Thematic Syllabus for YL

Syllabus: the choice and organization of course/coursebook content

Syllabus Types

- Structural Syllabus (grammar)
- Lexical Syllabus (vocabulary items, collocations)
- Skills-based Syllabus (listening, speaking, reading, writing – in isolation/combination)
- Functional (apologize, promise)-Notional (size) Syllabus
- Situational Syllabus (Situations where specific language is used: At the restaurant)
- Task-based Syllabus (Real life tasks: using a map to give instructions)
- Topic- based (Content teaching through an interesting/ relevant subject/ topic)
- Theme-based Syllabus

Theme-Based Syllabus

Theme-based teaching has been practiced since the 1960s in UK primary classrooms, where children spend all day with the same teacher. Theme-based teaching requires teachers to choose a theme or topic and then to plan a range of teaching and learning activities related to the theme that incorporated aspects of mathematics, science art, language, history, geography, music and so on. Then, theme-based teaching has been transferred across from general primary education to the teaching of English as a foreign language.

The essential notion of theme-based teaching is that many activities are linked together by their content: the theme of topic runs through everything happens in the classroom and acts as a connecting thread. In the simplest version of theme-based foreign language teaching, a topic provides content for a range of language learning activities.

Effective theme-based teaching is extremely demanding on teachers in both planning and in implementation; knowledge of a wide repertoire of activity types and resources is needed to plan for children of all abilities and to avoid them spending too long on cognitively less demanding activities such as drawing pictures. Skilled management of class, pair work and group work is needed to keep all children actively learning.
Theme-based teaching can be used in large and small amounts and in varying concentrations. It can be adopted for one or two lessons in a week or for several weeks in a term, or could replace the coursebook and syllabus altogether.

Theme-based teaching can be tightly planned in advance or it can be allowed to evolve on-line through dynamic teaching and learning, that changes direction in the light of task outcomes, developing and evolving with the emerging interests of children and teacher.

**Stages of Preparing Theme-based Syllabus**

1. **Finding a theme**
   
   Finding a theme is the easiest part. A theme can come from the students’ current interests, from topics being studied in other classes, from a story or from a local/international event.

2. **Planning the content**
   
   **a. Brainstorming:** A theme can be considered as including:
   
   \[
   \text{People + Objects + Actions + Processes + Typical Events + Places}
   \]
   
   The ideas gathered through brainstorming can be grouped into sub-themes or topics. From these sub-themes/topics, planning can move to identifying texts of different discourse, activities and language goals.
   
   A brainstorm can also be used to produce guiding questions (Journalist’s questioning) for the sequence and content of the activities.
   
   **b. Web:** Building up web linking activities to areas of the school curriculum: Math’s, technology etc.
   
   Brainstorming and webbing processes will help the teacher identify the types of discourse typically associated with the theme and sub-themes and can be carried out with the children rather than by the teacher alone.

3. **Planning the Language Tasks**

   After the theme and the content have been decided on, a language learning perspective should be determined. That is, language learning tasks and their sequence are organized into stages and fitted to the timing of the lesson.
Advantages of Theme-Based Syllabus

1. Theme-based work is likely to introduce new vocabulary items with the theme providing support for understanding and recall (retention). Vocabulary items that have already been introduced in the coursebook may be met again in the new context of a theme (recycling).

2. It offers a natural use for a wider range of discourse types, both spoken and written. Themes can include different aspects of the same topic that require different types of discourse. School-activities produce a range of discourse types such as graphs, charts, reports and commentaries.

3. Theme-based work lends itself to the production of displays and performances of various types.

Theme-based teaching is very demanding if it is well done and the students may refer to L1 during pair work or group work activities to complete the tasks. Thus, it requires excellent classroom management skills to keep students on task.

Theme > Sub-themes (Topics) > Texts (Discourse) > Language Tasks

Example

Theme: Space
Topics: The Solar system - Earth’s satellite – Space travel – Nine planets – Mars and Earth
Texts: Video on the solar system, two descriptive reading texts, information cards for speaking, internet sources for research
Language learning tasks/activities: Solving a puzzle while watching a documentary, finding the specific information from a reading text, performing the dialogue between the astronauts and the tower in a role-play- searching the internet to write a descriptive paragraph- comparing two planets to show natural facts.

The Information on Theme-Based Syllabus has been taken from:

For further reading: