Ideas for Developing a Personal EFL Teaching Curriculum

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A simple guide for novice teachers on how to develop personal teaching curriculums for their classes when no standardized curriculum is available.

**Introduction**

A curriculum is a vital part of TEFL classes. It provides a focus for the class and sets goals for the students throughout their study.A curriculum also gives the student a guide and idea to what they will learn and how they have progressed when the course is over.Although many large English schools have set curriculums for their teachers the smaller, more abundant English schools tend to let their teachers decide in what way the classes are conducted. This latter method, as free as it may sound, can cause difficulties for those who have little or no experience teaching English. From my experiences I have seen many novice teachers hired into English schools and told to teach as they see fit. Although they exert great effort and enthusiasm in teaching English to their students, they soon end up distressed because they can not find enough material to fill up a lesson because of difficulties finding expansion activities.This is one time where the personal teaching curriculum can come into play. A personal teaching curriculum is composed of basic English conversation topics which can be used without a textbook or as a reinforcement to text centered lessons. This article is designed to give new, and seasoned teachers ideas and points on how to develop a personal teaching curriculum and language targets that will, in turn, benefit the students' study goals.

**Putting a Curriculum Together**

Developing a curriculum is no easy task. It requires a long period of research concerning the needs of the student(s) and experimentation. It is important that the teacher keep searching for new ideas to expand their curriculum. The Internet is a great way to keep up with teaching methods and ideas. Utilize EFL/ESL teaching websites as much as possible to keep pace with the EFL/ESL industry and to find new ideas. Also, try to keep a library of teaching manuals and textbooks. Many publishers give frees copies of new textbooks. These can prove to be good resources for expansion activities stemming from text oriented lessons of non-text centered lessons. Most of all don't be afraid to ask questions to colleagues. They either can introduce new ideas or provide useful advice based on experience.  
  
It is difficult to say how much English a student should be capable of doing after the first, second or third year of study. It must be understood by all those studying and supporting other's who are studying, i.e. teachers, that the acquisition of any language other than one's own is a slow process. Furthermore, it is affected by a number of factors including:

* Exposure to the target language by native speakers
* Willingness of the student to experiment with the target language
* Personal confidence in self
* Learning ability
* The amount of vocabulary the student knows

In the case of children one must accept the idea that most of these factors will be ignored or hidden because of the age or maturity level of the child. Therefore, static phrases and vocabulary should be emphasized at the elementary level with minute attempts to expend to language experimentation. Adults, on the other hand, may exert more effort when speaking as they, obviously, have a higher maturity level but this, too, is case by case.  
  
The following section contains focus points teachers might find useful for creating their curriculum. Primarily, this is for children at the elementary level (grades 1-6) but it can be modified for kindergarten, junior high classes and even beginning adults, and can be applied to large or small classes. It provides a basis on what a teacher might want to focus on and assumes that the student will continue with the teacher for three years. The first two years focus on essential language targets for building basic skills while the third year concentrates on practical and spontaneous application.  
  
Teachers may want to consider these grammar and conversation points while developing a curriculum for first year students.

* Making self introductions (i.e. name, age or where the student lives)
* Subjective pronouns
* The "wh" question words what, where and when
* Auxiliary question words involving like, do and can
* Corresponding "yes/no" answers to auxiliary questions
* The use of this and that, these and those
* Tell information such as objects, time, date (w/ month name) and weather.
* Develop a large vocabulary of nouns and basic verbs
* Simple commands
* Understand the basic phonics of English letters

Teachers may want to consider these grammar and conversation points while developing a curriculum for second year students. Also, include time for review of the previous year's lessons.

* Possessive pronouns
* Past tense and present continuous tense
* Make simple sentences using adjectives to modify nouns
* Give more descriptive information about objects, time, etc.
* Understand "wh" question words who, which and how
* Have increased vocabulary to include more verbs and adjectives
* Have an understanding of blended phonics
* Have simple knowledge of English grammar (subject-verb-object) in easily understood concepts, e.g. I like… I want…or I can…

Teachers may want to consider these grammar and conversation points while developing a curriculum for third year students. Also, include time for review of previous year's lessons.

* Have students communicate simple thoughts without prompting
* Get students to ask questions involving the above-mentioned "wh" and auxiliary questions, i.e. "What sports (fruits, games, etc.) do you like?"
* Have students read and understand simple sentences.
* Have students recognize objects and describe them with little pause.

If a student continues to study he or she should have well developed English skills if they have mastered the language targets mentioned above. This means the student has the ability to recognize simple questions and answer them using a variety of objects. Don't worry if the students may still not be able to formulate fluent answers because some may lack adequate daily exposure to English. For most students there are few, if any, opportunities to hear various accents, dialects and pronunciations as well as syntax structures.  
  
Overall, the points mentioned should be used as a blueprint for teachers to create their own method of teaching. Some teachers try to combine their own teaching style and curriculum into their textbook oriented classes. For example, one week might include a lesson with activities particular to the teacher while the next week might focus on the textbook lesson. This is a good method as it gives the students exposure to English outside the textbook. This works very well if the teacher can change the focus of their curriculum to match that of the text series employed by the particular school.

**Using Textbooks as Curriculum Guides**

Good textbooks contain lesson that introduce simple dialogue and expand on it gradually. They are also prime examples on how to build your personal curriculum. The text book can provide the basis of the lesson while your curriculum can help the student to develop skills in order to language beyond what the textbook lesson teaches. I find that text series that employ lesson where the students can change the object of sentences are especially good for teaching students how to use their creative talents to produce real language. The textbook lessons should be clear enough so that the teacher can develop a lesson plan without the use of a teacher's book. An example of a clear lesson might be on giving and receiving things and the use of polite language. Perhaps the page shows a person giving a friend a gift and says "Here you are". The friend takes it and replies with "Thank you". This is followed with "You're welcome".Upon reviewing the lesson in the student text the teacher can quickly become familiar with what the students will be learning and be able to prepare expansion activities based on what the students see in the book. Supplement activity suggestions and expansion ideas should be included in the teacher's book. I have seen step by step instructions on how to teach the lesson and even translations and pronunciation guides on how to say various phrases in the students' native language in many teacher books. This can be helpful for teachers teaching low level classes.

**Reinforcement**

Reinforcement activities are necessary to allow the student to try to use the new language skills in a practical sense.Try including activities that allows the student to use the target language as a native speaker might, i.e. role playing. Games work especially well for children as well as secondary students and, if the right games are chosen, for adults, too. Furthermore, games provide a challenge arena so those who are reluctant to participate in a practice session might be more responsive when the spirit of competition is aroused. Worksheet activities also provide good reinforcement and review. Using a variety of workbooks from different series can provide a wealth of activities for reading and writing.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I feel that it is important for all teachers of ESL or EFL to develop a style which is comfortable for them to teach yet at the same time challenging for the students. Once the teacher gets a feel for developing personal curriculums he or she can start applying their techniques to English for special purposes classes, English test classes and high level conversation classes such as business English. This method only suggests the basic ideas on what things should be considered when developing a personal curriculum. With careful consideration and keeping the student's needs and abilities in mind an EFL teacher can progress from novice teacher to skilled EFL educator.

**References**

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