

Refreshing Your Teaching Theory

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This essay will help you plan your Japanese university classes more effectively. The ideas can be used for other classes as well, but the examples are targeted for university instructors. Teaching theory and class goals are examined to help clarify your thoughts on how to approach planning for classes. What is your teaching theory? Do your class goals adhere to the structure of your university? By examining these two questions, instructors should be able to surmise how they plan for their university courses.

Your teaching theory: No one way of teaching is right for every class or lesson. A good teacher knows not only what to do, but when, where, with whom, and how long to do it. Quite simply, all good teachers have a theory that guides their teaching methods. H. G. Widdowson elucidates this point clearly with the following argument.

...the teaching practitioner must have a theoretical orientation to his task. One could argue that effective teaching is a matter of applying in the classroom the findings of theoretical research. So if research indicates that learning is a matter of shaping behaviour by habit formation, then the teacher devises a methodology based on drill.... The dangers of this kind of dependent application are obvious. Every time there is a shift of theoretical fashion, a reversal of previous findings, the teacher is presented with a dilemma: either he gives up following the hunt and settles for what he has got or he scampers off in hot pursuit, changing his ways to conform to current thinking....

The teacher needs to ask why he follows certain routines, or otherwise these routines are simply empty ritual, gestures in the void. He must be able to formulate problems based on an analysis of short term and long term objectives and then be able to test out solutions through teaching activities.... What this amounts to is pedagogy made more systematic and exploratory, more critically self-aware and accountable....

To achieve this theoretical orientation to the teaching task ...one needs to develop an intellectual independence, an ability and inclination to explore by conceptual analysis and experiment. We need to encourage enquiring minds, which do not submit to the drudgery of humdrum routine without question and which are not easily persuaded to join the mindless march behind the latest banner. In short, we need educated teachers rather than teachers that are just trained. (Widdowson, 1984).

In addition, an effective teaching theory implies that you use different strategies for inexperienced and experienced students. As studies have shown (Brophy, 1976; Cronbach & Snow,

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1977)), beginning learners need to master basic skills. Madeline Hunter's teaching methods (See table #1 for a more detailed explanation), which emphasizes review, guided practice, checking for understanding and independent practice, is excellent for inexperienced learners, but inadequate for advanced learners (Hunter, 1982). As a student's ability to master basic skills improves, there is a need to move away from Hunter's teacher-led direct teaching approach to methods that include abstract thinking, creativity and problem solving.

Instructors need to put this information into context of the university system. There are few Japanese universities that set explicit goals for classes, therefore, the responsibility for setting goals is placed upon the instructor. As a teacher, you need know the level of your students to match instructional methods to learning goals. Instructors make the decisions that organize their classroom. Designing *your* lessons plans to allow *your* students to attain *your* class goals may lead to problems of fractured learning because each teacher is deciding the class goals, not the school. Students get a hodge podge of English lessons from various instructors with no cohesive four year goal guiding their education. This is more of university system flaw than a teacher's fault. However, the teacher must have knowledge of how his university system works and use that knowledge to prepare lessons.

When making plans for the class goals, some simple inquiries will enable the teacher to find out what is being taught by other teachers, such as examining the texts being used. For example, if you are teaching a first year English conversation class, it would be good to know what the school's goals are for the students. Is it a semester-long or yearlong class, or some combination of both? If the students fail the first semester, can they continue in the second semester? Although these questions' answers reflect the university's system, they are important in how you set up your class. Are you going to use a textbook? What concepts does your textbook cover? Do other teachers' textbooks cover the same concepts and will you teach the same concepts? For example, the first 40 lessons of the *American Streamline Arrivals'* covers simple present and future. There is no past tense in any of these lessons. If another teacher is using *English Firsthand*, past tense is presented in the sixth unit. These first year students will become second year students, which leads to the question of what goals should a second year student receive if you are teaching a second year class. After four years of learning English, students have received an ad hoc English education.

In order to rectify this problem, universities should revise their overall educational plan for their students studying English. University classes should challenge the students. Since most Japanese students have studied English for several years, instructors should presume that students have acquired the necessary basic skills. As an example for speaking English, first year English students should be able to use the concepts of simple present, future, and past in a 15-20 minute conversation by the end of the year. Instructors are then given freedom to prepare and teach material to achieve this goal.

A syllabus is a good way to let students know what the semester plan is and what they will need to do to accomplish the goals. An example of a semester syllabus for first year English conversation could look like this:

- week 1 Class explanation and introductions
- week 2 Role play: Introductions
- week 3 Grammar review. simple present with frequency adverbs
- week 4 Activity: scheduling
- week 5 Grammar review. Simple future-be going to versus will
- week 6 Activity: Fortune teller
- week 7 Grammar review. Simple past; Alibi explanation
- week 8 Activity: Alibi
- week 9 Grammar review. simple past versus present perfect
- week 10 Activity: travel agency
- week 11 Semester Speaking Test
- week 12 Semester Speaking Test

Second to fourth year students would be given other goals to achieve. At the end of four years, students would take a speaking examination. This simplistic plan could be used for writing and reading as well.

Since there are cultural differences with evaluating in Japan and abroad, it is important to clearly specify class rules and goals. Students need to know how you will evaluate them. If you are going to give a test, then explain how it will be administered. As previously stated, for a first year English conversation class, students are expected to be able to use simple present, future, and past in a 15-20 minute conversation. Students may use any grammar within the conversation, but they must demonstrate the ability to use the stated goal concepts. At the end of each lesson, students could get into groups of 2 or 3 and then practice for the speaking test. They begin the conversation with a question given by the teacher. This allows the instructor a chance to monitor the students, reinforce or clarify test rules, and help them to accomplish the goal. A lesson plan may look like this:

Material: Simple Past	Time: 90 min.
Introduction: write some examples on the board and explain the grammar function. Ex. What did you eat for breakfast? What did you watch last night on TV?	5-10 min.
Practice: Give a worksheet that practices using questions and answers of the simple past. Ex. Make a question for this answer: I ate peaches for lunch.	20-30 min.
Performance: Without the aid of materials, students demonstrate their knowledge of the past tense. Ex. use a game or role play.	25-40 min.
Wrap up: Conclude the activity by complimenting their good behavior and review the concepts presented with some corrections or comments from the performance.	25-40 min.
Test practice: Students get into groups of 2-3 and start the conversation with the teacher's question.	15-20 min..
Total time: give or take 20 minutes.	70-110 min.

Caution is necessary when planning your lessons: do not over plan. Researchers have found that once a teacher has decided on a plan, most will invariably try to “get through” all the material (Clark & Peterson, 1986). The key is to make a goal, develop the material to help students attain it and not be afraid to adjust. I have heard teachers complain too many times about

choosing or using material that is inappropriate for the class, for whatever reasons. Teaching “the material” need not be a punishment for the teacher or student. As you can see from a the aforementioned lesson plan, the class goal is clearly stated and material designed to accomplish the goal. Time, however, is loosely organized in each step. Since all of the students should have a syllabus, this should help the weaker students prepare. If the activity is too easy, make it more difficult. It is easier to make something more difficult than easier. For example, that is a black shirt is easier to teach at the beginning than that is a small, long sleeve black shirt. In addition, starting easy tasks should build confidence and enjoyment. If you have any remaining time, you can this opportunity to to communicate with your students. Tell the good students that they doing well and encourage them to help weaker students. Or give the quiet students a chance to speak to you while fewer students are around by letting some go early as a reward for doing a good job. Encourage them to practice in class without your guidance. Positive reinforcement of the class goals let students know you are serious.

Ask yourself, “what is my teaching style?” If you can not answer, you may have problems with giving clear directions and goals for your students to accomplish. I would like to use an analogy to elucidate. There have been many great athletes that have become coaches and failed. Certainly, these athletes understood the game and their knowledge of the game is not in question. The downfall of these athletes turned coaches was that they could not explain their knowledge of the game clearly. Most were not well organized as coaches and gave vague or confusing explanations of what they wanted the players to do. Since you are a teacher, you were probably a very good student. You understood what was needed to be an excellent student and could exhibit your knowledge accurately. Even though you were a good student, have you become a good teacher? Good teachers have clear goals they wish their students to accomplish by using personal strengths to attain them.

This essay has stated that having a teaching theory and class goal makes you a more effective instructor. Theory should give instructors a basis for developing coherent lesson plans with the appropriate material in matching the students needs. Goals should clarify what needs to be accomplished. By reviewing some instructional theories, such as Hunter’s teaching theory, Instructors can solidify their pedagogical methods. Understanding the university’s mission, can make your class goals more appropriate. Design and put forth a simple plan for your department if your university lacks such plans. After fours years, students deserve better than just *some* English classes.

Table #1

Madeline Hunter's Teaching Program: Basic Principles Summarized

Get students set to learn:

- *Make the best use of the prime time at the beginning of the lesson.
- *Give students a review question or two to consider while you call the roll, pass out papers, or do other "housekeeping" chores. Follow up--listen to their answers, and correct if necessary.
- *Create an anticipatory set to capture the students' attention. This might be an advance organizer, an intriguing question, or a brief exercise. For example, at the beginning of a lesson on categories of plants you could ask, "How is pumpkin pie similar to cherry pie but different from sweet potato pie?" Answer: Pumpkins and cherries are both fruits, unlike sweet potatoes.
- *Communicate the lesson objectives (unless withholding this information for a while is part of your overall plan).

Provide information effectively.

- *Determine the basic information and organize it. Use this basic structure as scaffolding for the lesson.
- *Present information clearly. Use familiar terms, examples, illustrations.
- *Model what you mean. If appropriate, demonstrate or use analogies--"If the basketball Ann is holding were the sun, how far away do you think I would have to hold this pea to represent Pluto?"

Check for understanding, and give guided practice.

- *Ask a question and have every student signal an answer--"Thumbs up if this statement is true, down if it's false."
- *Ask for a choral response: "Everyone, is this a dependent or an independent clause?"
- *Sample individual responses: "Everyone, think of an example of a closed system. John, what's your example?"

Allow for independent practice.

- *Get students started right by doing the first few questions together.
- *Make independent practice brief. Monitor responses, giving feedback quickly.

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概要

教授理論の再考

本稿は大学における授業運営について教師の考えを刷新しようとするものである。同じ授業科目を繰返し担当しているととかくマンネリに陥りがちである。このエッセイはそうした誤りに陥らないための提言として基本的な考えをいくつか提起している。

効果的な教師であるためにはその手引きとなる指導理論が必要である。自己評価は指導理論を精緻なものにしていく上において重要である。

また、本稿は教科内容の相互連関についても論じている。各授業が緊密に連携し合うことにより教師は授業を容易に展開することができるし、それは学習者にとっても良質の教育が受けられるという好ましい結果となる。授業目的について共通理解が十分に得られない限り、授業目的についての決定は教師各個人にまかされ、その場限りのものとならざるをえない。