

Unity in Planning: LOTE Essentials

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Lesson planning is an essential part of teaching, whether it be in arts, sciences, mathematics, or foreign languages. A well-constructed lesson relies on an understanding of current learner knowledge, an idea of where students will be at the end of the class, and a lesson syntax (pathway) that leads to this end. In foreign language education, many instructors use a lesson plan template, whether formal, as in PACE (Donato & Adair-Hauck, 1994), Interactive (Shrum & Glisan, 2005), a district-approved model, or a personal template that makes efficient work of lesson planning. While any carefully considered lesson plan model is effective in creating the structure on which to hang activities and the exploration of linguistic elements of the language, a model does not necessarily ensure that learner language acquisition strategies are activated. We suggest that if looked at as a linear computational progression, lesson plans lack the recursiveness necessary to promote successful language acquisition. In this paper, we explore lesson planning principles that augment the coherent nature of lesson plans by ensuring cohesion. Overall, these principles can be arranged under an overarching concept, thematic integrity, that centers and grounds lesson plans. More specifically, we suggest that thematic integrity is ensured by grammatical unity, content cohesion, and subject matter recursivity.

Our paper, therefore, is not intended to promote any specific lesson plan model over others. Rather, we propose that thematic unity, made up of the maxims of grammatical accord, lexical harmony and recursiveness, and holistic integrity, will enhance the effectiveness of any lesson plan that is constructed with a coherent focus on real-life communicative outcomes. We believe that the concepts promoted herein will assist instructors in conceptualizing and realizing lesson plans that facilitate language acquisition by creating a thematic and unifying thread, grammatical and content-based, that will weave through the lesson thereby strengthening the fabric of learning and teaching.

Lesson Planning – An Overview

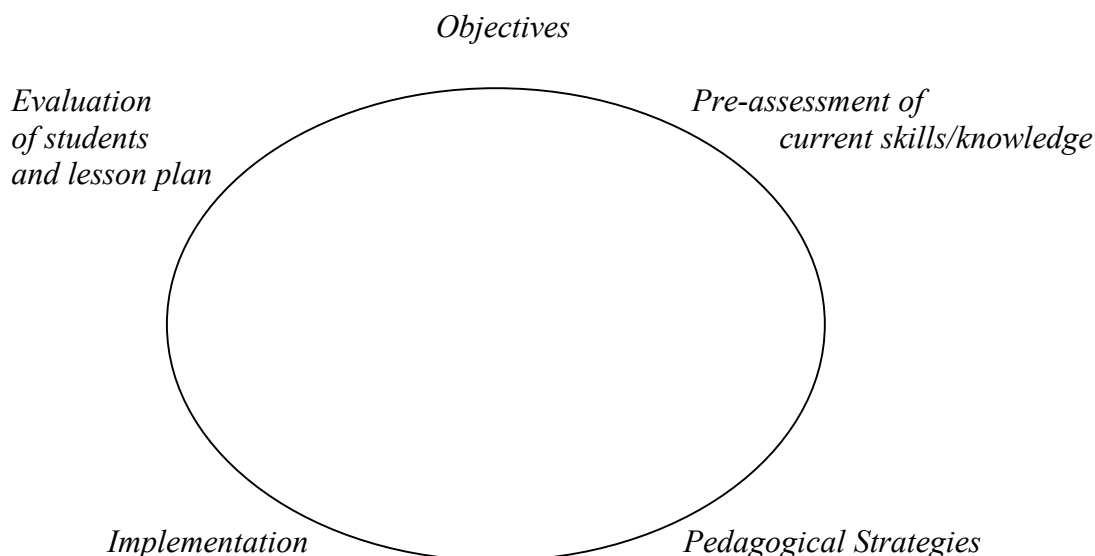
Educators distinguish among various stages of instructional practices. In a series of books and articles outlining his elaboration theory, Charles Reigeluth (1987; 1992; 1999) suggests five essential areas that educators, consciously or not, consider as they develop the scope and content of courses. Whether on a daily basis or as an overall assessment of a program's success, instructors and administrators consider the design (choosing the best method), development (creating instructional units), implementation (applying methods of instruction), management (understanding how to manage methods), and evaluation (assessing results). Each of these areas holds vital importance in the educational act; however, the development and implementation phases are the two that present daily challenges and opportunities to practicing education professionals. Indeed, these two elements form the basis for lesson planning and when used, in harmony, form the backbone upon which learning occurs.

Lesson planning, it is true, differs from instructor to instructor. Some educators, whether they be seasoned or younger professionals, simply form a mental checklist in their heads and rely on instinct and the dictates of the daily classroom experience to guide classroom activities. Others adopt a more formal lesson planning model and note, in rather minute detail, the sequence of activities and the time allotted to each. In both cases, however, instructors determine objectives for the class, assess existing learner “knowledge,” and create a plan, including

pedagogical strategies, to manage the distance between the two. Instructors engage in two levels of lesson assessment. First, they determine the best means, whether formal or informal, to assess to what extent the target objectives were achieved, as well as to understand from what point to begin the next lesson. Instructors also evaluate the lesson plan and assess whether the elements of the lesson supported the learning objective and consider potential changes to the lesson's activities or structure. This recursive planning (see Figure 1) allows instructors the time and opportunity to couch each lesson within the linear construct of an overall curriculum while also privileging the recursive nature of daily and weekly instruction.

The value of lesson plans, however, is not limited to their importance in mapping and planning for instruction. They also preserve a record of instructional practices (Jensen, 2001) and allow for active consideration of personal pedagogical practices, serving, in short, as a tool for reflecting upon successes, failures, and changes in personal pedagogy over time. It is clear, then, that lesson plans are not static documents. Rather, they are living artifacts that inform current practice and future endeavors.

Figure 1. Recursive Lesson Planning



While there is little doubt about the importance of lesson plans, they have not, contrary to what one might believe, always been a formal part of teaching. In fact, lesson plans did not enjoy widespread acceptance until the mid-19th century, when German psychologist Johann Herbart developed a five-step approach to lesson planning. This systematic and structured approach to teaching included preparing the learning terrain, presenting material, associating material to previously learned information or to life experiences, generalizing beyond the classroom, and finally, applying to real-life contexts (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2008, p. 124). Beyond this lesson plan map, Herbart also called for planning that defined what was to be taught, associated facts into a seamless whole, provided systematic ordering of material, and ended with methodological application of the material to life situations (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2008).

When closely examined, it appears that these principles served as the basis for the Tyler Rationale, the planning program created by Ralph Tyler (1949) that influenced, and continues to influence, generations of teachers from kindergarten to higher education. Tyler, using lessons

learned from the curriculum planning and evaluation models that he developed during his position as the evaluations direction for the Eight-Year Study (Tyler & Smith, 1942), suggested four essential questions that educators must address:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Although Tyler (1949) originally used these questions as an organizational trope for his courses on curriculum and instruction, he soon published them in the short, but important book *Basic Principles of Curriculum Design* (Tyler, 1949). The four questions, simple to understand and intuitively appealing, influenced overall curriculum design as well as lesson planning. Indeed, for Tyler (1949), lesson planning and instructional practice revolved around the creation of objectives that could be easily measured and accomplished by the end of a class period. Although the Tyler Rationale has been harshly criticized for its linear and normative nature, the simplicity and accessibility of the model have nonetheless centered contemporary pedagogy in objective-oriented instruction, a reality that is as present in LOTE classes as it is in other disciplines.

Functional Lesson Planning in the LOTE Classroom

As noted above, within the field of foreign language education, the Tyler Rationale has been the basis long used for the creation of lesson plans that focus on objectives and immediate learner outcomes. In the state of New York, this is easily seen in the state's LOTE syllabus, a document that describes teaching objectives not in terms of linguistic elements (grammar points), but rather in relation to the realization of functional language use. That is to say that lessons should not be centered on the study of a certain verb form or category, such as –er verbs in French or –ar verbs in Spanish. Rather, the lesson objective should be a function (e.g., asking for information) within a given context (e.g., public transportation). This allows instructors the possibility of developing vocabulary and grammatical concepts within meaningful contexts, thereby facilitating language acquisition.

This conceptualization of lesson planning also meshes well with our notion of thematic unity. To be effective, a lesson must introduce material, whether cultural, lexical, or grammatical, in a manner that provides the necessary input to activate language acquisition strategies. Indeed, the essential role of any lesson is the provision of meaningful and contextualized input, not the completion of mechanical drills. By input, we mean Van Patten's (2003) definition of input as the "language that a learner hears (or reads) that has some kind of communicative intent" (p. 25). Learners, in short, must pay attention to both form and meaning as they decode utterances and attempt to make understandable language that is perhaps slightly beyond their current linguistic competence. Good input, however, is not simply waxing eloquently in the second language (L2) with the expectation that learners will benefit from the flood of vocabulary and grammar forms provided, however haphazardly. Good input, quite to the contrary is pre-planned, comprehensible, meaning bearing, simplified, and highly redundant. In addition to these qualities, Diane Larsen-Freeman (1985) notes that good input possesses other defining characteristics.

Input to [nonnative speakers] is shorter and less complicated and is produced at a slower rate than speech between adult [native speakers]. This input tends to be more regular, canonical [that is, typical] word order is adhered to, and there is a high proportion of unmarked patterns. . . . High frequency vocabulary is used. . . . The input is higher pitched, it shows more intonation variation in pitch, and it is louder in volume.
(Larsen-Freeman, 1985, p. 436).

If we believe, as we do, that input is essential in the language acquisition process, it follows that lesson plans offer the framework for structuring a class so that input, in its various forms, can be provided. Good lesson plans are objective-based and ensure that learners are given grammar, vocabulary, cultural information, and pragmatics necessary for the completion of a final, culminating, or extension activity. Lesson plans, in essence, consider the developmental levels, linguistic and psychological, of learners and scaffold material in such a way as to ensure that daily objectives can be achieved. Yet, even this structured approach to lesson planning is insufficient to ensure high-quality instruction. Indeed, as Herbart suggested over a century ago, a proper and appropriate map, provided by an exemplary lesson plan, is not sufficient to ensure a good journey.

To be truly effective, lesson plans must be thematically unified. This unity is more, however, than simply making connections to an overall topic. In foreign language education, lesson plans must not veer from activities that promote students' abilities to notice and engage a single grammatical point or high-frequency vocabulary.

In short, foreign language lesson plans should be nestled within parameters that promote unity and that provide a psychological filter that allows recursive interaction with materials. In the next section, we explore thematic unity corollaries that, when used in the creation of lesson plans, ensure that activities are unified throughout the lesson, creating a thread of content (grammatical and lexical) that provides the foundations for noticing, internalizing, and successfully acquiring a foreign language.

Thematic Unity Corollaries for Lesson Planning

Lesson planning, as we suggest, is essentially a framework on which instructors lay effective teaching strategies that promote second language acquisition. The three elements of thematic unity that we suggest can, therefore, be considered corollaries that help promote the goals of lesson planning and instructional intentions. As noted above, the effectiveness of input, the fuel of language acquisition, is predicated on repetition of language within diverse contexts, both linguistic and situational. Thematic unity, likewise, ensures that materials and teaching strategies are united in a recursive manner that allows for multiple engagements with content. The lesson planning maxims that we argue to be important in language teaching are grammatical accord; lexical harmony and recursiveness; and holistic integrity.

Maxim #1: Grammatical accord requires the treatment of a single grammatical element within an activity or exercise.

Maxim #2: Lexical harmony and recursiveness requires that vocabulary items be limited in number and repeated often throughout the lesson.

Maxim #3: Holistic integrity requires that the lesson plan possess the elements that will build toward the stated goals and objectives.

These maxims allow for a unified lesson plan that satisfies the requirements for effective language teaching while also meeting the needs of learners who crave consistency and repetition.

Maxim #1: Grammatical Accord

Grammatical accord is concerned with centering instruction on a single grammatical point and using examples that are sufficient in number to activate learners’ abilities to notice grammatical features while internalizing morpho-syntactic structures. As Lee and Van Patten (2004) note, this type of processing “is concerned with those psycholinguistic strategies and mechanisms by which learners derive intake from input,” where intake refers to those elements of overall input that are used to promote language learning (pp. 137–138). We know, in addition, that learning occurs best when instructors focus on a single set of linguistic elements. This focused approach, or what we have called unity, allows learners to engage input with certain expectations, including the notions of consistency and recursiveness. We believe that when learners are focused on a single linguistic element, they are more likely to notice and internalize the morpho-syntactic structure presented.

With this knowledge of the importance of repetition and unity, we can begin to develop activities that conform to the dictates of the maxim of grammatical accord. We suggest, in essence, that all grammar activities relate to a single concept while responding to the very real needs of learners for repetition. To illustrate the first maxim, consider the following sets of activities from a lesson plan that purports to fulfill the functional objective: students will use French to discuss their weekend plans.

Set A

Activité A. Lisez les affirmations suivantes et décidez si elles sont vraies ou fausses.
(*Read the following statements and decide whether they are true or false.*)

	Vrai	Faux
1. En été, mon père partira en vacance. (<i>My father will leave on vacation this summer.</i>)	[]	[]
2. Nous serons contents quand l’école termine. (<i>We will be happy when school ends.</i>)	[]	[]
3. Ce soir, je mangerai un steak. (<i>I will eat a steak tonight.</i>)	[]	[]
4. Avant de quitter l’école, vous finirez vos devoirs. (<i>You [plural or formal] will finish your homework before leaving school.</i>)	[]	[]
5. Demain, tu feras la cuisine. (<i>You [singular] will make food tomorrow.</i>)	[]	[]

Activité B. Choisissez le bon verbe, puis conjuguez-le au futur simple.
(Choose the correct verb, and then conjugate it in the future tense.)

1. Je/J' _____ (prendre / aller) à la plage.
(I _____ (take / go) to the beach.)
2. Nous _____ (obéir / prendre) à nos parents.
(We _____ (obey / take) our parents.)
3. Elles _____ (boire / faire) la cuisine.
(They [females] _____ (drink / make) food.)
4. Vous _____ (écouter / avoir) la musique.
(You [plural or formal] _____ (listen / have) music.)

In these two activities, we notice an important structural problem stemming from a lack of grammatical unity. All future tense verb paradigms, -er, -ir, -re, and irregular, are either provided to students as input or are used in an activity that asks student to make form-meaning connections. The lack of consistency, even if the instructor were to provide 10 or more phrases per activity, renders the exercises inefficient in drawing learners' attention to the form under consideration and making valid inferences with regard to structure. Activity A also violates an essential characteristic of good input; it fails to concentrate on and fully explore one grammatical form before moving to another. Indeed, by using a variety of person-number forms (e.g., first person, plural; second person, singular), the unity needed to activate noticing skills and language acquisition processes is not present. Learners gain a vague, but incomplete understanding of the form-meaning continuum and are left to create their own, often wrong, grammar rules.

When contrasted with Set B, below, we notice significant differences, including a concentration on one form per activity and the use of contextualized and situational vocabulary that helps scaffold learners toward the ultimate goal of the lesson, the use of French to discuss weekend plans.

Set B

A. L'étudiant typique à John Marshal High School. Imaginez ce que l'étudiant typique à ce lycée fera le week-end prochaine. Puis, lisez les affirmations suivantes et décidez si elles sont vraies ou fausses.

(The typical student at John Marshal High School. Think about what the typical student who attends this school will do next weekend. Then, decide whether the statements are true or false.)

Le week-end prochain, l'étudiant typique à ce lycée . . .
(Next weekend, the typical student at this school . . .)

Vrai Faux

- | | | | |
|----|--|-----|-----|
| 1. | ... mangera avec ses amis.
<i>(...will eat with his friends.)</i> | [] | [] |
| 2. | ... écouterà la musique.
<i>(...will listen to music.)</i> | [] | [] |
| 3. | ... travaillera avec son club du lycée.
<i>(...will work with his high school club.)</i> | [] | [] |

4. ...**regardera** un film au cinéma. [] []
 (...will watch a movie at a movie theater.)
5. ...**vistera** un musée en ville. [] []
 (...will visit a museum in the city.)
6. ...**naviguera** sur Internet. [] []
 (...will surf the Internet.)

B. Et vous? Quels sont vos plans? Indiquez quelles affirmations sont-elles vraies pour vous.

(And you? What are your plans? Indicate which of the following statements are true for you.)

- [] 1. Je **mangerai** au restaurant avec mes amis ou ma famille.
(I will eat in a restaurant with my friends or my family.)
- [] 2. Je **visiterai** un musée ou une site historique en ville.
(I will visit a museum or a historic site in the city.)
- [] 3. Je **quitterai** Buffalo pour une autre ville.
(I will leave Buffalo for another city.)
- [] 4. Je **jouerai** au football américain avec mes amis.
(I will play football with my friends.)
- [] 5. Je **regarderai** la télé avec ma famille.
(I will watch TV with my family.)

Qu'avez-vous en commun avec un/e voisin/e? Pour parler des choses qui vous avez en commun, servez-vous de « nous ».

(What do you have in common with a partner? To talk about the activities that you have in common, use "nous.")

C. Un week-end chargé. Jean et ses amis ont beaucoup de projets à faire le weekend prochain. Choisissez le bon verbe, puis conjuguez-le au futur simple.
(A busy weekend. Jean and his friends have lots of plans for next weekend. Choose the correct verb and conjugate it in the future tense.)

1. Jean et ses amis _____ (parler / quitter) la ville pour aller à Toronto.
(Jean and his friends _____ (speak / leave) the city to go to Toronto.)
2. Nathalie, la copine de Jean, elle _____ (étudier / prêter) le français parce qu'elle a un examen lundi.
(Nathalie, Jean's girlfriend, _____ (study / loan) French because she has an exam on Monday.)
3. Marc, son meilleur ami, il _____ (travailler / naviguer) sur Internet pour trouver une bonne voiture à acheter.
(Marc, his best friend, _____ (work / surf) the Internet to find a good car to buy.)
4. Sa mère _____ (visiter / emprunter) les musées en ville avec sa fille.

- (His mother _____ (visit / loan) museums in the city with her daughter.)
5. Jean et ses amis _____ (chercher / manger) quelque chose de bien à faire samedi soir.
(Jean and his friends _____ (find / eat) something fun to do on Saturday night.)

The differences between the two sets of activities are clear! The first set fails to focus on a single form during each exercise and provides little recourse to assist learners in the exploration of form-meaning connections. Quite to the contrary, the second set demonstrates the maxim of grammatical accord by concentrating on a single verb form during each exercise. As architects who understand second language acquisition processes, instructors must create activities that treat one grammatical element at a time rather than a mixture of forms that fail to provide the coherent input required to assist learners in their exploration of linguistic elements. When instructors consider and use the maxim of grammatical accord, as demonstrated above, learners are encouraged to notice form-meaning connections while also exploring the grammatical constructs being studied.

Maxim #2: Lexical Harmony and Recursivity

Studies of the acquisition of vocabulary among second language (L2) learners have clearly indicated a correlation between the number of times learners encounter a word and their chances of retaining the lexical item for immediate and long-term use (Webb, 2007; Saragi, Nation, and Meister, 1978). Although research results are mixed, it has been suggested that learners need to encounter a lexical item a minimum of 8 times (Horst, Cobb, and Meara, 1998) and as many as 20 (Waring and Takaki, 2003) before successful acquisition occurs. Yet, simply encountering a word, as Saragi et al. (1978) suggest, is not sufficient. Lexical items must also be presented in meaningful and varied contexts. These observations lead to the second maxim, lexical harmony and recursivity, which is part of the larger concept of thematic unity. We believe that the repetition of thematically based vocabulary, and not the peppering of large numbers of lexical items in vocabulary lists, leads to successful vocabulary learning.

Pragmatically, these principles are conceived to ensure that learners are exposed to the linguistic input, in the form of vocabulary, needed for language acquisition. We believe that instructors should heed the harmony principle by looking through the vocabulary presented in a chapter, lesson, or unit and culling the important, high-frequency words from the overly long vocabulary lists. In addition, when possible, these lexical items should be a part of the same family of words (i.e., verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc.). Following from this principle, the condensed list or lexicon should be highly recursive; that is, the words should be woven into the lesson so that they appear and reappear consistently and frequently. Together, these ideas target L2 acquisition processes that must be activated and maintained if learners are to assimilate all aspects of the L2.

Seasoned language teachers, constricted by state- or district-approved vocabulary lists and worried about learners' abilities to pass the Proficiency or Regents exams, might be hesitant to shorten vocabulary lists or to repeat the same vocabulary words *ad nauseam*. However, professional language instructors must take responsibility for teaching and not succumb to the velvet handcuffs of canned curricula or state-approved textbooks and syllabi. In short, practicing professionals must make immediate and idiosyncratic decisions about lesson objectives and the quantity of words needed to complete the culminating task or final project. We suggest that no more than 10–15 new words be presented in any single lesson, especially for novice learners, and

that these words be reviewed and repeated over subsequent classroom meetings. Indeed, we believe that quite frankly, over-exposure to vocabulary, as in the presentation of long vocabulary lists with direct English translations, does little, if anything, to facilitate word retention and vocabulary development. Rather, a concentrated focus, within a context and with meaning in mind, facilitates learning more so than rote memorization and one-to-one translations do.

This second maxim, when examined closely, emanates from the empirical research on how learners acquire their lexicon and defines a fundamental pedagogical practice that will reward language learners with a more sophisticated understanding of language and the ability to use vocabulary in accurate and meaningful ways over time. With these concepts as our guide, we can begin to create vocabulary exercises and activities that lead to thematic unity and that promote the acquisition of lexical items through recursive exposure to vocabulary presented in meaningful contexts. As with the first maxim, we maintain that lexical items, as well as grammatical concepts, must be recycled through the lesson in order to provide the coherence and cohesion required for successful acquisition. Looking closely at the activities in Set A (above), we are struck by the lack of continuity and repetition of vocabulary. Only “faire la cuisine” (to cook food) is repeated from Activity A to Activity B. The lack of repetition in diverse contexts renders the vocabulary stale and inaccessible to even the best language learners. Instead of offering the opportunity to bind forms to meanings, the randomness of the vocabulary and the “one-and-done” nature of exposure to lexical items limit learners’ abilities to understand and retain form-meaning connections.

The activities in Set B are aligned with the maxim of lexical harmony and recursivity; that is, they remain faithful to the vocabulary required to complete the final task and repeat the same lexical items from activity to activity, adding only one, or at most two, new lexical items in each new exercise. Looking back to the abbreviated examples in Set B, Activities A, B, and C, we notice that in lieu of a new set of verbs in each activity, there is significant repetition of common words (e.g., manger [*to eat*], visiter [*to visit*], and regarder [*to watch*]) throughout the set. We also see that when new verbs are presented, as in Set B, B2, and B3, the number of new items is not overwhelming. Indeed, we understand that when an activity requires students to determine correct conjugation *and* correct meaning of a verb, we have abandoned the form-meaning connection and wandered into territory that is form dominated. It is also true that the double dose of mental processing heightens the cognitive load, thereby increasing chances of failure and affective distress.

In short, Set B demonstrates a series of activities, embedded within a larger lesson plan and characterized by a thread of vocabulary, verbs and content words, that is woven into the three exercises and serves as the common ground on which to explore and expand understanding of the language. Although new items are introduced in each activity, they are anchored in lexical forms from prior activities and contribute to the expansion of language skills in a context that promotes holistic language learning and language acquisition.

Maxim #3: Holistic Unity

Finally, we propose the maxim of holistic unity. This maxim suggests that lesson plans be guided by efforts to achieve coherence and cohesiveness. As stated above, the central notion of planning effective lessons is understanding the functional purpose of language (providing and/or getting information, giving directions, etc.) within meaningful and realistic situations. When seen in this light, it is clear that good teaching requires educators to deconstruct contextualized functions into sub-objectives that, when recombined in the course of the lesson, scaffold skills

and build toward final communicative goals. In short, lessons must unfold within a structure that uses and reuses previously accessed information as the instructor scaffolds the lessons toward a summative assessment of the learning objectives. We believe that if Maxims #1 and #2 are closely followed, Maxim #3 should be organically present in a fully integrated and unified lesson plan.

It is our belief that a unified lesson, focused on a central theme and an understanding of final objectives, creates the foundations on which learning best occurs. Not only, in our opinion, does unity provide the basis for the structured input that pushes learners to internalize linguistic forms (Lee & Van Patten, 2004), it also creates the framework within which recursive vocabulary use and presentation occurs. Together, the flood of linguistic and lexical input helps activate L2 acquisition processes that facilitate learning. Without the concentration of input, unified around a theme and containing multiple looks at the same material, learners are left adrift in a chaotic vacuum devoid of the richness of language required for acquisition.

As lesson plans evolve, it is clear that constant checks of the appropriateness of activities vis-à-vis stated lesson objectives can help ensure holistic unity. By keeping in mind the final goals, instructors are pushed to create activities that scaffold toward the lesson's objectives (Duffy & Roehler, 1986; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). In essence, like scaffolding, adherence to holistic unity ensures that a lesson plan is structured in such a way that extraneous information is non-existent, thus keeping learners focused on the goals of the lesson and motivated by the knowledge that they will be able to complete the assigned task.

Conclusion

We have attempted to outline a rational argument for creating foreign language education lesson plans and activities that are couched within the framework of thematic unity. We are certain that the benefits of the coherence, cohesiveness, and recursiveness of these lessons are substantial and will provide the foundations on which learners can successfully activate L2 acquisition strategies. While some might argue that we expect learners to do more with less, we strongly believe that lesson plans that apply the three maxims conform to the characteristics of good input, enabling learners to notice the linguistic and lexical items that we, as educators, are attempting to teach more effectively and efficiently,

Although the maxims of grammatical accord, lexical harmony and recursivity, and holistic integrity do not constitute, in themselves, a lesson plan, they are applicable to any lesson plan that favors the creation of objectives and the use of sub-goals (scaffolding) in working toward a final extension or culminating activity. Furthermore, while we do not explore thematic unity as it applies to listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities, the same overarching principles apply. Instructors should, in short, find the means to use and re-use vocabulary, cultural artifacts, and other linguistic forms in all activities. In this way, a common thread is woven into the fabric of the lesson, assisting students in the arduous task of learning a second language in instructed settings.

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