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Crafting lesson plans that reflect teacher agency and student voice

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This article explores the perspective on using external lesson plans for English lessons, reflecting on the Science of Learning (Immordino–Yang et al., 2025) versus the sciences of learning (Claxton, 2021; Watson & Busch, 2021). Amidst current debates in educational methodologies, it is important to balance structured approaches aligned with the Science of Learning with the inherent joy and creativity of teaching. Teacher agency in lesson planning empowers teachers to adapt these plans to inspire curiosity and foster critical thinking, ensuring education is more than test scores (Wilson, 2025). By integrating diverse methodologies from both the Science of Learning and the sciences of learning, teachers can cultivate dynamic and engaging classrooms that nurture the whole child, equipping students for a compassionate and thoughtful future.

Introduction

In the current educational landscape, lesson planning has garnered attention, as evidenced by the Victorian Lesson Plans and the AERO Practice Guide (AERO, 2025). The Department of Education offers sequences of endorsed English lessons aligned with the new Victorian Teaching and Learning Model (VTLM 2.0) (VCAA, 2025), creating pressure in some schools to adopt these externally prepared plans. While these resources aim to standardise instruction and alleviate unmanageable workloads, they also address teachers' perception of limited support from schools and systems. Moreover, the provision of scripted lesson plans for English teachers can be viewed as a response to the urgent shortage of qualified English teachers, where increasing levels of out-of-field teaching pose challenges (Creagh et al., 2023). While these lesson plans provide resources for English teachers, it is important to balance these lesson plans with creativity and agency for teachers.

The Science of Learning vs The Sciences of Learning

The Science of Learning prioritises a universal body of research that employs classical scientific methods to determine what works for most children most of the time (Immordino–Yang et al., 2025; Darling–Hammond et al., 2020). This approach involves using standardised measures and randomised clinical trials to facilitate direct comparisons between students, aiding in understanding what is effective for the majority (Troyer, 2022). The objective is to identify general principles regarding how most or all students learn optimally (Huang et al., 2025). This research is often rooted in fields such as neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and allied health (Hare et al., 2023). Research from large scale studies aids in identifying the optimal conditions for learning for the majority of students, while acknowledging variability in learning styles of different students.

One of the advantages of the Science of Learning is its ability to inform the development of instructional methods that align with how the brain processes and retains information (Breakspear et al., 2024). This knowledge helps teachers to design lessons that maximise engagement and comprehension, employing techniques such as spaced repetition, active learning, and formative assessment (Darling–Hammond et al., 2020; Ramirez & Olson, 2020). In contrast, the sciences of learning argue that learning is too complex and context dependent to be captured by universal rules. Instead, they draw on diverse bodies of evidence shaped by specific environments, cultural factors, and local conditions (Reinders et al., 2022).

Theoretical tensions

While the Science of Learning adopts a broad, large scale perspective, and it seeks common patterns in learning processes, the sciences of learning focus on understanding the local characteristics of learning (Watson & Busch, 2021). This approach explores differences, with proponents arguing that effective learning must account for diverse contexts rather than relying on a single overarching framework (Bitterman et al., 2023). The field often employs research methodologies that aim to understand students as complex individuals. Instead of quantifying learning, qualitative studies delve into teacher and student voices, providing insights into the conditions under which learning and teaching occur. These debates came to the forefront in the United States with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001), which prioritised funding for randomised control trials (Brass & Holloway, 2019).

As educational theories have evolved, so too have perspectives on how learning should be approached in the classroom. This ongoing dialogue has shaped educators' understanding and implementation of teaching strategies, influencing classroom practices. The impact of these discussions is evident in today's classrooms, where a variety of teaching methods are employed to cater to different learners. As teachers strive to balance evidence-based practices with innovative approaches, the history of these debates provides valuable insights into the dynamic nature of education and the ongoing quest to enhance learning outcomes (Townsend & Bayetto, 2021).

Implications for lesson planning

The current debate between the Science of Learning and sciences of learning has significant implications for lesson planning. Teachers are encouraged to strike a balance between structured, evidence-based lesson plans and flexible, context-driven approaches. This involves integrating universal principles with adaptations that consider the unique needs and backgrounds of students, ensuring that lessons are both effective and relevant. Teachers customise their lesson plans to teach their students at point of need (Hornstra, 2015). This practice allows teachers to reflect the diversity of student experiences and diverse ways of knowing. By incorporating elements that cater to different cultural, social and individual factors affecting learning, teachers can create more inclusive learning environments.

Teaching is not a 'one size fits all', thus teachers often incorporate multiple methods of teaching into their lesson plans (Andayanie et al., 2025). This allows teachers to cater for student voice and agency. By creating opportunities for students to express their opinions and make choices about their learning, teachers can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility in their students (Vaughn, 2021). This empowerment enhances motivation and encourages critical thinking (Ramaila, 2024).

When teachers plan their own lesson plans, they create opportunities for professional learning by reflecting on the lesson they have delivered. By regularly assessing the effectiveness of their plans and making adjustments based on feedback and observations, teachers can ensure their students' learning is effective.

While the Science of Learning is important for informing effective teaching practices, it is essential that this recognition does not come at the expense of teacher agency, student voice, and the joy in learning.

Teachers need to have ongoing professional development to stay informed about the latest research and debates on education. This enables them to apply new insights in their lesson planning. This will support teachers' agency and their self-confidence that they are equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students (Wilson et al., 2021).

The significance of joy in schools is important for students' engagement (O'Hara et al., 2025). While explicit instruction offers clarity and structure, its effectiveness is enhanced by teaching approaches that encourage creativity and joy (Cronqvist, 2024). Joyful learning experiences ignite students' passion and curiosity. They encourage students to be curious to explore new concepts. By embracing a variety of teaching methods, teachers can cater to different learning styles and interests, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive. Joy in learning fosters a positive attitude towards education, promoting resilience and lifelong love of learning (Starko, 2021). By valuing joy alongside explicit instruction, teachers can create a balanced and enriching experience that prepares students for a holistic education of the whole child based on academic and personal endeavours (Sze & Harrison, 2026)

By valuing joy alongside explicit instruction, teachers can create a balanced and enriching experience that prepares students for a holistic education of the whole child based on academic and personal endeavours

Conclusion

While the Science of Learning is important for informing effective teaching practices, it is essential that this recognition does not come at the expense of teacher agency, student voice, and the joy in learning. The Science of Learning provides valuable insights into optimising instructional methods. However, teachers must be given the flexibility to adapt the provided external lesson plans to adjust their teaching to meet their students' point of need. Empowering teachers to exercise their professional judgement fosters creativity and engagement in the classroom. Hence, a balanced approach that integrates the Science of Learning with these vital elements ensures students are engaged and teachers feel empowered to do what they do best: to teach the students in their care and nurture a love for learning.

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