DOI: 10.17117/na.2016.04.02.189

<http://ucom.ru/doc/na.2016.04.02.189.pdf>

Поступила (Received): 25.04.2016

Кудратов Л.Ф. Обучение классов разных способностей

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Teaching mixed-ability classes

Статья о преподавании в классах, которые имеет студентов с различным уровнем знаний

The article is about teaching a class which has students of different levels. They may have different starting levels of English or they may learn at very different speeds for any number of reasons

Ключевые слова: анализ, обсуждение, смешанные, методы, групповая работа, класс

Key words: analyses, discussion, mixed, methods, group work, classes

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Teaching foreign languages in Uzbekistan has become very important since the first days of the Independence of our country which pays much attention to the rising of education level of people, their intellectual growth. As our President I. A. Karimov said: "Today it's difficult to revalue the importance of knowing foreign languages for our country as our people see their great prosperous future in the cooperation with foreign partners" .

English teachers are known for asking a lot of questions. One of the questions we ask ourselves every day is, "Did my students benefit from what happened in class today?" If the answer to this question is "yes," we can start preparing for our next day of classes. However, if it is "no," most of us try to determine how best to remedy the situation. We usually carry out this daily evaluation of the effectiveness of our teaching privately, unless we feel the need to ask a sympathetic colleague or supervisor for help with a particular teaching issue. Sometimes, however, this evaluation is public. The communicative approach is becoming popular, and many of teachers are experimenting with new methods and activities. Terminology such as "authentic materials," "natural approach," "communicative language teaching," and "learner- centered teaching", could be heard in the staff room every day. We debated whether using these new methods improved the language proficiency of our students. We all had students who participated eagerly in any communicative activity, but showed very little improvement on tests. We also had students who preferred teacher-fronted instruction and participated reluctantly in any form of learner – centered activity, but who did better on tests

than their more enthusiastic classmates. Because of this problematic relationship between the new methods that we were trying out in our classes and the progress our students made, some of us began to wonder if the claims made about the effectiveness of the new methods could withstand major scrutiny.

We may often be teaching a class which has students of different levels. They may have different starting levels of English or they may learn at very different speeds for any number of reasons. There are several strategies that a teacher can use to deal with this situation. We'll try to pay extra attention to the following points:

Discussion and needs analyses: It is easy for students to get frustrated in a class of mixed abilities. Stronger students may feel pressured. The teacher may feel stressed. The best solution to this is to have an open class discussion about the classroom situation – to ensure the best for everyone it is better to acknowledge the situation for everyone to agree how to deal with it. It is probably best to stage and structure the discussion. We should use needs analyses to prompt the students to reflect upon their learning style, learning strategies, language needs, learning enjoyment, motivation, language strengths and weaknesses. Questions that might be included are:

What kinds of activities do you enjoy / benefit from?

Which language skill do you most wish to develop?

Do you prefer working individually or with a partner?

Would you rather sit and listen to the teacher all lesson or participate in group work? Students compare their answers in pairs or small groups. We should collect the information and prepare a statistical representation of the key questions and answers. This will help to develop the sense of shared community in the class. We can explain the mixed level situation to the students and give a list of possible approaches to the teaching and learning. In pairs, the students rank the approaches/ ideas according to their suitability for the situation. Following feedback, we should highlight the strategies we plan to use. Developing with the students, or perhaps writing it ourselves, a contract of behavior for activities is a useful device. "I will help and support my activity partner. I will participate in group work". If we think that our students are not mature enough to carry out this kind of reflection, we can explain the situation to the class and tell them what strategies we shall be using. If students know what to expect, we can hope that they will cooperate. All of the above work could be done in the mother tongue, although I feel it is better done primarily in the target language as it draws attention to the fact that this is a learning language issue. **Group work:** These groups could be of mixed levels or similar ones. The hope is that in a smaller group, the weaker student will feel more able to contribute. Also, if the group is working with a set of information, divide the information between students, forcing them to work together. Someone may consider dividing his/her class into groups by level for the whole lesson, enabling him/her to give a different level or number of tasks to each group, discussion of this strategy with the class should help to prevent stigmatization.

Whole class – mingles: This is a favored strategy of mine. A mingle activity involves students talking or interacting with many different members of the class on a short period of time in order to achieve a task. This means that any student will work with students at different levels – experiencing stronger and weaker levels of communication. This supports the weaker students and provides opportunities for the

stronger ones. A classic activity is a "Find someone who..." In this activity the student has to survey the class to find people who...

For example: have got something – Do you have a CD player? Or....have done something –Have you eaten fish and chips? Or.....like something – Do you like tennis? If student answers "yes" to a question, then the other student should ask for more information. If a student answer "no", then the other should find a new person to ask, and may come back to the first student with another questions later on. The potential for this is endless. It is a great way to provide practice of a particular language structure\area and provides controlled practice as well as the opportunity for further freer discussion. It also creates a lively classroom dynamics. "Mingles can take many forms-students may have to find the person who has a matching word to theirs or the second half of a split sentence. The students may all have the same or different questions, or a mixture. The key is the general principle of an information gap or communicative need .Overall, variety in the types of working groups, and an open discussion of the class situation will help to deal with some of the difficulties that are present in mixed ability classes. The aim of these strategies is to create a positive working environment, which is all part of ensuring better learning."I think that this topic is of great interest, that's why now we'll speak on the following strategies.

Range of tasks: This involves creating or providing different tasks for different levels. For example, the number of comprehension questions for a text. We might have two sets of questions, "A and B". Perhaps all students have to complete set A, the stronger ones also have to complete set B. Or they even have an extra reading text. This obviously increases the amount of lessons preparation. However, it is possible to think of fairly simple extra tasks. For example, during a reading lesson, the stronger student have to do detailed dictionary work on vocabulary in the text. It takes very little time to select words for the students to research. With the stronger students spending 10 minutes working with dictionaries, we have time to monitor and help the weaker ones with the text. Then we can go through the shared comprehensions tasks as a class, and perhaps the stronger student can make a presentation about the words they have researched.

Extra work/ homework : It is straightforward to give different students different homework –unless it is part of a standardized assessment procedure .We can give weaker students homework which really does consolidate the class work, and give the stronger students work that will widen their knowledge or put it to the test a little more. When teaching mixed ability classes, the weaker student will be missing things during the lessons ,or failing to understand. We must use homework to address this. The stronger students may feel held back during the class, so homework can now really push them (if they are so inclined).Writing tasks are great for homework, as a productive skill that can be performed individually. We can expect more from the stronger students, and use it as a way to identify their weaknesses, which may not be so apparent during the class.

Student's nomination: "This is a simple classroom management technique that really helps in the mixed ability class. When asking for answers to questions, ask particular students, rather than asking the class in a open air fashion" [19,12].

For example: What's the answer to number 9 ? is an open question, whereas What's the answer to number nine Tamara? is a nominated question. If you ask open questions, the same old strong students will provide the answers. This creates a poor dynamic to the class, for many reasons. When nominating ask the question before you give the name of the student. That's why everyone has to listen; consider how easy it is for the student to answer. If a weak student will struggle, perhaps ask a stronger student. If a weak student should be capable, then ask them ; avoid making students seem foolish, and yet also avoid patronizing them by only asking super simple question; nominate with variety. **Error correction:** In a mixed level class you can have different expectations of the language the different students produce. Sometimes, it can push stronger students if you correct them heavily – although you should be sensitive about this. And for weaker students, be more selective in your error correction. To conclude, the key strategies for teaching mixed level classes are probably developing a positive and collaborative working atmosphere and providing a variety of work suitable for different levels.

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