



Pearson

# Z poradnika praktyka

*Twoja dawka inspiracji  
na cały rok!*



## *Quo Vadis?*

*The role of setting and accomplishing goals in teaching.*

Much has been said and written about what it is that makes us, humans, unique. Is it language? Well, that idea went down like a stone in a pond when chimpanzees were taught sign language. The use of tools? Same story, when it turned out that chimps use sticks to dig out termites out of their holes. So, what is it that makes us truly unique? It's being able to imagine and plan the future. Imagining the world as it isn't right now, and as it has never been in the past, is a feature that in fact defines our humanity.

Planning is not only an ability unique to humans, as opposed to the rest of the animal kingdom, but also an activity that gives us a sense of stability and even happiness. Why? Because being able to imagine and plan the future makes us feel in control. In the context of teaching and learning English, this means giving the students a feeling of control over the process of learning by showing them what the future will look like – and for learners the future is about being able to communicate effectively in a given situation.

We all know that learning is a journey. Learning a language is a little bit like a round-the-world trip: an incredible experience you really look forward to, and which promises to make you a better person, but at the same daunting because there is so much that goes into it. Learning a language is a very long and arduous journey, with the final goal of being able to speak English hardly visible on the horizon, seemingly so far away and almost impossible to attain.

For language learning, as much as for travelling, what we need is a roadmap. It's not enough to give students a happy feeling of control by letting them imagine themselves speaking C2 English when they are just starting to learn the language. This will not give them a feeling of

control we all want, but rather a feeling of hopelessness when faced with the impossibility of achieving this huge goal.

If we want to give students the feeling of having any degree of control over this seemingly endless process, we need to help them by setting shorter-term goals: goals for a year, a month, a week, or a lesson. Lesson aims, as well as weekly or monthly aims are goalposts, little pins on their roadmap to achieving communicative competence. If we show students not only how far they can go, but if they also know what the goalposts are, there is a far bigger chance that we will help them unleash the effort which is a necessary ingredient to effective learning.

This in turn supports the development of a growth mindset – an idea that your abilities, talents and intelligence are not set in stone but that you can develop them through learning. For those of you who are interested in exploring the differences between the fixed and the growth mindset, and why it's so important to help students develop the latter, I strongly recommend Carol Dweck's eye-opening book "Mindset".

Planning is not just about knowing what your destination is, but equally importantly, it's about knowing how you want to reach this destination. In language learning and teaching, what exactly IS the destination? For a long time, in ELT we talked about teaching students the tenses, the lexical set of "travelling", or rules for using articles in English, etc. These are very valid aims, but only if they serve a far wider end – that of helping our students to learn to communicate effectively in English.

Knowing the rules for formation of Past Simple and Past Continuous is not going to help you to talk about your amazing holiday experience. Having said this, it's equally difficult to be very accurate when talking about this amazing holiday experience, if you don't know how to use these two tenses to tell an engaging story. In other words, goals in terms of real-life communicative skills must be supported by language which students will need to master on the way to effectively exercising these skills.

Here's an example lesson aim from "Roadmap" B1 unit 2:

*The goal of this lesson is for students to describe their past experiences. To help them achieve this, they will revise the past simple and past continuous in the context of telling stories.*

There are three key components in this aim: a communicative skill ("to describe a past experience"), the tools (the language needed: past simple and past continuous) and situational context (telling stories). Clearly, the focus is on providing students with tools they will need to handle communication in a given context, rather than on "what to do in a lesson".

In addition, an aim formulated in this way stresses the fact that communication does not happen in a vacuum – there is always a context, a communicative aim and need.

Here's a fragment of the lesson aim as formulated for the very first unit in Roadmap B1:

*The goal of this lesson is for students to get to know each other by asking and answering questions. To help them achieve this....*

What language tools do you think students might need to communicate in order to get to know each other? Yes, Present Simple and Present Continuous come to mind. What about context? How about exchanging personal information on jobs and hobbies. So here is how the lesson aim has been formulated as a whole:

*The goal of this lesson is for students to get to know each other by asking and answering questions. To help them achieve this, they will revise the present simple and continuous in the context of exchanging personal information on jobs and hobbies.*

How we formulate aims will have a huge impact on students' perceptions of what it is that they are learning in their English course: learning about language or learning to use the language. This in turn will influence students' sense of purpose.

Setting appropriate goals is one thing, but how do we ensure that these are followed through? Teachers have developed a variety of methods for ensuring that planning is not just done on paper, but that it becomes an integral part of the learning process. One of these ways is through student reflection. We know that student reflection on the learning they have done supports the growth mindset and helps students become effective, life-long learners – a set of characteristics necessary in the highly changeable world today.

Consider this example reflection at the end of the unit in which students were learning to talk about past experiences (please note that these are instructions for the teacher):

### **Reflection on learning**

Write the following questions on the board:

*How did you feel talking about your story?*

*What did you do well in this lesson?*

*What do you need to spend more time on? How will you do that?*

Put Ss in pairs to discuss the questions. When they have finished, ask if anyone wants to share their ideas with the class.

It's quite interesting to see that there is no direct reference to the language tools in this reflection exercise, and that the exercise focuses as much on the content as on the learning process. Yet when looking at what went well and what students think they need to spend more time working on, they need to go back to what the explicit aim for this lesson was: *The goal of this lesson is for students to describe their past experiences. To help them achieve this, they will revise the past simple and past continuous in the context of telling stories.*

This type of reflection is an essential part of assessment for learning – the kind of assessment which helps both the teacher and the student to modify the learning process according to the immediate needs of the students. It's not enough to ask, "what do you need to spend more time on?". For this reflection to really contribute to learning it's essential to ask, "how will you do that?".

Setting aims is vital. But this will remain a futile exercise if we don't go back to the aims we have set and look at how successful we and our students have been in achieving them. If learning is a journey, and you're planning to drive to Copenhagen, it's perhaps not very helpful if you don't use a roadmap or a navigation system and end up in Vienna.

*The content of this article has been largely inspired by two books: "Mindset" by Carol Dweck and "Stumbling on Happiness" by Daniel Gilbert. Example lesson aims are taken from a Pearson coursebook "Roadmap" B1.*

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