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

SOME PROBLEMS WITH HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

- Providing individual attention

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?
   •
   •
   •
   •
   •
   •
   •
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a big</th>
<th>black</th>
<th>cat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a small</td>
<td>brown</td>
<td>dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a medium-sized</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>pony</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 advantages 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animals</th>
<th>Colors</th>
<th>Things</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Clothes</th>
<th>People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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**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: