Customizing Curricula

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Despite MEXT's 2003 mission statement mandating improvement of TEFL methods, materials, and communication between teachers, there is only limited progress towards enabling Japanese to communicate in English. Responsibility falls largely on the "One-size-fits-all" approach of commercial text books purporting instant success, and polarized by foreign texts that inappropriately fuse English language and culture, and domestic texts obsessed with grammar-translation.

Developing Larssen-freeman's local curricula through student cooperation, customized and contextualized to meet immediate needs, may be one way to counter this. Teachers need to embrace responsibility for their classrooms, beginning by investing more time and personal commitment in materials preparation. This can increase students' motivation as they see learning is not mass-produced for teachers' convenience, but live, in turn leading both sides to develop spontaneity. To this end, task-based possibilities hold most promise, extending from basic communication to proficiency exam prepping.

While we can borrow from or customize existing texts, trial and error is our teacher, so the approach emphasized here is strictly do-it-yourself. All the necessary resources for teaching successfully without texts are already at our disposal: the renewed efforts of ourselves and our students in terms of lesson planning, inter-teacher communication and knowing how to elicit and respond positively to learner feedback. The presenter has taught without texts in Europe and Asia, and has 30 years' experience presenting at English conferences worldwide. Through varied examples, he suggests a rubric framework for teaching without texts for attendees to try out in their own situations by advocating local curriculum development.

Research on English Requirements of Early Childhood Education Teachers

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In order to improve the course design of English courses undertaken by students in the field of early childhood education, a questionnaire was sent out to 185 private preschools and kindergartens in the Kansai area in November, 2010. This questionnaire included questions regarding the provision of English classes, foreign children, cultural awareness development and recommended content for early childhood education courses.

An additional questionnaire was sent out to 30 Boards of Education within the Kansai area in order to identify the general English needs of public kindergartens and the responses were compared with the private sector. Although the response rates to the two questionnaires were lower than expected, the results provide useful information for English curriculum developers in early childhood education.

This presentation will briefly summarize the results of the questionnaires and provide recommendations for English courses in early childhood education.