

Thoughts about newspaper lesson plans.

As Siham noted during the discussion - this activity lends itself to a wide variety of purposes - developing literacy skills; searching for information on the Web; teaching a piece of software; and presenting information in a particular form for a given audience. This of course makes it a very useful classroom activity - but it also means that you (the teacher) need to be very clear about which particular purpose you are using it for -and matching the pupil activities to this purpose.

All the lesson plans focus on helping pupils to understand the difference between different kinds of newspapers - in particular tabloid and broadsheet. However the approaches are different and something can be learnt from all of them. The plans also differ in the extent to which the learning objectives **are** learning objectives - in one or two cases some of the LO are activities.

- A starts with real examples, using a class discussion to convey the initial idea. The pupils then complete a template for a newspaper in Word. Of note here are the programmed breaks in the activity to allow reviews of the work while it is in progress. This is a useful technique - remember how most groups radically revised the 'look' of their newspaper after seeing Abi and Alex's example. Evidence of the extent to which learning objectives are met comes from the final product.
- B Does not use computers, preferring instead for the pupils to produce paper-based templates of the required 'look'. This is a very useful idea as many pupils find it easier to draw on paper rather than on the screen - it also radically reduces the distraction of trying to 'fill-in' the text boxes. This group also encourages pupils to make their templates by tracing outlines from existing newspapers. Again this is a really good idea - the pupils are extracting the essence of the layout from particular examples. The final activity in this lesson is where the pupils classify different layout presented to them under a given set of heading - this provides evidence of the extent to which the learning activities are met, which the tracing activity cannot.
- C Makes reference to the different content and language used in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers - an important idea as newspapers vary enormously in this at least as much as they do in layout. This aspect also links very strongly to literacy development. The lesson involves pupils using existing templates in Word and Publisher to create their own styles - again an good idea which should allow the pupils to focus on the intended learning outcomes rather than spending lots of time creating an outline from scratch, but I am not sure that Publisher has suitable *newspaper* (cf newsletter) templates. It is interesting to note that were the intended learning outcomes different - for example to learn some aspect of the software, then this approach would not be suitable - again stressing the importance of matching activities to what you want the pupils to learn. One final point. The pupils are asked to compare the Word and Publisher for the intended purpose - it is worth thinking through what kinds of answers you would expect pupils of this age to give to this question.

- D Is a tricky lesson plan to comment on as there is not sufficient detail to know what it is that the pupils are being asked to do. All that there is is "Pupils to work on task" and "Ensure pupils on task and assist where required." Other than the activity for the final 5 minutes, the lesson plan could be for almost any lesson. Two thoughts about this: 1) With this level of detail it is not possible to evaluate the extent to which the activities match the intended learning outcomes. 2) *As written* the teacher's primary activity seems to be 'fire-fighting' i.e. monitoring activity rather than 'pushing' learning. Were some of the Key Questions things to be asked *while* the pupils were doing 'the activity' this would be less of a worry - then the teacher would have more of a framework for helping individuals learn - rather than simply ensuring that they were doing something.
- E Adopt an approach different from all the others - the pupils 'mark-up' the different parts of the newspaper and then use this information to answer a very interesting series of questions, including for example " What is the ratio of text : image in both? Language formal or informal? News content Editorial focus – national or international? Bias? (these questions include key words to learn)" This lesson plan also makes explicit reference to the school's literacy policy
- One final thought about this lesson - on the activity where pupils write their evaluation of a piece of work on the bottom and then pass it to another group. I once taught in a school where, half way through the year, the school moved from a single 'report booklet' for each pupil to teachers writing their reports on individual pieces of paper. This made a huge difference - when written in a single booklet the reports on any given pupil were far more homogeneous than when teachers wrote their reports not knowing what others had written. I wonder whether something similar might happen with this activity - worth trying in order to see.