning has been recognised as an important way for ensuring that a lesson is focused and achieves its objectives (Farrell, 2002; Woodward, 2001). Such planning typically considers:

- objectives
- materials needed
- class activities
- homework.

Lesson planning focuses on the immediate and short-term needs of a single class and is designed in relation to other lessons, or it may be considered as a 'stand alone' experience. Lesson planning is an important dimension of the overall process, but, even where lessons are connected to each other, lesson planning is not sufficient to accomplish all the needs of teaching and learning. For this to happen, planning needs to consider longer stretches of time.

Conceptual learning involves a continuous process of personal meaning-making. It is a process of developing ways for learners to organise their experiences into broader and more abstract understandings and develop the capacity to use their understanding in new contexts for new purposes. One way of approaching concepts is through questions like the following.

- How does culture shape communication?
- How does culture influence the ways we understand language in use?
- How does language shape and reflect cultural identities?

Planning interactions

KEY IDEA

- Planning a language program involves planning the interactions in which learners engage and from which they will learn

One of the key elements of providing deeper learning in the language classroom is focusing on interactions where one frame of reference meets another, such as between teacher and student, student and student, student and text, teacher and text as planned classroom practice. Such interactions provide learning experiences that focus learners on the intercultural and draw their attention to, and encourage processes of, noticing, comparison and reflection. These interactions provide experiences for students and teachers, and reflection on, and analysis of, these experiences provides deeper and 'decentred' development of knowledge and understanding for the learner. In interactions students and teachers participate as performers and analysers of the languages and cultures present in the interaction. The learning experiences provided by interactions can be represented in a program as key questions which encourage a process of enquiry and dialogue and draw explicit connections between learners' own language(s) and culture(s) and experience and the concepts addressed in the resources provided.

Personalising learning experiences

KEY IDEA

- Planning and language programming involves personalising learning experiences

Personalised learning means viewing students as individuals who engage in a dynamic process of knowledge creation and exploration. Making learning meaningful goes beyond identifying topics of interest for learning to providing opportunities for learners to make their own connections with the topic and explore their own ideas, reactions and interests. It means providing space for developing a personal perspective on what is being learnt, rather than passively assimilating information.

Planning a program which offers personalised learning involves recognising that what individuals currently know affords and constrains what they can perceive, understand, and learn. Planning of learning, then, needs to consider what it is that students individually bring to the learning experience and what they need to use, question and develop their experiences and knowledge. Personalised learning works best when learners have opportunities to reflect on what they know, how they know it and what they need to learn next. Teachers need to plan their teaching approach in ways which are varied and allow for different configurations of the ways knowledge is imparted and exchanged: teacher to student, student to teacher, student to student, individual to individual, individual to group, etc.

Planning should not be seen as a finished process resulting in a finalised program. To be effective, planning has to become a dialogic process in which the results of planning are questioned and modified as the result of interactions with colleagues, students and one's own evolving perspectives as a teacher.

Questions for reflection

- 1 How do you approach planning your long-term and short-term language programs? What are the main things you consider in your planning? How do you discuss your programs with your students and their parents?
- 2 How is conceptual learning integrated into your students' learning experiences? What might you change or add to your program?
- 3 How do you determine the scoping and sequencing of your students' learning? What connections are there between the elements that you have in your program (episodes, units of work, topics, concepts)?
- 4 What would personalised learning look like for a particular group of your students?