Course Topic: Classroom Management

Course Instructor

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Course Synopsis

Large classes are usually defined as classes with more than 30 students. Large classes can be both challenging and rewarding. With a high number of students, large classes provide plenty of opportunity for student collaboration, cooperation and self-directed learning. Language teachers can employ a variety of stimulating partner, group and class based activities to get students discussing and sharing their language skills in a setting that is both controlled and interactive. This session will review a variety of classroom management techniques and activity adaptations to maximize language learning in a large class scenario to fully exploit the teaching and learning opportunities presented by this type of class.

Course Agenda

1. The Challenges of Teaching Large Classes
2. Classroom Management
3. Assessment
4. Meeting Individual Learning Needs

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1. The Challenges of Teaching Large Classes

Large classes are typically defined as those that have more than 30 students.

Teaching large classes can be fun. There is a lot of energy for the teacher to work with and there are many opportunities for different types of student interaction.

On the other hand, there are some challenges that can derail even the best teachers. These challenges can be divided into three main categories:

1. Classroom management.
2. Assessing students in a way that is practical and also valid and reliable.
3. Meeting the individual learning needs of students in a multi-level class.

Let's look at each of these in more detail, along with strategies for each.

2. Classroom Management

The following are specific aspects of classroom management that can be challenging:
- Ensuring that students behave appropriately and respectfully towards each other and towards you as the teacher.
- Ensuring that the level of noise does not get too high.
- Ensuring that activities unfold smoothly and efficiently.
- Ensuring that you select student interaction patterns that are logistically effective with a large class.

Let's look at strategies to address each of these challenges.

Appropriate and Respectful Behaviour
The following are strategies to use to ensure that students behave appropriately and respectfully:
- Have a simple set of classroom rules that all students understand and agree to follow.
- Post the classroom rules so that all students can see them.
- Be consistent and fair in enforcing the classroom rules.
- Use positive reinforcement to encourage students to follow the classroom rules.
- Create an organized and predictable classroom environment. Set up daily classroom routines for taking attendance, correcting homework, handing out papers and collecting completed work.

Noise Level
Any activity that requires student verbal communication generates a lot of noise with a large class. You need to be mindful of the other classes around you when it comes to noise level, while at the same time allowing students the opportunity to practice communicating verbally.
- One technique to control noise level is to use a noise chart. A noise chart lists different kinds of voices that students can use in an activity: loud voice, conversational voice, quiet voice

(whisper) or no voice. Introduce the noise chart at the beginning of the course. For each verbal communication activity, specify which type of voice students are to use.

- Also at the beginning of the course, introduce a signal that indicates to students that they have to decrease the noise level, be it a hand signal, a series of claps or a series of light flickers.

Activity Management

The following are strategies to use to ensure that students do what they need to do, when they need to do it, in terms of learning activities.

- Post the objectives and the agenda on the board at the beginning of the class so that students know what they will be learning and the activities they will be doing.
- Always have your lessons well-planned. Know what you will be doing and when. Don't leave anything to chance.
- Have all of your materials prepared beforehand. With a large class, there is no opportunity to leave the room to make copies and do other preparations.
- Keep instructions for all activities clear and brief. Reinforce verbal instructions with written instructions and modelling.
- Ensure that all students can see you and the visual support, be it the whiteboard, blackboard or screen.
- Ensure that all students can hear you. Use a microphone, if necessary.
- Have a clear signal, that all students know, that indicates the end of an activity. This can be a hand clap, a bell, a flicker of the lights or a hand signal.

Student Interaction Patterns

Strategic selection of student interaction patterns for your activities can allow you to maximize student participation in activities while still maintaining good classroom management practices. The following student interaction patterns are effective with large classes.

- **Choral drilling** involves the teacher providing an oral model of a word or phrase for the whole class to repeat. While choral drilling does not provide students with the opportunity to create original language, it does provide them with the opportunity to practice verbal production of English in a very safe way. Students will know immediately if their verbal production is incorrect because they will sound different than the other students. Choral drilling also allows for the development of automaticity; students become automatic in their production of set phrases and sentences.
- **Show of Hands** is another whole class interaction pattern. As the teacher, you ask a question and then give possible answers. Students raise their hands for the answers they agree with. There is a technology option that is the equivalent to students putting up their hands. Clickers are small hand held devices that allow students to enter in the answer that they agree with. Their answers are then collated by an accompanying application and displayed on a screen. Alternatively, there are free applications that allow students to use their smartphones to submit answers to questions posed by the teacher.
- **Team Reporting** is an interaction pattern that allows small groups or teams to indicate their answers to questions posed by the teacher by raising one of several cards provided by the teacher to each group. For example, for teams to jointly answer multiple choice questions, the teacher provides each team with a set of A, B, C and D cards. If teams think the answer is A, they hold up the A card and so on.

- **Think-Pair-Share** is an interaction pattern that includes individual work, pair work and small group or whole class work. The teacher puts a question on the board for all students to see. First, students will think individually about their answer to the question. Next, students will pair with the person next to them to briefly discuss their answer. Lastly, students will share their answer with a small group or with the whole class. With Think-Pair-Share, all students get the opportunity to participate at some point in the discussion.
- **Student Teams** are structured groups in which some students are assigned particular roles for an activity. Students roles can include:
  - Monitor to ensure that all students participate.
  - Secretary to make one good copy of student group work.
  - Spokesperson to report back on group answers and decisions.

3. Assessment

Assessment is challenging with large classes simply because of the large number of students to be assessed both formatively and summatively. The teacher needs to select assessments that are valid, reliable and practical. Unfortunately, the most valid assessments when it comes to language learning are not usually the most practical when it comes to large classes. The most practical assessments are discrete item testing using multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank or other single answer question types. These are also reliable assessments; however, they are not a valid gauge of student language ability, particularly when it comes to the productive skills - speaking and writing.

The following are some valid, reliable and somewhat practical assessment options for the productive skills:
- For both speaking and writing, have students complete a self-assessment using a simple rubric or checklist.
- Similarly, have students complete peer assessments of their classmates for both speaking and writing, once again, using a simple rubric or checklist.
- For speaking assessments, have students record their answers to set questions in a computer lab, rather than conducting individual student interviews. This allows the teacher to efficiently review and evaluate student spoken performance.
- Use a language lab or a learning management system (LMS) in a computer lab to collect individual assessment data. Quizzes and tests can be run directly through the learning management system. Recorded speaking assessments and typed written assessments can be submitted directly through the LMS.

It is also challenging with large classes to ensure that students behave honestly in assessments. Monitoring the academic honesty of large groups of students is obviously more difficult than with small groups of students. Teachers need to have systems in place to ensure that students do not share answers or otherwise have access to answers during tests, and that they do not copy from each other for other assignments.

4. Meeting Individual Learning Needs

Large classes are, simply by statistical probably, also multi-level classes. Students in a large class, even one to which students are assigned based on level, are going to represent a wide range of language abilities. With a large, multi-level class, it is very challenging to address all the language learning needs of all the students at the same time.

The following are some strategies to address this issue.

- Use a diagnostic test at the beginning of the course to find out where each student is at. This is an efficient way to gauge the level of the students in the class. Use this information to inform your grouping decisions and your activity choices.
- Strategically assemble students into groups of either similar ability (all high students together, all low students together) or mixed ability (high and low students together). Use similar ability groups for some activities and mixed ability groups for other activities.
- For key activities, have different stages. Expect higher students to finish all stages, and lower students to finish some of the stages.
- Have a task board listing additional self-directed activities for higher level students to do if they finish an activity ahead of the other students.
- Enlist higher level students as in-class tutors for students who are struggling. Pair the in-class tutors with the lower level students for specific activities that other students will complete individually.
- Train students to be independent learners. Teach them to track their own progress. Teach them to self-correct. Teach them to keep themselves organized and on task.
- If you have a learning management system, post activities for higher level students to complete independently. Also post support or scaffolding materials for lower level students.
- Make sure that your activities also meet the learning needs of all the different learning styles – visual, auditory, tactile and kinaesthetic. Sometimes lower level students struggle simply because their learning style preferences are not being addressed.

Remember: Well-planned and well-executed activities can engage large classes to create meaningful language learning experiences!

Thanks for participating!

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