Challenges and Solutions for Teaching Multilevel Classes

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Multilevel classes
“Students in those classes differ not only in language acquisition ability, but also in age, motivation, intelligence, self-discipline, literacy skills, attitude and interest”.  
(Hess, 2001)

Challenges of multilevel classes

- Methodology: “What can I give them to do that won’t bore the advanced Ss and won’t be too difficult for the beginners?”  
(Bell, 1991)

- Curriculum: “How can a teacher possibly gather all disparate threads together into a curriculum?”  
(Bell, 1991)

- Group conflict: ◦ Lower-level Ss may feel intimidated by the competition.  
◦ The advanced Ss may feel that they are being held back.  
(Bell, 1991)

- Preparation: Heavy preparation demands on the teacher

- Learners rarely work at the same pace.

- Advanced learners may dominate classroom activities.

Solutions for multilevel classes

- Planning for the multilevel class
  “To ensure some success for all learners in the multilevel classroom, teachers must determine what each learner needs and wants to learn.”  
(Shank & Terrill, 1995)

  “False expectations are less likely to drive students and teachers crazy”  
(Balliro, 1997)

- Grouping strategies
  Equal-ability and cross-ability groups have different functions:
  Equal-ability groups ➔ facilitate accuracy ➔ guided activities
  cross-ability groups ➔ maximize complementary strengths and enhance fluency ➔ communicative activities

- When some students finish their work earlier ➔ assign them additional follow-up tasks
- When advanced students dominate the class ➔ politely stop them
• When materials may be too easy for advanced students or too difficult for low-level students ➔ make the materials cross several levels

Techniques
• Sample group activities:
  1. Whole class activities can be used to warm up and wrap up classes.
     (E.g. small talk, brainstorming, listening to audiotapes or viewing videotapes, projects)
  2. Small group activities can be used to enhance time to practice target language in real communication.
     (E.g. discussions, conversations, problem-solving, jigsaw activities, board games, collaborative writing, information gaps, role plays)
  3. Pair activities can be used to practice verbal interaction in short periods of time
     (E.g. dialogues, role plays, pair interviews, dictations, written work)
  4. Individual activities can be used to assess individual achievement.
     (E.g. self-access activities) (Bell, 1991)

• Invite volunteers to demonstrate activities ➔ advanced students first
• Provide students with same text, but different tasks

References


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Demonstration
- Multilevel dictation -

Aim: Listening, writing, spelling, multilevel progress
Level: All levels

Preparation: Choose a passage for dictation. Students will have studied the passage at home or in class. Create three different levels of the passage by:
- Using a blank page for the most advanced level.
- Leaving out great chunks of text on the next level.
- Leaving out only small sections in the least difficult level.

Make enough copies of each level for your class. Arrange three stacks of papers – corresponding to the three levels – on your desk.

Procedure:
- From the stacks on your desk, students choose a paper according to the level they think is best suited for them.
- Dictate the passage, while students write and complete papers on their chosen level.
- Re-read the passage, to allow students to check their work.
- Hand out the original passage and allow students to check their own work and to give themselves a score.
- Students pass their papers to the front so that you can look them over to decide what the problematic areas are.

Note:
- Encourage your students to move to higher levels.
- In some circumstances, you might prefer to distribute the papers yourself making sure that students get papers at the appropriate level.

In the summer, I like to make taco salad.
A Summer Dinner

In the summer, I like to make taco salad.

It is easy to make ________________________________.

First, I ___________ some lettuce ________________________________.

Then, I ___________ some tomato, _______________, and _________________.

I ___________ grated cheese, cooked hamburger, and ________________________________.

I ___________ it together and ___________ a special ________________________________.

I also ____________ taco salad ________________________________.

The combination of _______________, _______________, _______________, and chips is _______________ and ___________________.

Salad ______________________ to eat ____________________________.

I especially like _______________, ____________________________.

Finally, taco salad is ________________________________.

In one bowl I have ___________, ___________, ____________, and ____________.

I might have ____________ and ____________ with my dinner ____________________________.

__________________________________________________________!
A Summer Dinner

In the summer, I like to make taco salad.

It is ____________ to make this kind of salad.

First, I ______________ some lettuce into a bowl.

Then, I ______________ some tomato, green pepper, and olives.

I _____________ grated cheese, cooked hamburger, and broken tortilla chips.

I _____________ it together and add a special Mexican salad dressing.

I also ____________ taco salad because it _______________ good.

The combination of __________, cheese, vegetables, and ____________ is crunchy and delicious.

Salad _________________ to eat on a hot day.

I especially ______________ the sweet, tangy dressing.

Finally, taco salad is a ______________ meal.

In one bowl I have meat, ____________, vegetables, and ______________.

I might have _____________ and ______________ with my dinner if I’m really hungry.

Taco salad is a __________________________________!
A Summer Dinner

In the summer, I like to make taco salad.

It is easy to make this kind of salad.

First, I tear some lettuce into a bowl.

Then, I cut up some tomato, green pepper, and olives.

I add grated cheese, cooked hamburger, and broken tortilla chips.

I toss it together and add a special Mexican salad dressing.

I also enjoy taco salad because it tastes good.

The combination of meat, cheese, vegetables, and chips is crunchy and delicious.

Salad is refreshing to eat on a hot day.

I especially like the sweet, tangy dressing.

Finally, taco salad is a healthful meat.

In one bowl I have meat, dairy, vegetables, and grains.

I might have milk and fruit with my dinner if I’m really hungry.

Taco salad is a great summer dinner!