

Teaching Norwegian to Beginners: Six Principles to Guide Lesson Planning

Anna Krulatz
Sør-Trøndelag University College

Introduction

Teaching a foreign language is no simple task. There are several factors to consider, from curriculum design, to material selection and lesson implementation, to assessment. The challenge, however, is even greater, if you are teaching a less commonly taught language such as Norwegian – a language spoken by fewer than six million native speakers, used almost exclusively in one country, and with a limited number of available pedagogical materials. Under such circumstances, the task of preparing high quality communicative lessons is immense, even for an experienced language instructor.

The goal of this article is to present how a successful language lesson can be developed even if one is using a textbook that does not foster communicative competence. As an example, I am using a unit from a Norwegian textbook for beginners: *På vei*, often used in Norwegian as a second language course for adults in Norway. The lesson focuses on routines and times of the day, and it concludes with the students comparing and contrasting their daily routines with a partner. Prior to this lesson, students have learned to provide basic information about themselves (where they come from, what languages they speak, what they do for work), expressions for greetings and goodbyes, basic verbs relating to daily activities such as *'snakker'* (to speak), *'kjører'* (to drive), *'kjøpper'* (to buy), *'jobber'* (to work), *'leser'* (to read), *' skriver'* (to write), ordinal numerals, meals, some food items, some basic prepositions and locations, words for family members, and subject and object pronouns for all persons. If you were to closely follow the textbook in teaching this unit, you would begin by teaching the students how to tell time, then briefly go over some verbs to express daily routines, listen to and read a text titled *'Jeg står opp klokka seks,'* a narrative about Monica's day (Monica is one of the characters in the book), and finally ask the students to produce a similar narrative

about their own day. Such a lesson, however, would not provide the students with the skills necessary to independently compose a narrative nor would it promote the development of communicative competence. Instead, it would leave both the teacher and the students frustrated and with a sense of failure because:

- 1) There are no clear goals stated at the beginning of the lesson, so the students do not know why they are doing these activities; the teacher may have some goal(s) in mind, but these are not explicitly stated.
- 2) The connections between the individual activities in the lesson are not clear (e.g. how to tell time is followed by a presentation of (apparently) random verbs).
- 3) Students are expected to read and understand the text without much attention given to whether the text is a) interesting and b) possible to understand. There are no comprehension questions or other activities accompanying the text.
- 4) There are no opportunities for meaningful interaction.
- 5) Students are expected to construct a text about their own day without any assistance other than the text which they can use as an example (i.e. more or less copy).
- 6) The only form of assessment is the final product: the narrative.

Instead, I would like to provide an example of a lesson guided by specific objectives, designed using the Into-Through-Beyond approach to lesson planning (Brinton & Holten, 1997) and supported by current second language acquisition (SLA) theory. The lesson begins with solid doses of comprehensible input, builds up on students' background knowledge, offers multiple opportunities for interaction, and provides a communicative goal and appropriate scaffolding to prepare the students for meaningful interaction. The careful design of the activities also creates opportunities for the teacher to conduct ongoing assessment and thus to adjust, add or remove activities as the lesson is being delivered. Thus, the lesson presented here follows these principles:

- Principle 1: The lesson is guided by clearly specified objectives.
- Principle 2: Activities in the lesson follow a logical sequence.
- Principle 3: Comprehensible input is provided.

- Principle 4: There are multiple opportunities for communicative practice.
- Principle 5: Scaffolding and strategies are provided to enable students to perform at a higher level.
- Principle 6: Ongoing assessment informs lesson design and implementation.

In addition to the six guiding principles listed above, the lesson plan described in this article also adheres to the following characteristics of communicative language teaching (Brown, 2000, pp. 266-267):

- Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not just restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
- Language techniques are designed to engage learners in pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
- Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times, fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
- In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

Below, a detailed discussion of the six principles follows, including justification from SLA research and the account of how they guide the lesson plan I am proposing.

Principle 1: Objectives

According to Echevarría, Vogt, and Short (2008), one of the characteristics of effective instruction is that it is guided by “concrete [...] objectives that identify what students should know and be able to do” (p. 24). Lesson objectives can be derived from the common core,

from the course syllabus, or from language proficiency guidelines defined by institutions such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) or the Council of Europe. However, the objectives specified in these sources are typically extremely broad, and often stated in terms of “knowledge” and “understanding,” constructs that are not very helpful when measuring student performance (i.e. determining whether the objectives have been attained or not). For instance, the Council of Europe states the following objectives for level A1 (basic user), the target language learner of the unit from *På vei* discussed here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2012):

- Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.
- Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has.
- Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Clearly, because these objectives are supposed to guide a whole course and not a single lesson designated for level A1 learners, they only specify learning goals very broadly, and the task of narrowing them down is left to the teacher. Further help can possibly be found in textbooks. In fact, more and more foreign language texts state specific objectives for every unit. This indeed is the case with *På vei*. The objectives for the unit in question are as follows (p. 5):

- *Snakke om tider på dagen* (To talk about the times of the day).
- *Snakke om daglige gjøremål, jobb og avtaler* (To talk about one’s daily activities, job and appointments).

While this is a good starting point, I still see these objectives as problematic because they can easily lead to a lesson plan in which individual activities are very loosely connected. In addition, these objectives tell us very little about how they will be attained and in what ways the attainment will be measured. Finally, they also do not reflect all of the characteristics of communicative language teaching as

defined by Brown (2000). They do not warrant that students will engage in meaningful communicative practice rather than focusing on the forms needed to discuss these topics. Of course, it is important for language learners to be able to state what time of the day it is and also to talk about different activities they engage in, but this should be done during meaningful interaction. This is how the objectives above can be rewritten to reflect measurable outcomes that will be demonstrated by students, and to create opportunities for communicative language practice:

By the end of the lesson, the students will:

- Match pictures with corresponding verbs that describe daily routines (Objective 1).
- Listen to a short text about a person's typical day and arrange the activities in a correct order while listening (Objective 2).
- Write short sentences about activities they perform on a typical day, including the times of the day at which these activities are performed (Objective 3).
- Compare and contrast their day with a partner using a Venn diagram (Objective 4).

Each of these objectives is measurable, i.e. the teacher can assess, either during or after class, whether the objective was met or not. For example, the teacher can monitor the class and determine if the students are matching the pictures and the verbs correctly, and she can collect the graphic organizers to check whether the students were able to find similarities and differences in their daily routines. In addition, these objectives lead to meaningful communicative activities and promote unrehearsed interaction (Brown, 2000): the students describe their day because they need to compare what they do with what their partner does; they need to tell each other about their day in order to complete the graphic organizer. Finally, these objectives invite creation of a sequence of logically connected activities, where each step leads to the next, and in which all steps need to be completed for the final task to be successful.

Principle 2: Logical sequence

A well designed language lesson is comprised of activities that follow a logical sequence, one activity leading to the next, and all the activities unified by a common theme. Brinton & Holten (1997) propose an Into-Through-Beyond model of lesson planning that does just that. The model was designed for content based instruction (CBI), a communicative language teaching framework in which language is taught through meaningful, interesting and engaging content. While promoting CBI for teaching less commonly taught languages is beyond the scope of this paper, I believe that the Into-Through-Beyond model provides an approach to language lesson planning that is easy to follow and that can aid in creation of any foreign or second language lesson. During the first stage of the lesson (Into), students' background knowledge is awakened, or activated, so that they can create stronger links between old and new information. It is during this stage that the teacher should make students curious about the content of the new lesson as well as state the objectives. The goal of the next stage (Through) is to present and practice new language and content, including activities with a new text or texts, and grammar and vocabulary practice. Finally, in the last stage (Beyond), students apply newly learned language skills and content knowledge in new contexts, for example by doing a project. While assessment is ongoing, this last stage best reflects whether the students have learned the new language to a degree which allows them to use it in communicative, unrehearsed situations. The following outline provides a list of activities that can be implemented in the beginning Norwegian lesson at hand.

1. Into

- a. Hand out pictures of various activities (e.g. people walking, someone cooking, someone reading a book, eating, watching TV, verbs students should already know, but also some of the new verbs such as '*å ta en dusj*' (to shower), '*å skynde seg*' (to hurry), '*å vaske*' (to wash) which appear in the text the students will listen to). Display these verbs on Smartboard in a random order. Ask the students to

label as many pictures as they can individually or with a partner (Objective 1).

- b. Using a wall clock (or a paper clock with movable hands), and pictures illustrating different times of the day, introduce the following terms:
 - i. om morgenen – in the mornings
 - ii. om formiddagen – during late mornings (between 10 am and noon)
 - iii. om middagen – at noon / every day at noon
 - iv. om ettermiddagen – in the afternoons
 - v. om kvelden – in the evenings
- c. Hand out paper clocks with the times of the day the face of each clock. Ask the students to list the activities they typically do during different times of the day using Post-it notes and to post them on their clocks.

2. Through

- a. Now that the students' background knowledge is activated and new vocabulary introduced, they are ready for a listening task (Track 42, *På vei. Tekstbok*). Distribute slips of paper with simplified sentences from the text, e.g. *'Monica står opp'* (Monica gets up), *'Hun tar en dusj'* (She takes a shower), *'Hun går på job'* (She goes to work), *'Monica ser på tv'* (Monica watches TV), etc. Explain that they will listen to Monica tell about her typical day (*Monica forteller om hennes typiske dag*). Tell the students to arrange Monica's activities in the correct order in a table as they listen (Objective 2). Figure 1 shows what the table could look like.

Om morgenen	1. 2. 3.
Om formiddagen	4. 5. 6.
Om middagen	7. 8.
Om ettermiddagen	9. 10.
Om kvelden	11. 12. 13.

Figure 1: An example of a table to help students organize the activities from the reading about Monica's day.

- b. Play the track 1-2 times, depending on the students' need. Then display the table on Smartboard and go over the answers with the class (Objective 2).
- c. Now tell the students to open the books and play the track one more time as they follow the text in the book. If they have questions about any other expressions in the text, explain them using body language, visuals and Norwegian, providing translation only if necessary.
- d. Using the verbs they have listed in step (c) of the Into stage and the sentences describing Monica's day, students should now be able to write simple sentences about their own activities throughout the day (Objective 3). This is a scaffolding strategy to prepare them to talk about their own day with a partner (Objective 4). It also provides an opportunity to practice newly learned language.

3. Beyond

- a. Hand out copies of Venn diagram. Tell the students to stand up and find someone who has a different occupation from their own. Model asking and answering the question '*Hva gjør du?*' – "*Jeg er...*" (What do you do?/What is your job? – "I am a..."), which the students already know from a previous lesson. They sit down with their partner.
- b. Explain and model with a volunteer: they tell each other what they do in the mornings, late mornings, at noon, etc. and record the similarities and the differences in the graphic organizer (Venn diagram) (Objective 4). To provide continuity, the notes can be used as a warm-up (Into) activity during next class, and to introduce the conjunction 'men' (but), e.g. '*Jeg drikker te om morgenen, men Benito drikker melk*' (I drink tea in the morning, but Benito drinks milk).

Principle 3: Comprehensible input

According to Krashen (1985) and Krashen and Terrell (1983), comprehensible input is a sufficient condition for second language acquisition to take place. While I believe that other factors such as modified interaction (Long, 1985, 1996) and comprehensible output (Swain, 1993; Swain & Lapkin, 1995) are also crucial – and are therefore captured in Principle 4 below – providing large doses of comprehensible input has been widely acknowledged as effective in second and foreign language instruction (see, for example, Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2008). The strategies a language teacher can use to make input comprehensible to the students include using visuals, demonstrations and body language; slowing down the rate of speech; enunciating carefully; repeating; and providing synonyms and paraphrasing. In the lesson outlined above, the teacher uses pictures to review known vocabulary and to introduce new vocabulary before asking the students to complete a listening task; she replays the monologue as needed; she provides a written script of the listening and uses visuals, body language and simple paraphrases to explain

unknown words. In other words, she makes the language understandable to the students using a variety of both linguistic and non-linguistic means.

Principle 4: Communicative practice

As Swain (1993) and Swain and Lapkin (1995) argue, production of output (i.e. speaking and writing) fosters second language acquisition. This principle is also strongly supported by the characteristics of a communicative language classroom (Brown, 2000), including productive and receptive practice in unrehearsed situations. For this reason, objective 4 and the supporting activity (comparison of a daily routine with a partner) have been included in the lesson plan above. In contrast to the activity suggested in *På vei: Fortell om en vanlig dag for deg* ('Tell me about your typical day') which gives the students no communicative purpose ('Listen to your partner' can be considered meaningful practice, but not communicative practice (Richards, 2006, p. 16)), the comparison/contrast activity provides the students with a clear goal: find similarities and differences. As a result, the new language forms – verbs in the present tense – are not the central focus of the lesson. Rather, they provide the students with the tools they need to accomplish a communicative task.

Principle 5: Strategies and scaffolding

The use of scaffolding has been originally justified in the writings of Vygotsky (1978) and his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the metaphorical space in which children can accomplish more because of the scaffolds provided by adults. This metaphor has been extended to second language learning. Scaffolding and strategies such as providing language learners with a word bank or sentence frames, modeling a task, showing how to organize information using a graphic organizer or how to better learn new vocabulary using flash cards are just a few ways of creating the ZPD for foreign or second language learners. At least three examples of strategies and scaffolding can be found in the lesson plan presented here: students writing down sentences before telling about your day; the teacher modeling how to find a partner and how to complete the Venn diagram; and students

using the Venn diagram to organize ideas. The goal is to assist the students in gaining independence to finally accomplish the communicative task on their own.

Principle 6: Assessment

The final principle that guides the lesson plan presented here is assessment. It is perhaps not as clearly visible in the lesson plan as the other five principles because in a way, it overlooks them all. There are many reasons to conduct assessment, from high stakes assessment leading to correct course placement or course completion, to low stakes self-assessment to help students understand their strengths and weaknesses. The most relevant assessment goal in this lesson is to inform the teacher about the effectiveness of instruction – about what is working well and what could be improved, as well as about how to design future lessons. It can be done informally at several stages of the lesson. For example, the teacher can monitor and spot check when the students are matching verbs with pictures, or when they are discussing their daily activities with a partner. The teacher is also using Smartboard to ensure students have arranged the activities in Monica's day in a correct order. Finally, it would be possible to collect the graphic organizers to provide feedback on language points such as spelling and correct verb forms. In all, these ongoing assessment strategies help the teacher determine if the lesson was effective, and if not, what changes should be implemented and how the next lesson should be designed.

Conclusion

Teaching languages such as English, German, French or Spanish is facilitated by a plethora of instructional materials, several of them available for no charge on the Internet. On the contrary, teaching less commonly taught languages poses an additional challenge to teachers who have to create their own supplementary materials in an effort to aide often poorly designed textbook chapters. The goal of this article was to provide a framework to language lesson planning guided by six principles and to illustrate each of the principles with an example from a Norwegian lesson for beginners. The six principles foster

creation of a lesson guided by clear and measurable objectives, which leads to logical organization of the activities. During the delivery of the lesson, students are provided with large doses of comprehensible input, multiple opportunities to practice language in communicative tasks, and strategies and scaffolding to enhance their performance. Finally, the ongoing assessment principle ensures that the teacher constantly monitors, evaluates and adjusts the lesson to better meet the needs of the students. Of course, we could argue that it is crucial at this point to create better learning and teaching resources for the non-dominant languages of the world, and I wholeheartedly agree with this point. That, however, is an immense endeavor, and until it is done, teachers will have to continue to rely on their own creativity and resourcefulness. The model presented here might help them in this task.

References

- Brinton, D. M. & Holten, C. (1997). Into, Through, and Beyond. A Framework to Develop Content-Based Material. *English Teaching Forum*, 35(4), 10-21.
- Brown, H.D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2012). Retrieved from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_en.pdf.
- Echevarría, J., Vogt, M. & Short, D. (2008). *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners*. The SIOP Model. Boston, New York: Pearson.
- Ellingsen, E. & Mac Donald, K. (2012). *På vei. Tekstbok. Norsk og samfunnskunnskap for voksne innvandrere*. Livonia Print: Latvia.
- Krashen (1985). *The input hypothesis. Issues and implications*. New York: Longman.
- Krashen, S. & Terrell, T. (1983). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. Ritchie & T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Long, M. (1985). Input and second language acquisition theory. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 377-393). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Swain, M. (1993). The output hypothesis: Just speaking and writing aren't enough. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 50, 158-164.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (1995). Problems in output and the cognitive process they generate: A step towards language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 16, pp. 371-391.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.