

Course Topic: Classroom Management Techniques**Course Instructor:**

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Course Synopsis:

Many teachers, especially those in rural settings, are faced with the challenge of teaching a class where the students exhibit a variety of English language skill levels. This course will present ideas on how to incorporate activities for a multi-level setting. Rather than planning several activities for a range of proficiency levels, this course aims to demonstrate how one activity can be adapted for use with all students, regardless of the extent of their English competencies.

Course Agenda:

1. What Does a Multi-level Class Look Like?
2. Pair work: Equal Ability, Mixed Ability and Examples
3. Group work: Equal Ability, Mixed Ability and Examples
4. Whole Class Activities

1. What Does a Multi-level Class Look Like?

Often, classes are comprised of students who exhibit the same or similar English competency levels. A multi-level class, on the other hand, is comprised of students who exhibit differing competency levels in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Activity #1: Come up with some words or phrases that you might use to describe the experience of teaching a multi-level class.

Along with differing language skill levels, there are also many other variables that can contribute to a multi-level classroom. Let's take a look at a few of them.

- a) Previous educational backgrounds
 - Formal learning environment, interrupted education, developed learning strategies.
 - Cultural expectations of a classroom setting, how the teacher is viewed, teacher-centred environment vs. learner-centred.
- b) Roman alphabet
 - Some students come from countries where the characters are different.
 - Learning a new set of alphabet characters can affect a student's ability to participate optimally in the classroom.
- c) Motivation
 - Why are the students coming to class?
 - What are their reasons for learning English?
 - What are their specific learning goals? The more specific a student's goal is, the more motivated he/she will be to attend class.
- d) Learning styles
 - Visual, auditory or kinesthetic.
 - Are classroom instructions and activities accommodating to these different styles of learning?
- e) Age
 - Younger - more flexible, more adaptable.
 - Older - bring wisdom and experience.
- f) Personal situations
 - Are they eager to come to class?
 - Are they refugees?
 - What are their personalities like?
 - Are they willing to participate?
 - Are they shy or outgoing?
 - Are they willing to take risks and make mistakes?

Activity #2: Take a moment to think about some of the student variables that are present in the class you are currently teaching.

2. Pair Work: Equal Ability, Mixed Ability and Examples

a) Equal Ability

Equal ability pairings consist of two students with similar competency levels in the skill area being worked on. This can also be referred to as “like-ability”. This type of pairing provides the greatest opportunity for verbal interaction, allows for collaboration, and makes the most use of your time. Structure: Everyone has the same task, but each pair of students will have different requirements depending on their skill level.

Activity Examples:

Question completion	Have the lower level students complete 10 questions of a written exercise, while the higher level students complete 20 questions.
Picture discussion	Have lower level students describe a relatively simple picture using vocabulary words, while the higher level students must describe a more complex picture using full sentences.
Interviews	The lower level students will have the questions written out for them with an emphasis on WH- questions, while the higher level students must use expansion type questions in order to draw out more detail.

b) Mixed Ability

Mixed ability pairings consist of two students with differing competency levels in the skill area being worked on. This can also be referred to as “cross ability”. Structure: Place the more demanding language learning tasks on the higher level students; but lower level students can still be in charge.

Activity Examples:

Dictation	Have the lower level students dictate to the higher level students and then check the grammar point or spelling.
Listening task	All students will use the same source material but the higher level students will fill in the blanks with the words they hear, whereas the lower level students will have the words written out for them or match the words with pictures.
Photo story	Have the lower level students tell the story based on the pictures, whereas the higher level students will write out the story.

Activity #3: Take a moment to think about one of your favourite activities. How can you adapt this activity for pair-work in a multi-level classroom?

3. Group Work: Equal Ability, Mixed Ability and Examples

Before discussing different types of group work, we need to consider how to organize students into groups. There is always the option of randomly selecting students and putting them into groups; however, another option is to create intentional groups. An excellent way to do this would be to use a matrix as described in Jill Bell’s book *Teaching Multilevel Classes in ESL (2004)*. You will find a blank matrix at the end of this handout that you can use in your own classroom. Please note that this matrix is for the teacher’s eyes only and should not be shown to students. Rank the students’ abilities on a grid from lowest to highest. Each student would then be given a colour and a letter. If you would like to assemble students in groups of equal ability, call out the letter name. For example, all the A’s together, all the B’s together, etc. If you would like to assemble the students in groups of mixed ability, call out the colour. For example, all the reds together, all the blues together, etc. If your class is not as easily divided, you can have two lower level students act as a team together or you can have one higher level student go between two groups.

a) Equal Ability

In equal ability groups, each member of the group has roughly the same competency level. Everyone in the group has the same task; however, the requirements of the task will differ from one group to the next, depending on skill level. The focus of the task is accuracy.

Activity Examples:

Group readings	Everyone has the same topic for reading but each group gets a different reading based on abilities. A variation would be to give each group the same reading but the lower level groups would complete WH- questions for reading comprehension, whereas the higher level groups would have to complete more complex, expanded-type questions for comprehension.
Collaborative Writing	Each group will have the same topic but the requirements will be different: lower level groups will write sentences using the same ‘formula’ or vocabulary words (very structured), whereas the higher level groups will have the freedom to write a paragraph.

b) Mixed Ability

In mixed ability groups, the members of the group have differing competency levels. Each member of the group must be given a task so that their contribution is tangible. The focus of the task is fluency.

Activity Examples:

Discussions	Allow lower level students to write down agree/disagree statements before offering to the group or have them write down some vocabulary words that might be used in the discussion.
Jigsaw readings	Use a matrix like the one discussed earlier. Put students into their colour groups and give each group a portion of a reading text. As a group, students will go over the reading, discuss vocabulary and pronunciation,

	and complete comprehension questions. The teacher then assigns a number to each member of the group and assembles students according to their numbers. All the ones together, all the twos together, etc. Each newly formed group should have one member from each of the original groups. The students in the new group will each have a portion of the reading so every member must contribute their piece of the puzzle in order to complete questions about the reading, regardless of skill level.
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Activity #4: Take a moment to think about one of your favourite group activities. How can you adapt this activity for use in a multi-level classroom?

4. Whole Class Activities

It’s always a good idea to begin and end the class with something that joins the whole class together. It helps students feel like they are part of a community. It’s important to use activities that “level” the students, so that they are all on the same playing field. Activities that focus on vocabulary and pronunciation are great examples.

Activity Examples:

Minimal pair sounds	These are pairs of words that differ from one another in only one sound. Use a chart similar to the one found at the end of this handout and give each student in the class a copy. Someone will choose a path to vocalize and the rest of the students will follow along on the chart based on the sounds they hear. The goal is that the students will correctly differentiate between each minimal pair sound and arrive at the same number on the chart.
Communicative activities	Have students participate in games, such as board games, or work with flash cards.
Class projects	<i>Garage sale:</i> The higher level students can be in charge of answering questions, advertising and making posters; while the lower level students can be in charge of pricing the items and organizing them on the tables. <i>Newsletter:</i> Have higher level students type out stories as told by lower level students and pair them with pictures. These newsletters can then be used in the classroom as reading activities.

Hopefully, you can see that multi-level teaching can be fun and invigorating and can be a great opportunity for you to tap into your creativity for some exciting lesson plans!

Thanks for participating!

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