

# A Lesson in Lesson Planning & Reflective Teaching

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For a moment I was frightened to see a sharp deep cut on the forefinger of one of my grade 10 biology students. Zaeem got injured by the scalpel he was holding. I was worried about the cut; I was even more worried that the scalpel that might have been contaminated with chemicals during dissection procedures. I immediately let him go back to school to seek First Aid. I feared other students might also hurt themselves. I stopped the activity and brought the students back to their classes.

It was a pleasant day in spring. I took my students out of the classroom to a nearby forest patch for field teaching. The topic was ‘Artificial Propagation of Plants’. I was supposed to teach this topic in winter but I postponed it till the spring season. Most of my students have agrarian family backgrounds therefore the field activity would be very relevant. Out of the three artificial methods of plant propagation (grafting, layering and cutting), we chose to do tissue grafting first. After a brief theoretical discussion, I divided the whole class into groups of four, provided each group with materials including scalpels, adhesive tape, polythene plastic and thread and allowed them to go to the nearby green area. My students were enthusiastic. They disappeared among the trees. I first demonstrated the grafting method to my students and then, asked them to carry out the activities independently. After a couple of minutes Zaeem got a cut on his finger.

My first reaction was to blame the student. Then I realized that it was not the student but I who was responsible. A scalpel is not a good substitute for a razor for cutting the plant tissue. Its lower sharp surface curves upward. That makes it unsuitable for such an activity. It may

easily slip over the branch and that is what happened with Zaeem. Had I properly selected the tool required for this activity, he would not have gone home with a bandaged finger that day.

For a long time, this incident flashed through my mind. I reflected over it. I realized that many times materials are not chosen appropriately for classroom activities. Proper lesson planning fosters students' learning. Perhaps many times I have gone to my class without proper lesson planning, causing long-lasting damage to my students. Each time there may not have been a visible cut, but there may be hidden bruises to a child's spirit of curiosity, unseen scars to his enthusiasm for learning, due to weak lesson planning.

We work with curious young minds and therefore, teaching is a trying profession. It requires passion and commitment. It is wrongly assumed that novice teachers need to plan lessons and not the experienced ones. Teaching is a complex process of both transfer and creation of knowledge, of skill acquisition and attitude formation. The teacher, new or experienced has to go in prepared. Was my lesson plan for grafting tissue appropriate for learning? The answer, unfortunately, is No.

I did not ignore the incident due to which the activity did not go well. I planned the same activity for next day again but differently. Firstly, I selected carefully the right materials replacing the scalpel with the grafting razor. Secondly, I took some first aid material (bandage and antiseptics etc) with me. This time it turned out to be a wonderful activity. Students enjoyed it. Two months later we visited the place again and saw that grafting tissue had become a part of the plant and had started to burgeon. Thus my students had succeeded in grafting the tissue with their own hands!

My nine years of teaching tell me that students learn least from unplanned lessons. Effective lesson planning is a blend of theory and practice. It brings change in the form of students' deep engagement with learning. In the above event I tried to amalgamate theory and practice but I realized that in the end of the class I left my students with the theory only, due to the mishap. But the lesson I learnt from this event is worthwhile. Although we can not eliminate the element of human error from our lives altogether but we must try to reduce it by learning from the past, planning ahead and remaining optimistic for better ways always.

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