

Challenges and Solutions for Teaching Multilevel Classes

I-Mei Wang
omgomg0124@hotmail.com

Youngju (Mindy) Lee
happyyoungju@gmail.com

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

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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.

Adapted from Hess, N. (2001). *Teaching large multilevel classes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

A Summer Dinner

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 meal.

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!

Adapted from Tracie Heskett, M. (2006). *Traits of good writing* (p. 14). Westminster, CA: Teacher Created Resources, Inc.