Affordance-based lesson planning: How to plan positively for the unpredictable

Jason Anderson

jason.Anderson@warwick.ac.uk

for **Teaching House World**

18th May 2023

Teaching House

WARWICK
APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Plan

- What is 'affordance'?
- The structure-freedom tension in all teaching
- How our planning practices change over time
- 1. Novice teacher planning
- 2. Experienced teacher planning
- Evidence for affordance-based planning
- Questions, comments, critique

Should be useful for novice and experienced teachers, teacher educators and ELT line managers

Defining affordance

- From James Gibson's work (e.g., 1979), also see van Lier (2004).

- 'Affordance' can describe accurately how the learning environment provides opportunities (positive or negative, effective or ineffective) for the learner to learn.

- It enables us to see the learner as an active participant in the process, such that "learning opportunities arise as a consequence of participation and use" (van Lier, 2004, p. 92). The learner directly perceives and acts on the occurrences and ambient language around her/him (Anderson, 2015).

- Today I'm contrasting ABLP with 'Outcomes-based LP', which implies a simplistic, undifferentiated teleological 'input'-> 'uptake' model.

Affordance – in the classroom

What learning may happen during these activities... both planned and unplanned? Feel free to reflect in the chat.
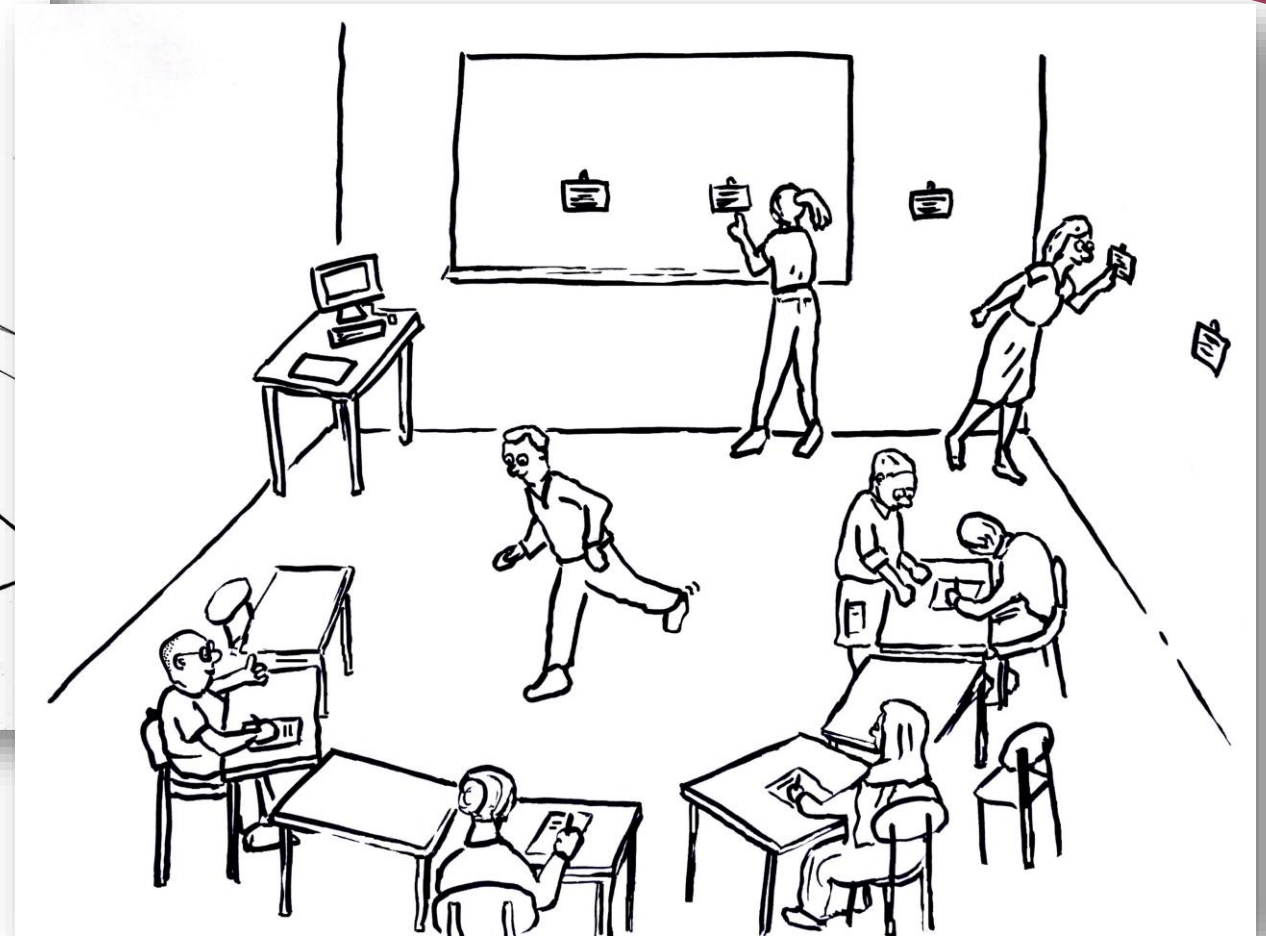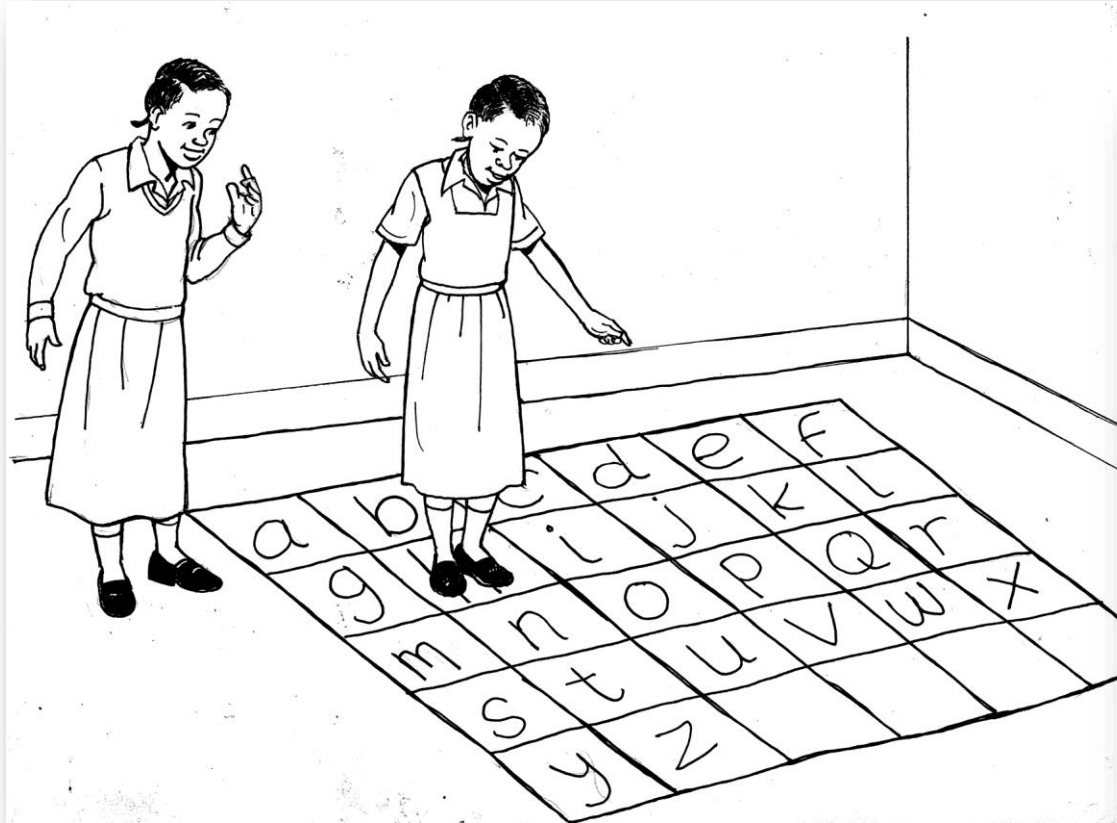
The structure-freedom tension in education

- Formalising learning always leads to the need for structure (e.g., time, content, rules) esp. mainstream education

- Yet learners need freedom to apply, experiment, develop ideas, communicate

- There is ample evidence that some aspects of learning don't follow a structured syllabus (esp. implicit grammar learning; Ellis & Shintani, 2014)

- Many interesting and enjoyable lesson 'moments' are often unplanned

- Numerous approaches emphasise this: 'improvisational performance' (Yinger, 1987; Sorensen, 2022); 'responsive teaching' (Robertson et al., 2015), 'reactive teaching' (e.g., Sayed, 2016); Dogme ELT (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009), 'working with emergent language' (Chinn and Norrington-Davies, 2023). Any others?

structure   freedom
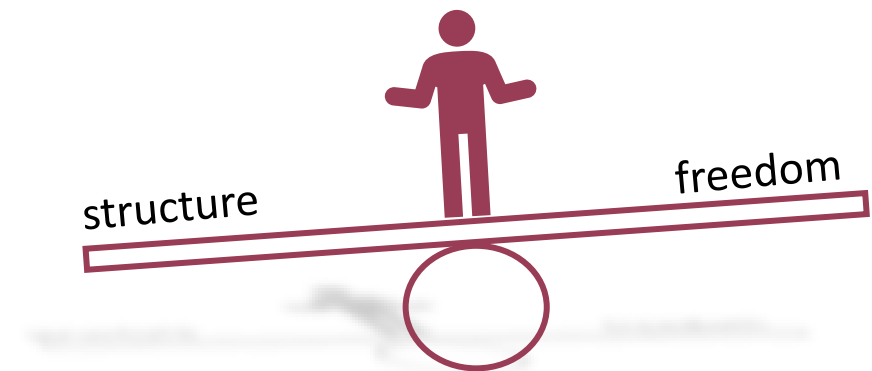
Planning practices over time
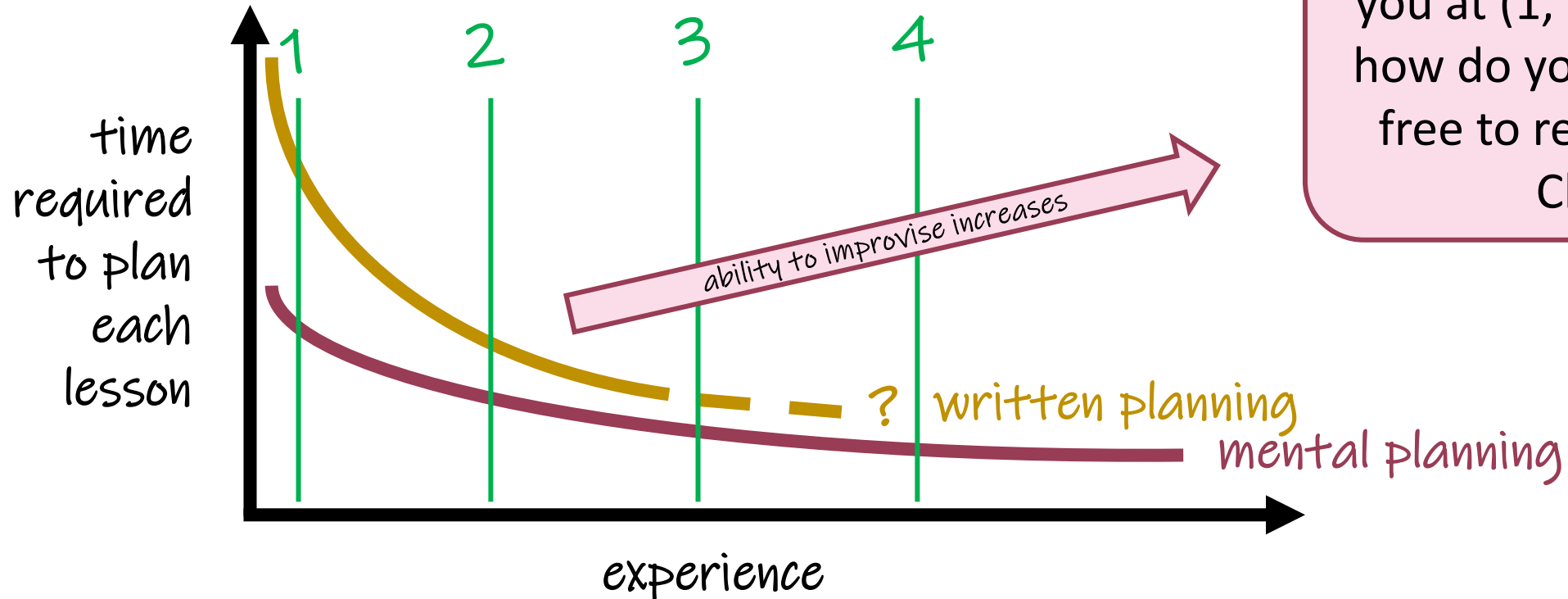
What career stage are you at (1, 2, 3, 4?) and how do you plan? Feel free to reflect in the Chat.

"Planning is essentially a thinking skill... imagining the lesson before it happens. ... Prepare thoroughly. But in class, teach the learners, not the plan." (Scrivener, 2005, p. 109)

# 1. Novice teacher planning

1. Novice teacher planning

- Written planning is essential to early teacher learning

- It is required in initial training, often after (e.g., mainstream education)

- Both mental and written planning take a lot of time at this stage

- Lesson plan pro formas available are typically outcomes-based, but sometimes editable/negotiable

- Ideas here come mainly from my own research and proposals (Anderson, 2015), but also from Melissa Lamb (IH London).

Key suggestion for novice teachers

- Focus on the main activities you plan to include in your lesson. These offer **predictable affordances**.

- Try them out yourself, or in pairs with an observer.

- Notice:
  - what skills you use
  - what language you need
  - what language you use
  - what other skills you need (e.g. m[...] emotional; literacy)
  - what other knowledge you require (e.g. content-related)

- These are potential **learning opportunities**.

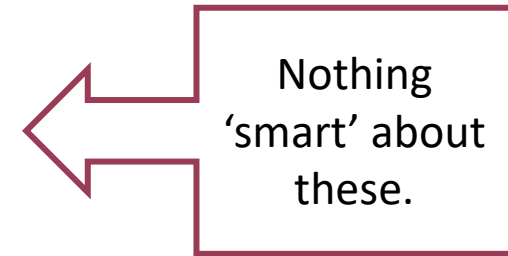- With experience, you will learn to imagine them happening.

> How to facilitate this through planning tools?
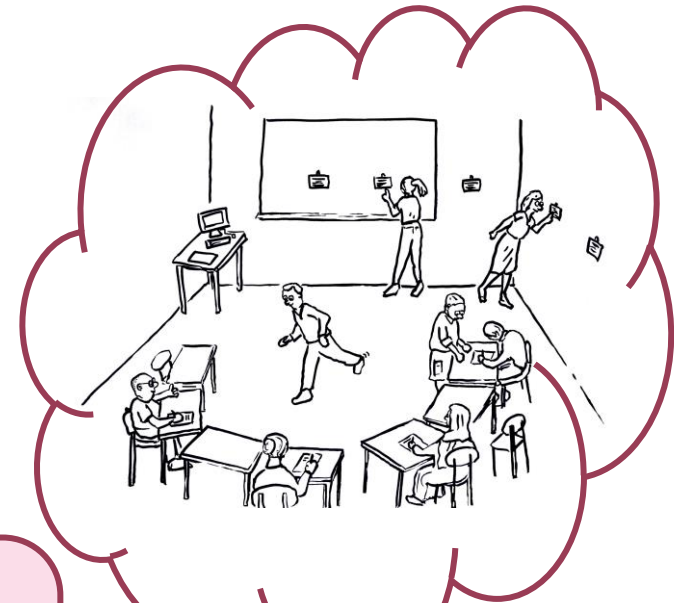
From 'Learning outcomes'…

By the end of the lesson, the learners will…
- be able to listen to identify key opinions
- have learnt 10 new words to describe social networking
- etc.

Nothing 'smart' about these.

…to 'Predicted learning opportunities'

Learners…
1. improve their listening skills (listening for and identifying opinions expressed by speakers).
2. consolidate and expand their current vocabulary in relation to the lexical field of online social networking.
3. notice and deepen understanding of a range of useful expressions for expressing opinions.
4. develop their speaking/conversation skills (expressing/responding to opinions).
5. develop critical thinking skills through justifying opinions (especially AM, NM, and JP).
6. improve strategies for selecting words from a text for checking in a dictionary (especially JP and BG).

(from Anderson, 2015, p. 232)

Procedure section of the plan

Time frame

Optional stages possible

Stage	Time frame (mins.)	Procedure (indicate if stage is optional)	Reasons	Possible occurrences and responses
6	3–4	Ls listen again and match the opinions on a handout to the speakers.	To provide opportunities for listening practice, noticing of relevant language, and ideas for discussions.	If NM and BG (weak listeners) struggled with 1st listening task, I'll give them the option to read the tapescript this time.
7	2–3	Ls compare answers in pairs. T monitors without confirming answers.	To help Ls develop analytical skills, correct minor errors, and to allow T to check task achievement.	If pairs agree, they may forget to provide reasons. Watch for this and encourage early finishers to recall what they understood.

Note final column: Not 'anticipated' and certainly not 'problems'.

POs can be positive, negative or neutral, and learner specific

From Anderson (2015, p. 235)

Lesson Plan – Front Page

Teacher	Teacher's Name:	Teacher's Lesson Number:	Date of Lesson:

Lesson	Length of lesson:	Level of lesson (e.g. A2, B1, etc.):

Student Context	Number of Students:	Approximate age range:	Nationalities:

How will this lesson be useful or interesting to them?

Predicted learning opportunities
Predict what happens using present tenses: "Learners improve/expand/notice…"

Personal action points for this lesson
What would you like to change or experiment with in your own teaching?

Learning indicators
What signs do you expect t

Lesson Plan: Lesson Stages Page

#	Time frame (mins)	Procedure: What will happen? (indicate if stage is optional)	Reasons Why did you include this stage?	Possible Occurrences & Responses What else might happen—positive or negative—and what will you do if it does?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

http://www.jasonanderson.org.uk/downloads/Lesson_plan_pro_forma_Jason_Anderson.docx

Melissa Lamb's suggestion

C. Emergent language planning template

Functional language
Sentence frames
Grammatical structures
Words and collocations

Photocopiable task

Functional language
Sentence frames
Grammatical structures
Words and collocations

Phrases for agreeing + disagreeing

I would ban xxx because...
That's a good idea
Without a doubt, I'd...
I agree
I agree, but...

Conditionals
if we ban xxx, people, people will...
Firstly, parking across two spaces
Good idea, but...

Secondly, avoiding taxes
I'm not sure about that

implement make create abolish | a law

if you had to xxx, the world would...

Imperatives
One. Fire people who drop litter.
Two....

it's | unfair outdated unjust

I'd legalise

It really | annoys upsets irritates | me that

I'm not sure that would work

I see what you are saying, but...

Modals
We could...
should...

Fire people who | park badly east noisily

yes, but...

I'd stop people | walking + takling on the phone lying

that's a bit | harsh radical strict

2. Experienced teacher planning

2. Experienced teacher planning

Experienced teachers: How true is this about you? Feel free to reflect in the Chat.

- Written planning is not always done (most do brief notes)
- Mental planning is still required (rough time frames are calculated and stored)
- Materials often act as aide memoires
- Lesson plan pro formas are only required for senior observations
- Ideas here from varied sources (own experience; Anderson, 2017, 2020), also Richard Chinn and Danny Norrington-Davies' work on emergent language (Chinn & Norrington-Davies, 2023) and Melissa Lamb (again)!

Experienced teacher planning examples:
Lists, running orders

RUNNING ORDER

1. Discussion
2. Reading
3. Discussion
4. Listening
5. Lexis
6. Rant about a flatmate or family
7. Polite language
8. Role play the situation
9. Hot seat
10. FB

Cecil court → bookshops Andivca
(A) Noughts & Crosses - Dice
(B) Nationality Joke.
(C) British doublespeak
(D) Text - Adject
(E) compae
(F) British citizenship test
speak-out - Int
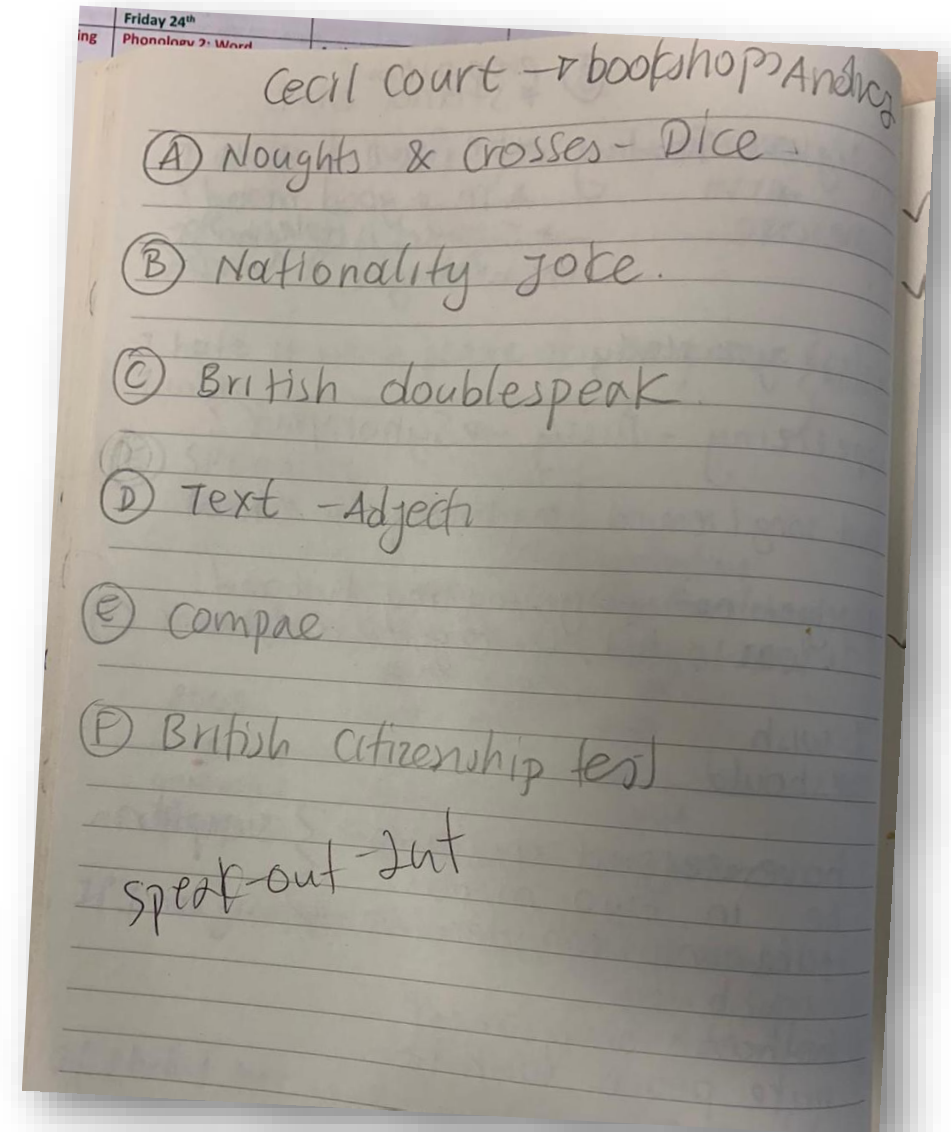
Experienced teacher planning examples: Materials narration

Planning for emergent language

- Definition: "Language that arises naturally during the learning process, often produced or needed by learners, that is then focused on through clarification with the support of the teacher." (Anderson, 2017, p. 226)

i.e., language that is the product of affordance

- Chinn and Norrington-Davies (2023) contrast it with "target language" and see a range of lesson shapes as appropriate for emergent language work, from more structured (PPP, CAP) to less (TBLT and Dogme).

- They discuss 5 lesson stages where EL work can happen (p. 31):
  - lead ins
  - responses to texts
  - grammaticalization tasks
  - communicative tasks
  - feedback stages
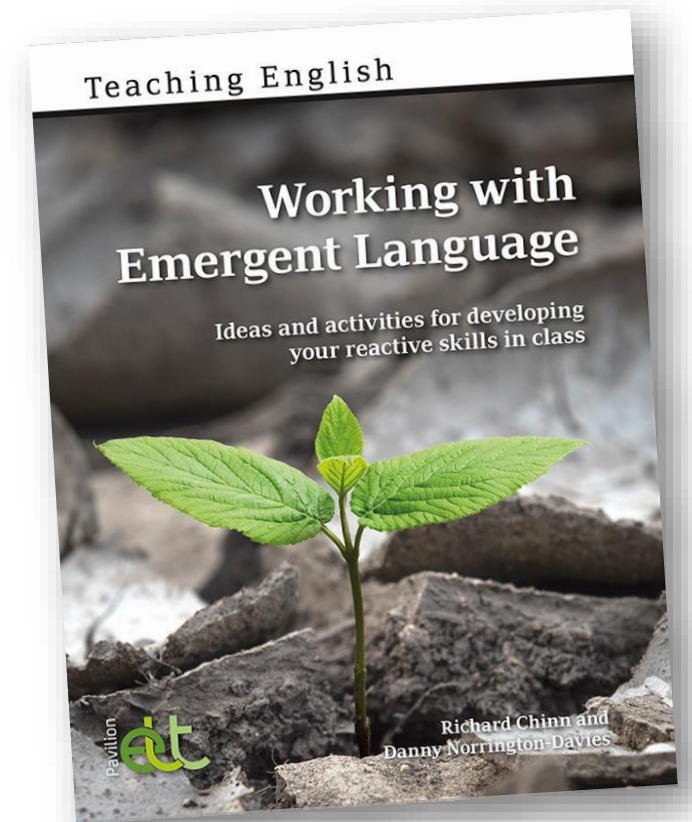
Potential frameworks for an emergent language focus?

Anderson's TATE framework (2020)

Phase	Description	Examples of potential implicit processes	Examples of potential explicit processes
Text [a]	Receptive skills practice through meaningful engagement with a written or aural text	Lexical priming Reinforcement	Inferring meaning from context
		Noticing	Raising awareness
Analysis [b]	Learner- or teacher-led focus on target features (TF) of lexis or grammar related to the text and/or task	Translanguaging Proceduralisation activities	Focus on lexis Form-function focus Contrastive analysis
Task [c]	Meaningful, mainly productive skills practice that may include opportunities to use lexis or grammar from previous phases	Pushed output Negotiation of meaning Translanguaging Automatization of TF	Use of TF (optional) Incidental form focus
		Uptake / Noticing the gap	Raising awareness
Exploration [d]	Evaluation, review and form-focus responsive to task success and challenge	Reinforcement	Emergent language focus Reflection Planning for future

© 2020 ELT Journal. Oxford University Press.

Reflective questions for experienced educators

1. Do I often spend more time on early activities, and have to rush later ones?

2. Do I ever get annoyed that I didn't have time for something?

3. How do I decide whether to 'follow a tangent' or not?

4. How do I know whether one student's 'emergent language' is useful for everyone in the class?

5. When negotiating content choice with learners, how can I make sure that all voices are equally heard?

6. What feedback have I received from my students on issues of pace, curriculum coverage, time management?

(Also useful for pairwork discussions)

Senior observations of experienced teachers

Suggestions for line managers

- Have a flexible lesson plan pro forma that they can adapt, reword, etc.

- Consider using the affordance-based pro forma (adaptable)

- Recognise that if they normally teach without a detailed lesson plan, by asking them to complete one, **YOU** are guaranteeing that **you will not see a normal lesson**.

- Which is likely to be most useful for your purposes (M&E) or their development? The real lesson or the *overplanned* one?

Do you really want to exacerbate the observer effect?

Evidence supporting ABLP

- Experimental study by Sayed (2016)

- Test-retest (general language proficiency)

- All 4 skills

- 59 students in two groups

- Study for 45 days, 3 hrs per day

- Experimental group outperformed control group on general proficiency as well as speaking, writing and reading scores (but not listening) over the period.

- https://jrciet.journals.ekb.eg/article_24499_f7b6cbdc55a9dbf0bbe30b378cbd3e5b.pdf

JRCIET   Vol. 2 , No. 4   October 2016

Towards EFL Reactive Teaching: From Lesson Plan pro Forma to Affordance-based Planning

Dr. Osama Hassanein Sayed
Assoc. Prof. in Curriculum and Methods of TEFL,
Faculty of Education in the New Valley, Asyut University

Abstract:

The current study aimed at exploring the effectiveness of affordance-based teaching on EFL students' general English language performance. Sixty four freshmen in two classes of the preparatory year at the Northern Borders University participated in this study. One class with 31 students was assigned to the experimental group while the other class with 33 students was assigned to the control group. Students in both classes were all in literary path, registered in English 1 course (Code: 1001101). Affordance-based teaching that utilizes lesson contingent affordances and various learning opportunities offered by language learning tasks, was used with the students of the experimental group whereas, those of the control group were taught in the usual way. A pre-post general English language test was used to assess participants' general English language performance before and after the intervention. Results revealed that experimental group students outperformed their counterparts of the control group in the posttest of general English language performance. Based on the results attained, some recommendations were made; A change is needed in EFL teachers' practices, from teaching to managing learning and from teaching pre-planned specific teaching points to identifying and managing learning opportunities. Instead of basing their lesson plans on specific learning outcomes, they should plan for richness of opportunity. In addition, EFL teachers should overcome their fear of going off script and they should be prepared

Keywords: Affordance, Learni Contingent Behavior, Lesson Plan

Introduction

Language classrooms are "cultures that are replete with generating authentic interactions (Chick, 2015, p. 40). In addition, i

175

Journal of Research in Curriculum, Instru

References

Allwright, R. L. (1981). What do we want teaching materials for? *ELT Journal, 36*(1), 5-18.

Anderson, J. (2015). Affordance, learning opportunities and the lesson plan pro forma. *ELT Journal, 69*(3), 228-238. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccv008

Anderson, J. (2017). *Trinity CertTESOL Companion: A Guide for English Language Teachers*. Delta Publishing/Ernst Klett Sprachen.

Anderson, J. (2020). The TATE model: A curriculum design framework for language teaching. *ELT Journal, 74*(2), 175-184. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccaa005

Chinn, R., & Norrington-Davies, D. (2023). *Working with emergent language: Ideas and activities for developing your reactive skills in class.* Pavilion.

Ellis, R., & Shintani, N. (2014). *Exploring language pedagogy through second language acquisition research*. Routledge.

Freeman, D. (2016). *Educating second language teachers.* Oxford University Press.

Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Erlbaum.

Hutchinson, T., & Torres, E. (1994). The textbook as agent of change. *ELT Journal, 48*(8), 315-328.

Meddings, L. and Thornbury, S. (2009) *Teaching unplugged: Dogme in English language teaching*. Delta.

Robertson, A. D., Scherr, R. E., & Hammer, D. (Eds.). (2016). *Responsive teaching in science and mathematics*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315689302

Sayed, O. H. (2016). Towards EFL reactive teaching: From lesson plan pro forma to affordance-based planning. *Journal of Research in Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Technology, 2*(4), 175-203.

Scrivener, J. (2005). *Learning teaching: A guidebook for English language teachers* (2nd ed.). Macmillan.

Sorensen, N. (2022). *The improvising teacher: Reconceptualising pedagogy, expertise and professionalism*. Routledge.

van Lier, L. (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A sociocultural perspective*. Kluwer.

Yinger, R. J. (1987, April). *By the seat of your pants: An inquiry into improvisation and teaching*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American educational research association, Washington, DC.