

## Insight on Planning and Assessing the Teaching-Learning Process

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**Abstract:** Today, talking about educational planning generates a certain vital importance for the achievement of the goals and objectives previously established, as well as the definition of the steps and means necessary to carry out this process. However, we cannot talk about planning without addressing the assessment process as an essential element to review, through concrete and reliable criteria, how many goals have been achieved and under what conditions. This article discusses the important relationship between two essential areas at educational level: Planning and Assessing during the Teaching and the Learning Process. The main purpose of this work is to present a pedagogical tool that could facilitate the organization and the establishment of a follow-up in an actual form and thus contribute to the improvement of the study programs. Readers interested in this field of education will find in this article considerable ideas that would help them to understand the transcendence of systematized planning and organized assessment under a complex process, to complement their didactic training and thus make practical decisions that allow them to reach the established objectives. It seems that both Planning and Assessing work together to the achievement of the outcomes. But under what circumstances and conditions should be done the whole merging?

**Keywords:** Planning, Assessing, Teaching-learning process

### Introduction

*I believe that only by studying carefully the past, we can anticipate the future and understand the present, and consequently, the history of teaching would be the best of pedagogical schools (Durkheim I:13)*

Today, talking about planning generates a certain indispensable importance for the achievement of the goals and objectives previously established, as well as the definition of the steps and means necessary to carry out this process. However, we cannot talk about planning without addressing the evaluation process as an essential element to review, through concrete and reliable criteria, how many goals have been achieved and under what conditions. Many authors and different texts unify their vision of educational planning that must be flexible, with clear and realistic goals, surrounded by a formula so that it is evaluable (in other words, observable and measurable), quantitative and qualitative, while including each of the elements involved in the process. This said that theory, reflection and practice must be inseparable, based on a philosophy that postulates more specifically a further interiorization of the art of education and teaching, a constant appreciation of the action of the teacher and her/his attitudinal changes resulting from a better understanding of ends and means, a critique of inappropriate practice as well as current ideologies.

Learning is a complex phenomenon, and rather than trying to explain what it is, one must simply recognize its complexity and say that it is better projected in the performance of learners (Ohlsson & Rees, 1991). On the other hand, different insights start from the meaning of the term "Teaching-learning Process" (TLP) where many theorist – as Paulo Freire (1972) – expresses themselves in different ways such as:

1. Stating that the name is incorrect and that the term "Teaching" must be eliminated because "nobody teaches anyone", i.e., that every one learns in the dialogue (Freire takes here the term to its extreme definition). (P.67)
2. Understand the TLP as a process of transferring the knowledge in an unidirectionally (from teacher to student) and verbal way.
3. To talk about TLP as a dynamic process that allows the realization of relevant activities that, on their part, - through appropriate means – improve students' ability to learn how to effectively solve problems related to the content of certain subject (Educational technology).
4. Understand the TLP as a social process whose objective is to generate a critical awareness among students in order to form generations who seek the transformation of their society and construction of justice (critical didactics).

5. Understand TLP as a student-centered process whose goal is to continue, through meaningful experiences, that each learner can maximize her/his human potential as an agent responsible for her/his own development.

In the majority of these cases, it is understandable that teaching could not be separated from learning; outside, during this process, teachers and learners are being led at hand at all times, especially at the level of critical and humanistic currents. From the integral humanistic point of view, it is supposed and purported to bring a notion of the TLP and to aim to the search of an open system of planning and evaluation, so that could become a global and an inclusive element. Some of the basic reasons that could enrich the whole process are listed below:

- a. As stated by Musial, Pradère and Tricot (2012), Planning is to be engaged into a rational approach of design to effectively prepare the implementation of Teaching. It then begins with an approach to goals, not understood as observable or measurable behaviors to which students are exposed, or as learned content or skills, but understood as a reflection on a realistic dimension, such as the planning of basic concepts whose purpose is to seek to understand the judgements or affirmations during the course of a real event, without forgetting the necessary decisions to be considered throughout the process.
- b. Planning is predicted to achieve goals through well-established outcomes, but not just as content volume, design activities or establishing an infinite series of techniques, but also as a heuristic process in which we are supposed to create an environment where we do share experiences, trigger dialogues, address key concepts, reflect implicit values, and so on. Basically, we help to think and work on different dimensions.
- c. Assessing is probably making value judgements related to the broadening of the horizon of each individual or group of people. It is above all a qualitative procedure, even though it includes the part of formal quantitative accreditation that sets parameters to examine the attention, the understanding of the concepts, the quality of the reflection and the analysis of the human, scientific and ethical implications views on the course.

It should be noted that any assessment process requires rules on which an evaluated judgement depends. This compromises a process that evaluates, estimates or renders a judgement about a performance that can be exhibited, transmitted, performed, or presented in a real and authentic way. It is a process in which students not only complete or demonstrate the desired behavior, but perform it in a context of their real life. However, it all depends on classrooms teaching practices and various tools to assess student learning. Questions like: “What are we looking for when we assess?”, and “How can practices be used for the benefit of teaching and evaluation processes?” help to generate decisions and develop strategies that aim to improve the academic level of learners. Some authors, such as Tucker, JA (1985), point out that before beginning this assessing step, the proposed curriculum should be well designed to be taught to students while establishing different pedagogical methods that would allow better teaching experience (199-204).

Obviously, the realization of this step requires an absolute mastery of the content to be addressed. Rigorous knowledge of the academic program is a trigger, no doubt, for the development of a successful control, the application of assessment procedures and making good decisions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986; Howell, 1986; Shinn & Hubbard, 1992; Shulman, 1986). That said, the assessment of both formative and cumulative curriculums implies its usefulness in meeting or satisfying social needs. The educational objectives would then be achievable and measurable under the prevailing circumstances of being “realistic”. In other words, it must be possible to somehow determine if they can be achieved. On the other side, a program or curriculum should be compatible with the educational philosophy contained in the applicable laws, with a specific and sufficient guidebook to ensure that everyone’s efforts contribute to the same set goals. Therefore, there is a rapport between degree and type of average development of the student at the biological, psychological and cultural level.

It is also worth to mention the importance of responding to the needs and impacts of learners and individuals. There should be complete coherence between all parts of any program or curriculum; this implies – supposed – that each of these parts has an internal coherence. The selected content is an essential element that must be relevant because:

- It contributes to the student’s training and
- The achievement of the learning threshold should be significant enough to allow learners to integrate – in a coherent way – the knowledge acquired to their material and intellectual reality.

## **Planning Objectives**

The planning of a course based on determined notions in a specific program highlights the importance of progressing a process that establishes an order in learning, a full path of points and obligatory passages. This progress is essential to determine the precise sequence of teaching-learning stages, so as to avoid stacking and juxtaposing notions. (Terminology of Education – BO No 35 of September 17, 1992, p.2484, quoted by Musial and Pradere, 2012). In this sense, it is worth to mention that a series of objectives – that represent the importance of links between the gaps and the results, while guiding towards the choice of the content, the pedagogical methodologies and the assessment process to follow – is required and is determined as below:

1. Increase the effectiveness of teaching,
2. Ensure good control of education,
3. Avoid improvisations because they confuse the learner,
4. To follow up and progressively school work,
5. Devote greater attention to the essential aspects of the subject,
6. Propose homework according to the available time,
7. Propose appropriate tasks according to the possibilities of the students,
8. Facilitate the coordination of different disciplines to achieve integrated education, and
9. Demonstrate an attitude of responsibility and respect towards learners, as the approach is the best evidence of the teacher's preparation for his/her task within the class.

## **Keys for a Successful Lesson Plan**

The course plan has an annual work including an interdisciplinary outline of all subjects. That said, we should rely on essential elements formulated according to a certain number of causes; which allows the approach to be developed accordingly to the organization of the elements or factors in question. For example: 1) The objectives of a certain discipline are aligned with those of the educational institution; 2) the hours available for teaching the discipline; 3) the minimum program or curriculum to be developed, including themes or units selected on the basis of their fundamental and current aspects, their functioning, their social value and their theoretical and practical capacities; 4) the particular environmental conditions; 5) the academic level of learners; 6) if the subject has linear progress, in other words, what has been studied last year and what should be studied in the current year; 7) available teaching resources and materials that can be done and prepared by students, 8) motivation and experiences to be shared for the launch of the works; 9) extracurricular activities related to the discipline; 10) the work done; and 11) the bibliography without forgetting to add general information to be considered at the institutional level. At the planning stage, it is essential to indicate the program units and the number of corresponding sessions according to their significance and importance; describe the units according to their depts as well as the time allowed for their completion, and identify if the approach of the work could be in relation with other disciplines.

## **Specific Learning Objectives**

These goals are considered the most laborious part because they include outcomes and thematic content. To establish them, Bloom (1975) revised by Krathwohl (2003), indicates – according to his taxonomy divided into three domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor – that it is necessary to specify the type of activity to be accepted as a sign of completion of the objective; to define the desired behavior considering the important conditions under which it is supposed to be realized; and to specify the acceptable performance criteria. This division helps the course designer to check the scope of what he offers to students (Saint-Onge (1992), Legendre (1993)).

It should be noted that most of the planning schemes of a course that have emerged from the systematization of the teaching-learning process, set in motion a closed model that should be reformed from the outset, clearly defining the objectives, topics, methodology and materials (bibliography, resources and teaching tools, etc.) as well as the evaluation system that will be used throughout the course. A model that is closed is considered rigid, even if there is a talk of flexibility when it is implemented, and the possibility of making changes in the case of maturity. On the other hand, this kind of model is seen differently if it is subjected to a through critique.

Sometimes the teacher suggests some models that are not well defined and ambiguous, which generates conflict. In this sense, learners would wonder if it is not the teacher who should plan the course especially that he is paid

for it, or how would they propose topics and / or objectives if they have no idea of the subjects in question. These problems are rooted in the traditional concept of the roles of teachers and learners (who knows and does not.), but deeply raise valid questions and are largely a mirror of reality.

Humanistic and critical teachers plan programs while clarifying that their work remains as a proposal that could be changed after discussion. This alternative, although well intentioned, highlights a situation of “false democracy” because learners do not really know the subject (even if they have experience or knowledge) and because planning is done before the beginning of the course. So, the themes are not yet clear and the trust between the teacher and his students is not well established. This says that proposals or plans are rarely changed. On the other hand, on the field of practice and as a critical remark, Barnier (2009) raises the point that is the pedagogy based on objectives that makes it easier to be aware of the often-noted difference between what is proposed by the teacher to assimilate (in this case, the specific objectives or goals) and what is really happening for the learner (the operational objectives) (p.7). It is therefore necessary to develop conceptual course plan that clearly outlines some basic guidelines or principals and, at the same time, that is an open framework in which students and teachers can move freely to build an intelligent, critical and open dialogue process.

### *Assessment Process*

Assessment is a judgement of merit as defined by Ebel (1979), sometimes based only on measures such as those provided by the test results, but more often involving the synthesis of various measures, critical incidents, subjective impressions and other types of evidence (1-14, 18-31). However, when it comes to making decisions about student performance, the effectiveness of the educational program and the environment or the whole process, it is necessary to: (a) identify and formulate objectives; (b) select and design tools to measure progress towards the achievement of pre-established objectives; (c) use different instruments to quantify, and thus (d) make judgements based on the results achieved. From this, the assessment process is considered a very difficult step, because it should not only include quantitative data but also qualitative elements. Therefore, even if takes into consideration the student’s numerical and official accreditation, it should also promote a serious, continuous and qualitative assessment at the individual or collective level.

During this process, the center of balance is represented by the learner at different times, beginning by knowing (a) whether she/he is attentive, in other words, to what extent is it possible to pay attention to reality and under what level of quality, adequacy and relevance can obtain the necessary data for the realization of her/his work; (b) if she/he understands that is, once he has assimilated the information, understood the basic concepts and themes of the course, she/he could in theory – formulate all the content in his own language (Deschenes, 1995: 119); (c) if her/his intellectual capacity allows to formulate a judgment that makes it possible to know and determine whether she/he can ask, seek reasons, justify opinions, provide evidence, seek examples of pros and cons, etc; and, (d) what attitudes are derived from what she/he was able to discover during her/his learning, whether her/his values are questioned as well as those of the society in which she/he lives, whether she/he is able to make her/his own decisions and so on (Duffy and Jonassen, 1992)

Considering the four levels above, an assessment process could be established, which should be varied, creative and participatory. It should be noted, then, that analysis and reflection activities or personal contributions are more useful than exams themselves. However, it should be ensured that the tests do not only have questions of memory but also those related to levels b, c and d. In this sense, different authors like Hopkins (1990) emphasize that when the assessment is formulated in terms of conscious and intentional activities, it is common to say that it is subjective because it cannot qualify the way of thinking of each person: (101). However, two questions are emerging: Are there really adequate procedures to evaluate or certify knowledge? How objective are objective tests? All this, although it is impossible to measure what someone thinks (content), it is possible to see how they think (method, skills, etc.); and while it is impossible to qualify values, it is possible to observe and evaluate attitudes, questions of discussion, evaluation, etc. that reflect existing values.

### *Pedagogical Planning*

One session is, according to Graça and Preira (2009), a certain period lived between the teacher and the student in which the activities have a sense of direction that aim to achieve some of the predetermined objectives; thus, the role of the teacher would be to plan, manage, provide materials, and establish standards and guidelines that create a supportive learning environment and thus achieve previously established goals. In the field of foreign languages, for example, the syllabus is a project activity – if we see it in this way – that according to the authors

Garça and Pereira (2009), indicates the elements and concrete methods that enrich the content of a subject. Yet, this project is determined by the duration, space and characteristics of the course. Its implementation does not really require the teacher to follow step by step all the planning details, but it would be like a guide that facilitate the Process of Teaching and Learning.

Particularly, the teacher has the duty to develop the class plans adapting all the activities needed to achieve a better integration and involvement of his students into their learning process and improving the interaction's environment. Defining a class profile would be an asset. The class plan should be enriched, according to Musial, Pradère and Tricot (2012), with a specific approach to determine the learning goals. It must have a beginning, a middle and a clear ending or conclusion. The class must be planned by the teacher himself to avoid any improvisation and to encourage reflection on the development of the main course. Each class preparation or planning involves the assessment of everything that has been seen in class. Therefore, it serves as a mean of meditation for the teacher on his work already done and what remains to be achieved.

### *Guidelines for Planning*

According to Fink (2005, Dessaing, 1995, p.169), the important elements to consider are the following:

1. Specific objectives, to understand the description of the observable behavior of the student;
2. Motivation that consists in proposing an activity or key element to have the attention and the interest of the group towards a specific subject;
3. Subject or if it is indicated the content that will be developed in progress;
4. Procedures of instruction, i-e-d, identification of learning activities to be implemented in the classroom;
5. Duty, while specifying what the student will do in class or outside to achieve the expected learning;
6. Verification of learning (Martens et al 1994, Dessaint 1995). It indicates how the achievement of the objectives will be evaluated (Landry, 1986, Dessaint, (1995), 7) Bibliographic references. Understand the sources from which additional information will be obtained;
7. The need to determine the educational resources that will be essential (equipment or teaching material), how the new theme will be integrated with the activities already treated as well as the time required for each step. To precede the evaluation of sessions, it is essential that the teacher makes critical remarks in the same planning in order to achieve improvement as each approach progresses.

Before starting to think about the subject and activities of the day, the teacher should make, as the first moment of planning, a critical review of how the is the group if students to know at what stage the general process is. This provides feedback regarding the group when needed to effectively prevent needs and anything that might be of benefit to students. Mainly, the revision should be done on the variable of the overall course planning, which are as follows:

1. Pay attention: what is the status of the group according to its academic ability to pay attention? What kind of activities would help students focus better in the classroom and how to move in between smoothly?
2. Understand: what is the situation of the group towards the understanding of the basic elements of the subjects? What should be reinforced and how? On what basis could we advance? What activities or means would help to reach a better understanding of concepts and how to integrate them systematically? Etc.
3. Judgement: How is the group when it comes to critical thinking? What is the level of the discussion, the quality of the questions, the depth of the arguments, the validity of the statements? Etc
4. Evaluate/Decide: How are the ethical implications of what is discussed in the classroom? How does the group advance in its deliberation process? How are decisions made and what attitudes should be strengthened? Etc.

Now, after this reflection, the teacher could start planning. However, are we planning based on the theme of the day according to the objective to be achieved, for example from a "movie or material any other material available", or it depends on the mood we are experiencing? A flexible process should consider a lesson plan based on clear and specific goals.

A general planning template could be as indicated in the chart below:

Chart. Lesson Plan Matrix						
Course:			Topic:			
Date:						
Group:						
	Objectif	Activity	Time	Evaluation	What?	How?
Be attentive – Close attention						
Understand						
Judgement						
Assess /  Improvement						

### Planning a Test/Quiz/Exam

The first essential thing in this case is to plan the quizzes carefully. That said, if proper planning is not followed, such a test would probably have little validity in its results to be measured. First, we should decide what we really want to evaluate. Do we want – for example – to evaluate the cognitive learning that our students have acquired? And if so, is it then to evaluate only low-level cognitive learning (recognized as Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives) or to assess one of the highest levels of cognitive learning (the ones Bloom calls: Comprehension, Application, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation)? In addition to cognitive learning, could we also assess students' emotional learning? And if so, what are the desirable levels to evaluate? (Receiving, responding, valuing, organizing or characterizing – according to the Taxonomy of Educational objectives) or evaluating students' psychomotor development, coordination, etc.... perhaps the intention is to want to measure the academic success or the interest of the students or their aptitude or a combination of these? It is important then for the teacher to be clear in his mind what he would like to evaluate, because if he does not, he can easily end up with a test that has little validity.

Being well aware of the objectives of a test will help the teacher to build valid exams. The consultation of basic rhetorical references as for example the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives and the way of how learning is divided into different types and levels, should also enable the teacher to better build tests. When the course outcomes are well developed, the task of deciding the content of any test remains relatively simple. After deciding which types and levels of learning to evaluate, it is time to list the general themes or areas of interest, such as certain teaching units; chapters of a book; perhaps the analysis of a play, a book, an opera or a painting; the main topics or sub-topics listed on the lesson plan, etc. It is probably advisable not to list more than four or five topics to cover in one test (Collings, Johansen and Johnson 1969:81-82)

Now, it's time to choose the type or types of the exam's questions that are convenient. This means for example, multiple choices, true or false or association which represent the recommended option. Finally, it is the collection of didactic tools (Garça and Pereira, 2009). An example could include textbooks, teacher's notes, exercises books, reference books, maps, globes, newspapers, magazines, pictures.... etc. The list could be endless depending on the course, type of test and creativity of the teacher. Some of these mentioned steps can be done mentally. This is particularly applicable for more experienced teachers or for those who have taught the same course many times. The key is to know how to specifically plan the educational content.

After all what has been mentioned, a fundamental part of this process requires that – in the first instance – the evaluator clearly identifies the learning objectives established in the curriculum. This implies a well located in

one of the existing taxonomies or classifications that serve as a basic repository. This process needs active teaching, which motivates students instead of keeping them in a passive behavior, imitating and receiving all that has already been done and prepared. It is a daily practical teaching accompanied by an objective reflection, allowing to personally create a way of planning and assessing that is realistic, practical, complete and honest. A way that focuses more on human beings than on content, objectives and certifications, having a shared vision and a conscience of professional ethics

### **Recommended Readings**

1. Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluations. *The Program Evaluation Standards. How to Assess Evaluations of Educational Programs*, 2a, ed., Sage, USA 1994

This book proposes a standard set of standards for evaluating educational programs. These standards are the result of the work of 16 professional associations, which have been tasked with evaluating various educational program evaluation systems in the United States. This work culminated in the issuance of a document – March 15, 1994 – aimed to identifying evaluation principals that promote better program evaluation. In this book, the reader can find a detailed description of standards grouped into four categories: utility, viability, ethics and accuracy.

2. Isaac, S. and W. Michael, *Handbook in Research and Evaluation. A Collection of Principles, Methods, and Strategies in Planning, Design and Evaluation of Studies in Education and Behavioral Sciences*, 3a. ed., EdITS, USA, 1995.

This manual provides the evaluator with a good compilation of principals, methods and strategies for planning, design and evaluation studies in the fields of education and behavioral sciences. It presents the basic methodological concepts in a clear and brief way, while explaining the advantages and disadvantages of each method of investigation and evaluation of each model. Although the reader understands different types of methods, places special emphasis on the application of statistical techniques for measuring and analyzing data.

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