

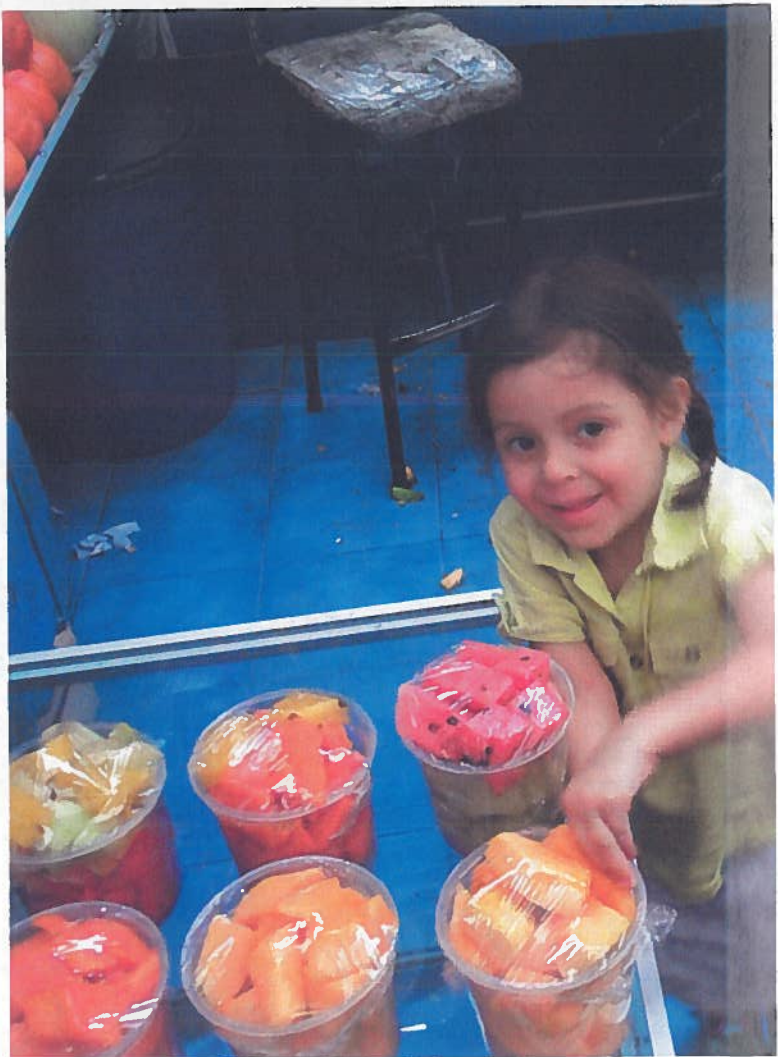
Lesson Planning for Once-Per-Week Spanish

Linda Smrokowski

If you have ever taken a leave from teaching, you might or might not have had a chance to reflect on the job you just left. I left Holy Trinity School's once-per-week second language program after nine years to spend a year overseeing the renovation of our home. The year stretched into two years, which gave me time to consider which aspects of my teaching at Holy Trinity were best suited to a once or twice per week program. As of fall 2005, I am now in a new school teaching Spanish five days per week to 7th and 8th graders. Because many once or twice per week programs continue to exist and many devoted teachers find themselves in these programs facing a particular set of challenges, I hope to share ideas that worked for me at Holy Trinity. One such idea is to write very detailed lesson plans.

- Use the top page (p.1) for writing your step-by-step plan. Use the inside left page (p.2) to note special information you need to refer to during class, e.g. questions for an oral quiz or detailed instructions for a game. The inside right page (p.3) is for two sets of notes, one titled "Next time" which are your notes for any activities to include in the next session. The second set, "Soon" is for your ideas for

Your students might not be seniors enrolled in a college seminar but planning a lesson for a once per week language class is like preparing for a once per week college course. You want to squeeze in as much learning as possible. To keep continuity from session to session, you want to remember how you phrased things the last time. A week is a long time in terms of what the teacher as well as the students can forget. You don't want to forget to bring to class any teaching materials you need. If the room is unavailable until the start of class, you need ways to quickly set up the learning environment. Let's assume that you teach your exploratory language "seminar" once or twice a week in an elementary or a middle school. You most likely teach without a textbook and therefore need tricks for keeping a vast array of papers and props organized.



I suggest it is worth the time to write a very detailed lesson plan, especially if you teach several "seminars" to different classes during the week and need to keep a lot of lessons straight. My lesson plans are so detailed that for the "target language only" portion of a class, I practically write a script. This way I present things just as I intend to present them. I want my beginning students to hear mostly familiar Spanish prompts from me, without too much *ad lib*. Another reason for writing a detailed plan is that, unlike college, my school has no passing time between periods. The classroom is occupied by another teacher until the start of class and so I need a checklist to help me set up quickly.

Here are some tips for an effective lesson plan:

- Devote a single sheet of paper to each class period, card stock if possible. Fold it in half and place the long side up and down. It is now a mini-book with four pages: a top page, 2 inside pages and a back page.

activities that you want to include over the next several weeks. These notes you jot down as thoughts strike you, either while writing the lesson plan or right after teaching the class. If it's nearly a week before you write the next plan, you'll find you have all your thoughts right there at

hand and next week's plan should take shape quickly.

- Devise a standard heading for the top page such as:

Grade 6
E 1 17 de febrero del 2004
Session #24
Day #138



The session number reminds me to be realistic. Although it's mid-February, we have only had 24 class meetings so far this year. The "Day #" means what day it is in the school year. I keep track of this because I write the number on the board to use in our opening conversation routine.

- Write close to the heading any reminders to individual students, e.g., "Carlos to schedule make-up exam."
- Now list top to bottom the activities of the lesson. Use quote marks or highlighting to indicate any target language remarks that you want to be sure to phrase a particular way.
- Next to some activities you might want to draw a box

inside which you write word for word any data that you need to copy onto the chalkboard right before class. If, instead, the information is on a poster that you've prepared ahead of time, then draw a graphic symbol or icon of the

poster—this reminds you to slap it up on the wall before class and also to refer to it while you're teaching.

- Put a code such as "AP" next to any of the boxed-in information or poster icons to mean that you will require students to copy this information verbatim into their apuntes (notes). Putting "AP" on your plan also reminds you during set-up to write that same "AP" code on the board next to the information. This will then cue students to copy down only those items with the "AP" code.
- Turn the top page sideways. Along one of the long edges, write or draw any items that you need to have available in the classroom for this particular class. I made up icons for CDs, audiocassettes, books, handouts and maps so that my eye can quickly scan whether I have set out the needed items. For example, in a typical class I might need two audiocassettes, one map, one set of handouts and one set of graded papers to return.

As with anything you practice repeatedly, writing highly detailed lesson plans becomes easy and fast. Once it is routine, you will find that you save time, wrack your brain less and forget fewer things. You will also conduct a smoother class. By filing away each plan chronologically, you'll have a valuable record to consult when it comes time to plan next year's lessons.

Linda Smrokowski studied foreign language methods under Constance Knop at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, earning a B.S. in Education, an M.A. in French, and many graduate hours in German and Spanish. She is currently teaching middle school Spanish and would love an excuse to learn Chinese. She worked for IBM in the 1980s and now has three children at home, one with special needs.

Spanish But Once a Week — ¡Caramba!

While on a leave after nine years of teaching, I had time to reflect on my own practice, which had to meet the challenges particular to a once- or twice-per-week program. A visit to another school is a great way to find ideas that you can use in your own classroom. I invite you to take a virtual tour of Holy Trinity School's exploratory Spanish classes online at www.NNELL.org.

This feature, by Linda Smrokowski, is available at the NNELL website, www.NNELL.org.