



Is TEFL a Dead Duck?

It is time for English professionals everywhere to play a part in managing its future. Leave it much longer and we may find the world has moved on without us. So argues Jan Kingsley.

The focus is on the changing role of the traditional language school. As the market for EFL matures in many countries,

especially in Western Europe, language schools are faced with increasingly difficult choices.

Do they 'stick to their knitting' and trust that there will be an economic upturn?

Do they diversify their product range and if so, into what areas?

Or do they invest even more into the development of their staff and services?

By broadening the definition of 'EFL schools', and looking into the future of the industry, we shall investigate potential answers to these questions and their implications for managers.

For the purposes of this workshop, I shall use the following format and models:

- The far environment (STEP factors)
- Organisational strategies (Porter)
- Human Resource Implications

1 The future of the EFL industry - STEP factors

1.1 Sociological

- increasing awareness of personal responsibility for continuous learning
- increased specialisation of educational products, targeted at occupations
- increasing tourism and desire for

experiences beyond 'standard' packages

- increasing amount of disposable time

1.2 Technological

- the Internet and the huge information resources available - increasing choice of learning methodologies and locations
- CD-Roms and inter-active TV, increasing the range of learning modes (e.g. multi-media)
- increasing distribution of English language programming through satellite TV
- video-conferencing

1.3 Economic

- increasing disposable income
- greater choice in terms of services & products to spend it on
- development of large players (EF, Berlitz, The British Council etc.)

1.4 Political

- more government investment in language tuition at secondary level
- several governments investing in EFL-tourism
- Greater globalization of the industry

2 Organisational Strategies

Michael Porter suggests that there are four generic product strategies which successful organisations follow:

- Broad product range serving a broad public at a low cost (EF would be such an example)
- Broad product range serving a broad public with a differentiated service (The British Council DTO network)
- Narrow focus cost leadership (the Frontesteria/small private language schools in Greece)
- Narrow focus differentiation (Berlitz)

The least successful strategy in Porter's terms is to be stuck in the middle, as so many medium-size schools and chains are!

Following this model, the following responses would be justifiable:

- **Category 1: Increasing the number of ways in which the school provides English language tuition - using multi-media; video-conferencing; Internet facilities and distance-learning and so on.** The key to this strategy would be to reduce the cost of delivery and reliance on expensive teaching staff, whilst increasing the barriers to entry.
- **Category 2: Increasing the product range to make it more attractive to a wider public.** In this respect, I would like to suggest that traditional language schools see themselves as supplying not just English language tuition, but a range of educational products, such as secretarial and managerial skills;

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courses to satisfy personal interests and hobbies (art; literature; history etc.). In other words, schools should consider themselves as developing human resources in a broad sense, rather than a narrow one.

- **Category 3: Providing low-priced services in a geographically-localised area**, using part-time and temporary staff on a flexible basis - a strategy that can be highly successful for a small organisation.
- **Category 4: Providing high-priced specialised services to e.g.: corporate/individual clients.** But the services need to be developed so that they add far greater value to the individual or company concerned. EFL teachers find themselves in an ideal position to provide cross-cultural development services, especially for people wishing to business with English-speaking countries. So, the range of training services needs to be broadened to satisfy person-specific needs (including for example, training in presentation and telephone skills). Here the key to success lies in developing a specialism within a particular industry.

3 Human Resource Implications for Managers

As a key part of their chosen strategy, managers will need to consider the issues involved in HR development. Can the TEFLer of today be the same as the TEFLer of tomorrow? It is highly unlikely - in order to differentiate themselves, schools will have to undertake a great deal more teacher development than has been the norm within the industry. Some of the issues are:

- **Category 1: Developing technical skills in their staff**, especially in the use of the Internet, CD-Roms etc.
- **Category 2: Using and exploiting**

the knowledge and experience of TEFLers in areas other than English language - many TEFLers have a range of useful and relevant experience outside the industry. It is noticeable that a number of recent recruits to the Cert. Courses run by International House are mature. Managers need to assess how previous experience can be utilised most effectively, and draw on it to develop their product range.

- **Category 4: Expecting staff to behave as professional consultants**, with the increased sense of responsibility and the enhanced range of skills that this entails.
- **Category 5: Developing the marketing and managerial skills in their staff**, so that they see themselves as 'satisfying customers' rather than 'teaching students'.

What I am proposing entails a change in emphasis rather than a totally new training programme; from classroom teaching methodology to more specialised skills which the new strategies will require. By drawing on teachers' current areas of interest and expertise, the cost of development of the strategies can be kept comparatively low.

4 Conclusion

The industry is changing - we've seen how the STEP and industry factors are having an impact, especially on small and medium-sized schools.

In order to take advantage of the opportunities that these changes offer, managers will have to select from a range of possible strategies and then ensure that they invest in the appropriate training for their academic and indeed administrative staff.

Therefore, to return to the original

questions posed at the beginning, I would suggest that:

- 'Sticking to the knitting' is an appropriate strategy for small schools serving a highly localised market, but not for others
- Most medium to large sized schools will need to diversify their product range in terms of either the mode of delivery or the number of educational products they offer or both
- In terms of investment, schools will need to develop their staff to ensure that they have the relevant skills for the new millennium.

The TEFLer of the future will be a specialist, not a generalist, and we will need to ensure that they are given opportunities to develop their specialisms. However, it is clear that the main responsibility for development lies primarily with the individual, not the organisation they work for. If this is the case, then managers need to

- a) set an example to their staff, but demonstrating that they are continuously learning too;
- b) encourage their staff through job reviews and other mechanisms to specialise;
- c) provide staff with opportunities for personal development

Only if this happens can the industry continue to grow and expand.

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