

LINKING LESSON PLAN TO TEACHING LEARNING PRINCIPLES

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ABSTRACT

A lesson plan is a basic part of a planned teaching-learning (T-L) activity. The advantages of preparing a lesson plan include improved clarity for the teacher and student regarding the objectives of the session, evaluation and organized logical progression of content and audio visual (A-V) aids. A lesson plan also allows the teacher to refine and revise subsequently to improve his teaching. However, it is possible that even well-constructed lesson plans may fail if they are not linked to T-L principles. Every teaching session should have an opening that will grab the attention of learners and get them to concentrate on the following lesson, a closing that sums up the lesson and focuses on the take home messages and a body that forms the major part of the T-L activity. A induction of short videos, historical facts, photographs, anecdotes can be used to establish the pace of the lesson. The introduction to the lesson should strive to build on knowledge that is already known to the learner and take the learner from the known to the unknown. A good lesson plan not only accounts for the content being broken down into presentable portions but uses active learning techniques, and methods that combine different A-V aids and T-L methods. Taking learners from simple to complex concepts and from concrete to abstract concepts are tips that should be incorporated in a lesson plan as they promote a meaningful flow of learning. A well thought out lesson plan should also take into account the sag in attention seen mid-way in a one hour class and tweak students' attention by using humor, anecdotes, or some activity. Overloading a lesson with content should be avoided by giving prior assignments to read up on background information (like anatomy, physiology of a system) or looking up specific information (as a part of self-learning). Following the "five to seven rule" of a lecture wherein only five to seven "big points" which are outlined at the beginning of the lecture are taught; each "big point" further explained or clarified using five to seven points to maximize learning and remembering. It is also a good practice not to have more than five to seven minutes of continuous didactic talk. Therefore, breaking up the lecture with activity is a good strategy. Finally, the use of good quality A-V aids, well lit lecture halls, comfortable seating arrangement and environmental temperature all go to show students you care and will complement your lesson. Incorporating these T-L principles will facilitate learning and give the learner and the teacher immense satisfaction.

A lesson plan is an integral part of any planned teaching-learning (T-L) activity. It is unfortunate that many medical teachers equate planning for a T-L activity with content preparation and preparation of audiovisual (A-V) aids. Most medical educators focus only on delivery of content that they fail to realize that the objectives of their lesson are not met. The advantages of preparing a lesson plan include the following: (a) improved clarity for the teacher and student regarding the objectives of the session (b) organized logical progression of content and audio visual (A-V) aids (c) sufficient time being allotted to each part of the content and evaluation of student learning (d) the teacher may reflect, refine and revise subsequently to improve his teaching (e) documentation of what was taught. Not preparing a lesson plan may lead to a lack of clarity of the objectives of the lesson, a dissatisfaction and frustration for the teacher and the taught, poor time management and a failure to utilize good practices. Hence every T-L session should have a lesson plan. As the focus of this session is on linking T-L principles to a lesson plan, the mechanics of preparing a good lesson plan and its components will not be elaborated much.

Well-constructed lesson plans may fail if they are not linked to T-L principles. Every teaching session should be organized and presented like a stage performance so that the time spent on the lesson is optimally utilized and learning is maximized. Each lesson should have an opening that will grab the attention of learners and get them to concentrate on the ensuing lesson, a closing that sums up the lesson succinctly and focuses on the take home messages and a body that forms the major part of the T-L activity. Clarity of the objectives of the session and a T-L method that best fits each objective along with an evaluation of learning are important aspects of a lesson plan. There are usually eight components to a lesson plan (a) Objectives and goals (b) anticipatory set (c) direct instruction (d) direct practice (e) independent

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practice (f) required material and equipment (g) assessment and follow-up. It is usually a good idea to decide on the assessment after writing the objectives. In a lecture class assessment may mean questioning a few students, putting up a few MCQs on the content covered, asking students to write a few of the the take home messages and submit after class or home-work. This is upto the teacher to plan for this.

A well thought out set induction will establish the pace and enthusiasm for the lesson. It should be relevant and interesting enough for learners to relate to the following objectives and content. Short videos, historical facts, photographs, anecdotes, cartoons can be used as triggers. At times, teachers in their enthusiasm tend to overdo this section and this goes on for ten to fifteen minutes. This should be avoided as this is not the objective of a set induction. The introduction to the lesson should strive to build on knowledge that is already known to the learner and take the learner from the known to the unknown. A good lesson plan not only accounts for the content being broken down into presentable portions but uses active learning techniques, and methods that combine different A-V aids and T-L methods. Taking learners from simple to complex concepts and from concrete to abstract concepts are tips that should be incorporated in a lesson plan as they promote a meaningful flow of learning. Asking students to come after revising the anatomy or physiology of a system that will be taken is one way of saving time revising the areas already taught and reinforcing previous knowledge.

The attentiveness of students' is not static and will change depending on the time of the day and also during a single class. A well thought out lesson plan should take into account the sag in attention which is seen mid-way in a one hour class (about twenty minutes into the class) and tweak students' attention during this time by using humor, anecdotes, some activity such as a buzz session, questioning etc. Using these different techniques five to six time during a one hour theory lecture will ensure students stay alert and focussed. The teacher should have the flexibility and experience to cope with students' body language signalling they are bored, not interested or have other things on their mind like a test in another subject later in the day. Overloading a lesson with content should be avoided by giving prior assignments to read up on background information (like anatomy, physiology of a system) or looking up specific information (as a part of self-learning). Following the "five to seven rule" of a lecture wherein only five to seven "big points" which are outlined at the beginning of the lecture are taught; with each "big point" being further explained or clarified using five to seven points to maximize learning and remembering is a good principle to follow. It is also a good practice not to have more than five to seven minutes of continuous didactic talk. Therefore, breaking up the lecture with activity is a good strategy. Hence lesson plans can be so structured that small bits of information which fit into themes or "big points" can be arranged to complete the body of the lecture.

The closure of a lecture is equally important. Use this time to reinforce what was taught. "tell them what you are going to tell, then tell them, then tell them what you have told them" is an age-old teaching principle that has withstood the test of time. The take home messages should be reiterated and further reading or assignments should be handed out. One may want to give a small test or ask a few questions to check learning. Some teachers ask one question every ten or fifteen students when taking attendance at the end. It is also important to keep sufficient time to clarify the doubts of students. The number and quality of questions is a good indicator of students' interest and understanding of what has been taught. Lesson plans should not be so "tight" that taking time out of the next lecture or class becomes inevitable. This is unprofessional as it takes away the time of another lecturer.

Lesson plans are incomplete without the listing of teaching aids and equipment, sources of information and other paraphernalia required for the class. All principles of good quality T-L aids and their use must be followed during preparation and display of slides, models or use of equipment like manikins. Since lectures demand students remain seated for a long period of time, comfortable seating arrangement and environmental temperature should be ensured. Well lit lecture halls, good audio equipment and a non-threatening atmosphere will facilitate learning, complement your lesson and show students you care. Incorporating these few T-L principles into a lesson plan will facilitate learning and give the learner and the teacher immense satisfaction.