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## Language Acquisition: Reflective Lesson Planning

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### Introduction

Acquiring vocabulary is a vital aspect of language learning and is the foundation upon which social, cognitive and literacy development rests. Children learn to communicate by understanding and producing words; organising them into thoughts, sentences and concepts. Vocabulary development is a key predictor of academic success (Cummins, 2000) with vocabulary use at age 3 a predictive measure of language skills and reading comprehension scores at age 9-10 (Hart and Risley, 1995). A 'talk-rich' environment (NEPS, 2016) both at home and in school is critical to children's vocabulary and language development.

Practising in a professional manner requires regular reflection upon practice (CECDE, 2006). Planning and reflection are essential elements in supporting children's language acquisition and ensuring that there is continuity and progression in their learning. It also enables you to reflect on and develop your own professional skills. Through actively evaluating your own practice and measuring it against the theory of education and curriculum frameworks, you gain new knowledge about yourself as a professional and your teaching. You also acquire the professional language required to discuss your students' learning with others (Bleach 2014).

This reflective lesson planning paper aims to enable you to create your own reflective lesson plans on any topic. It is part of the Making Literacy Meaningful project, funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ Programme, which is developing practically-oriented knowledge in the area of language and literacy development, with a specific focus on addressing the needs, challenges and opportunities resulting from multilingual and multicultural classrooms. More information is provided in our MOOC <http://literacymooc.eu/courses/teaching-in-multilingual-classrooms/> and website <http://euliteracy.eu/>.

Section 1 outlines how you can plan a language acquisition lesson using a non-didactic reflective approach. This will require you to think carefully about your students, their

language abilities, the activities needed to support their learning and how you will facilitate the different elements of the lesson. It will also enable you to incorporate new ideas from the MOOC or other reading or courses you might be doing. This is followed by a list of language acquisition learning activities and a sample lesson plan.

## **Vocabulary Acquisition Learning Reflection and Planning**

Reflective practice (Schön, 1983) helps you grow as a professional through improving your teaching practices and understanding of educational theories. It also helps you to ensure that you are meeting your students' learning needs.

- Reflect on the various issues that arise for you in supporting your students' language acquisition. List the approaches that you think would work well for you as teacher. Why do you think these will work? What are the challenges involved and how could you address them?
- Choose one or two strategies, which you think would work for you with your students. Having considered what you hope to achieve with these strategies, list your goals and expected outcomes. Check that the key elements of vocabulary acquisition as outlined in the MOOC (<http://literacymooc.eu/courses/teaching-in-multilingual-classrooms/>) are included.
- Having prioritised one or two strategies, devise a lesson plan to implement them. The learning opportunities, both home and school-based, along with the relevant resources required to implement these opportunities, should be detailed.
- Having drawn up your plan, reflect again on what you are hoping to achieve. Check that it is realistic considering the context in which you work and the time available to you. Revise your plan if necessary.
- Implement your plan. After the lesson reflect on how it went. What worked well? What did not work well and needs to be changed? Consider if you are still on track to achieve your learning goals and outcomes. If not, what changes are needed to both the plan and the next lesson?
- Re-read your plan and reflections. List the main things you have learnt from implementing the plan. Compare your learning with the theories outlined in the MOOC lesson on vocabulary acquisition. Record if and how your thinking, theories and practices have changed.

## **Language Acquisition Strategies**

'Robust vocabulary instruction', which makes a significant positive difference to children's vocabulary knowledge involves multiple encounters and practice in a variety of contexts (Fricke & Millard, 2016). Here are a few suggestions for teaching vocabulary and for providing your students with opportunities in which to practice their language skills. It is

important to remember that children need time to explore and think about the world around them if they are to develop their language skills. Engaging in a variety of related activities across different areas of learning, including real-life, hands-on experiences, helps children understand the use of words and expands their vocabulary. Much, if not most, of children's learning takes place in the home, in sports clubs, and in the wider community (Illich, 1973; Bourdieu and De Saint-Martin, 1974). Non-structured activities such as family outings, events, and holidays, all contribute to children's language development (Bleach, 2010). Therefore, you need to consider how to involve your students' families.

1. Teach vocabulary directly (e.g. child-friendly definitions) and indirectly (e.g. meaningful use of new words). Make sure to provide lots of context and visual aids.
  - a. Relate new words to the child's experiences and interests and to words the child already knows. Show short videos to introduce a topic of discussion.
  - b. Develop word consciousness – notice characteristics of words (e.g. prefixes/suffixes)
  - c. Language function practice on specific activities such as apologizing, negotiating, and thanking
  - d. Teach conceptually-related words across the curriculum in Maths, Music, Art, Science etc.
  - e. Complete the sentence exercises to encourage specifically written formulas
  - f. Phonics and elocution to promote correct pronunciation and phonological awareness
  
2. Ensure multiple, meaningful exposure to new words, where children gets lots of opportunities to practice using in the words
  - a. Multisensory play activities, rhymes and stories using actions and sounds. Play enables children to make mental images of what they are doing, thereby helping their understanding.
  - b. Shared book reading e.g. using big books and story sacks
  - c. Discussion, interviews, debates, either in large or small group or 1-1
  - d. Drama: Creating role-plays and acting them out for others
  - e. Games focusing on communication skills e.g. Simon Says
  - f. Writing: Descriptive, persuasive, informative, narrative, creative or fictional writing
  - g. Provide appropriate fiction and non-fiction texts and encourage independent reading
  - h. Use multimedia technology to promote vocabulary development and digital literacy
  
3. Involve families in developing your students' language development
  - a. Use extended language and name your actions
  - b. Sing songs, tell stories and read books to your children
  - c. Pick a topic and have a discussion about it
  - d. Point out interesting things you see, hear or read and talk to your children about them

- e. If your home language is not that of the language of instruction, continue to use your home language with your children

## Sample Lesson Plan

It is important to remember that there is no one "best way" to plan or to teach. This is just one example of how to teach a lesson.

<b>Learning Activities:</b> Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquire language re: money</li> <li>• Engage in conversation and creative role play</li> <li>• Ask and answer questions</li> </ul>	<b>My Reflections:</b> What worked well? Why? What could be improved? Have I achieved my objectives? What do I need to do next?
Explain that you are going to talk about money today. Ask your students what they already know and what they would like to know. List 5 key words you would like them to learn using pictures to aid understanding.	
Tell a story or read a book about a money. Stop every few minutes to ask open-ended questions: What happened? Why? When? Who was involved? What might they have done? What will they do in the future?	
In small groups of 4, ask the students to create their own story about how they use money. You could read one of the stories created by the children in the Dublin Docklands as an example: <a href="https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/Users/030/30/30/The%20SMART%20MONEY%20stories%20web-email-version.pdf">https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/Users/030/30/30/The%20SMART%20MONEY%20stories%20web-email-version.pdf</a>	
Let each group act out their own story of a fire. When each group is finished, encourage the other students to ask them 1-2 questions about their story.	
Finish the lesson with a short group reflection, using the follow questions: How do you think the lesson went? What have you learnt? What else would you like to learn? How might we do that?	
Let parents know that you are learning about money. Encourage them to take their children shopping and discuss what they would buy, how much they were they spending, and so forth. This will reinforce your students' in-class learning as well as being the basis of a very interesting class discussion the next day.	

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