

Six Important Tips for Beginning and Ending the Lesson

Veneranda HAJRULLA

University “Ismail Qemali” of Vlora, Albania

Department of Foreign Languages

venerandahajrulla@yahoo.com

Marsela HARIZAJ

University “Ismail Qemali” of Vlora, Albania

Department of Foreign Languages

marselaharizaj@yahoo.com

Abstract

The University of Vlora “Ismail Qemali” takes great pride in its student teaching program. It has outstanding partnerships with schools throughout the South west region of Albania. In all cases, student teachers have the opportunity to work with outstanding experienced teachers in a cooperative relationship.

The student teaching experience, in most cases, is both intense and exhilarating. After many years of learning, students get a chance to test their teaching skills in a comprehensive way, in an active classroom and with real students. During the process, students will realize their areas of teaching strengths and weaknesses, before heading out to look for a full-time school employment. Generally teacher courses often include a unit on “lesson planning”, which relates mostly to the selection of the lesson components, and how these will be ordered. So when planning the activities, for a lesson, it is important to do them in a sequence that indicates a gradual progression from simple to more complicated tasks¹. On the other hand, effective teachers strive for a balance among whole-class work, pair work, and individual work.

But it’s important also to think about how teachers, especially student teachers or novice teachers, will “frame” the lesson with effective beginnings and endings. It is a fact that in the early years of teaching, teachers feel a bit scared of the students and they try to be tense and serious at the beginning of the lesson. Novice teachers think that being serious at the beginning, will help them gain authority later?! It may take too long to learn to relax and smile. They forget that a serious or neutral expression on teacher’s face, does

¹ P. Ur, *Grammar practice Activities* Second Edition (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

not convey a neutral message to the students, it conveys a negative one, which can be easily changed by a smile, that is the first important tip for the beginning of the lesson.

This paper suggests some practical piece of advice, for pre service teachers, to help them overcome emotions, establish a warm and friendly atmosphere, and begin and end clearly.

Keywords: *lesson planning, tips, novice teachers, frame, pre service teachers, beginning, ending.*

Introduction

English teachers in the course of their teaching careers accumulate a wealth of practical *know-how* about classroom teaching. But some of them feel a bit scared of the students in the early years of teaching and they try to be tense and serious at the beginning of the lesson. Novice teachers think that being serious at the beginning, will help them gain authority later ?! It may take too long to learn to relax and smile. They forget that a serious or neutral expression on teacher's face, does not convey a neutral message to the students, it conveys a negative one (*"I'm here because I have to be, not because I have a slightest pleasure in teaching you!"*), which can be easily changed by a smile, *that is the first important tip for the beginning of the lesson.* Teachers can teach if the learner has some desire to learn and is motivated. Thus, in order to be an active educator²¹ our students should know to:

- be systematic teachers;
- know and apply appropriate models;
- be aware of non-school influences;
- inform others.

This paper suggests some practical piece of advice, for pre-service teachers:

- to help them overcome emotions;
- to establish a warm and friendly atmosphere;
- to begin and end clearly;
- to be professional in dress, manner, and attitude from the first minute they enter the classroom;
- to act professionally in public;
- to use language appropriately (and avoid using slang);
- to speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard;

² J. Cox, *Classroom Management Tips for Novice Teachers*, Teachhub.com (2016).

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- not to be late to class;
- not to come late to staff meetings;
- to know when to compromise;
- to state their opinion - let others know where they stand;
- to have a positive attitude;
- to establish a good rapport with parents and administration.³

Six important tips

It's important to think about how teachers, especially *novice teachers*, will “*frame*” the lesson with effective beginnings and endings. The six important tips that we suggest are:

1. *Start with a smile and use a normal, natural voice;*
2. *Begin and end clearly;*
3. *Give an advance overview and have a well-designed, engaging lesson;*
4. *Teach new material first: review later;*
5. *Don't give homework at the end;*
6. *End with something nice.*

1. START WITH A SMILE AND USE A NORMAL, NATURAL VOICE

If you are like me when teaching a new class, I find myself with butterflies in my stomach, worrying how the learners will develop as well as whether I will get on well with the learners. Scrivener attempts to defuse potential problems arising when teaching a new class.⁴ Every teacher can remember from his/her first year of teaching in the classroom: spending those first months talking at an above-normal range until one day, we “lose” our voice. Raising our voice to get students' attention is not the best approach.

If we want students to talk at a normal, pleasant volume, we must do the same. Sometimes we want to differentiate our tone. If we are asking students to put away their notebooks and get into their groups, we should use a declarative, matter-of-fact tone. If we are asking a question about a character in a short story or about similarities between cultures we should use an inviting, conversational tone. On the other hand, it is important to make eye contact with our students and smile as we greet them at the beginning of the lesson. Nonverbal communication,

³ Teaching Strategies: 5 Questions You Should Be Asking - TeachHUB www.teachhub.com/teaching-strategies-5-questions-you-should-be-asking.

⁴ J. Scrivener, *Classroom Management Techniques* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

including facial expression, body language and gesture, plays a key role in maintaining our relationship with the students in the class.

2. BEGIN AND END CLEARLY

There should be a definite moment when the lesson begins: a dividing line between “not lesson” and “lesson”. And surely there should be a clear point when it ends. If we want our students to listen more attentively, then we must incorporate *active movement* into our lessons. We should try and integrate movement into our lessons. We can do this quite easily with any lesson. For example, if students are learning their spelling words we can have them stand up and snap, clap or sing. If we do not like the ideas of *active movement* in our lessons, then we can try having *brain breaks*. Brain breaks are essentially energizers that get our students up and moving while connecting their mind and body at once.

3. GIVE AN ADVANCE OVERVIEW AND HAVE A WELL-DESIGNED, ENGAGING LESSON.

This tip is most important. Perhaps you’ve heard the saying, “if you don’t have a plan for them, they will have one for you”. It’s better to run out of time than to run short on a lesson. Bored students equals trouble! If the lesson is poorly planned, there is often way too much talking and telling from the teacher and not enough hands-on learning and discovery by the students. We all know engaging lessons take both serious mind and time to plan. Particularly with teenage and adult groups, it is important to provide the class at the beginning with information about what’s planned for the lesson. Students like knowing the plan: it gives them a reassuring sense that they know where they are going and helps to keep the lesson process orderly and purposeful.

4. TEACH NEW MATERIAL FIRST: REVIEW LATER

In principal, teach new or more difficult material early in the lesson, when students are at their freshest. Then go back and do a quick review of it at the end of the lesson, after we have spent time doing other things. (*Does it happen so, in our school contexts?! Of course not, in the majority of cases. Teachers start with homework checking, then reading or questions, and only at the middle of the hour, they start explaining the new material.*)

5. DON’T GIVE HOMEWORK AT THE END

If we know we have a homework assignment to give, we should explain it in the middle of the lesson and make sure students have noted it down. We shouldn’t leave it until the last minute. From my long teaching experience, I also suggest my student teachers to write the homework given, on the blackboard. Students see it with a different script (*teacher’s script*) and it’s easy to be remembered.

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6. END WITH SOMETHING NICE

Just before closing the lesson, try to find something pleasant to do or say so that our students leave the classroom with a smile: a funny story, a compliment on what students have managed, or on their behavior, an interesting fact about English, a new website that might interest them etc.⁵

Conclusion

Through this paper we provided some very important tips for student teachers, pre-service teachers and novice teachers. Most of them look easy when are read, but hard to be realized. Experienced, veteran teachers and teacher trainers will always smooth the way for student teachers. The areas of classroom teaching being tackled in the paper include the opening session of the lesson, teachers presentation and ending of the English lesson, but for teachers the best “recipe” is the classroom experience and his own teaching style. To be really good at teaching they need to find their own teaching style, and choose the methodology that suits them.

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⁵ P. Ur, *Penny Ur's 100 Teaching Tips* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).