TEACHING HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

WHAT IS A LARGE CLASS?

A class of 20? 30? 50? 100? more?

WHAT IS A HETEROGENEOUS CLASS?

A heterogeneous class is one in which the members vary in:

- Ability
- Knowledge of English
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-
-
-
-

SOME PROBLEMS WITH HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

- Providing individual attention
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SOME ADVANTAGES

- Educational aspects: learning tolerance, mutual help, cooperation, preparation for life
- Challenge, teacher development
- Peer-teaching
- Richer human resources
-

SOME THINGS THAT CAN HELP

A. Keeping them motivated

1. Variation

2. Interest

B. Reaching the individual

3. Collaboration

4. Individualization

5. Personalization

C. Providing for learning at different levels

6. Open-ending

7. Compulsory + Optional

1. Variation

- Topic
- Skill (reading / writing / listening / speaking
- Active / reflective
- Organization (teacher-led, individual, group/pair)

- Level of difficulty
- Speed
- Material (board, improvised, coursebook, visual materials)

2. Interest

What makes for interest?

-
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-

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Collaboration

Learners work together in order to get better joint results than they could on their own.

Advantages:

Peer-teaching

Educational implications

Feeling of teamwork

But:

What about those who prefer working on their own?

Does it hold up the faster ones?

Not all tasks work as collaborative activities.

- Pair work usually works better than group work.
- Make sure the task is such that it is likely to be better done by the group / pair than by an individual (e.g. peer editing)
- Allow individuals to work on their own if they prefer.

4. Individualization

Allowing for individual variation in speed and level, even within a teacher-led or set exercise

- Learners choose **where** to start
- Giving a time limit rather than a quantity-of-work limit.
- Allowing for self-checking
- Learners check their own work

5. Personalization

Expressing one's own opinions, tastes or desires, relating personal experiences etc.

I want:

a big	black	cat
a small	brown	dog
a medium-sized	white	pony

An English lesson is like:

A variety show	Eating a meal	A symphony
A conversation	Doing the shopping	Consulting the doctor
Climbing a mountain	A football game	A menu
A wedding		

6. Open-ending

A 'closed-ended' item has only one right answer.

An 'open-ended' item has many possible right answers.

So that:

a) More learners can get to respond.

b) Learners can respond at different levels.

Making a closed-ended into an open-ended exercise

Put in the correct past form.

1. She _____ early. (leave)
2. He _____ the cake. (make)
3. I _____ there for six hours. (sit)
4. The man _____ the book. (read)

Possibility 1: Do it once conventionally, then invite variations on the end of the sentence

Finish the sentence any way you like.

1. She left _____
2. He made _____
3. I sat _____
4. The man read _____

Possibility 2: Delete the verb in parenthesis, invite learners to suggest their own.

Put in a correct past form.

She _____ early.

He _____ the cake.

I _____ there for six hours.

The man _____ the book.

More options for open-ended exercises:

1. Brainstorming:

How many ways can you think of to use an empty tin can? (A pen? A piece of plasticine?)

(oral fluency/can/could)

How many adjectives can you think of to describe the noun road? (movie? song?)

(grammar: adjective-before-noun, vocabulary)

How many nouns can you think of that could be described by the adjective hard? (black? clear?)

(adjective-before-noun, vocabulary)

How many things can you think of to say about this picture?

(oral fluency)

How many ways can you think of to solve this dilemma?

(oral fluency)

How many ways can you think of to compare a train with a car

(comparatives)

How many endings can you think of for the sentence: If I had a million dollars…?

(conditionals)

2. Originality, 'lateral' thinking

Think of ten ways to compare a tree with a piece of spaghetti.

(comparatives)

Think of as many ways as you can in which a lesson is like a wedding.

(both…and)

Find six questions to which the answer is … twelve…(tomorrow …of course! …I don't know … I hope so …)

(interrogatives)

Suggest at least three <u>advantages</u> of being an only child. (of not having a cellphone / of having no car?)

(writing)

Name ten things you have never done.

Name six things that you can't touch, and why.

Say six negative things about …a pen (a cat / English)

Say four NICE things about your friend, using negative sentences.

(grammar: negatives)

Compulsory plus optional
'Do at least…' 'Optionally…' 'If you have time..'

The class is given a task, which is easy enough to be done successfully by everyone (or nearly everyone).

They are also given an optional task which may be done if they have time.

Vocabulary exercise

Find at least three things to put in each column

a clock, a dog, a dress, a mother, black, a pen, bread, pants, bag, a husband, red, boots, a cat, rice, a frog, a baby, pink, a teenager, a hat, a banana, a book, a sheep, meat, kids,
a desk, green, an elephant, salt, a t-shirt, white

Animals	Colors	Things	Food	Clothes	People

Grammar exercise

Write relative clauses. Do at least sentences 1-5.

1. A teacher is a person who…

2. A car is a thing which …

3. A book is a thing…

4. A monkey is an animal …

5. A dishwasher is a machine …

6. A student …

7. A sandwich …

8. A stone …

If you finish, invent as many more similar sentences as you can!

Test on the past tense (last item)

Complete using past tenses:

A. Her mother _____ to Little Red Riding Hood: 'Take this cake to your grandmother, but don't talk to strangers!'

Little Red Riding Hood _____ through the wood, and on the way she _____ the wolf. 'Hello, Little Red Riding Hood!' _____ the wolf. 'Where are you going?'

Little Red Riding Hood _____ what her mother _____. 'I'm going to visit my grandmother,' she _____. 'She lives in the forest, over there.'

The wolf _____ off through the forest, and _____ to the grandmother's house.

B. Optional. Finish the story as you like, but not the same way as usual!

TO SUMMARIZE

There are no easy answers! But there are some things that can help.

1. To vary activities, so that different learning-styles and levels are addressed

2. To make them interesting, so that more advanced students won't be bored by lower-level activities

3. To encourage collaboration, to take advantage of possibilities of peer-teaching and -learning

4. To individualize choice, in order to allow flexibility in level

5. To 'personalize' activities to allow room for self-expression of different individual learners

6. To 'open-end' activities to create opportunities to respond at different levels

7. To design tasks with a clear, easily-achieved success level plus further optional extensions for faster workers.

Further Reading:

Ur, P. (1996). *A Course in Language Teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hess, N. (2001). *Teaching Large Multilevel Classes.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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