



Cambridge English



Supporting mixed-ability learners at Cambridge English: Key for Schools (A2) and Preliminary for Schools (B1)

6Y04

Handout: Managing mixed-ability classes

Read the descriptions below of how four teachers manage learners with different ability levels in their classes.

1 On your own, decide:

- which teachers use ideas that you already use
- which teachers use ideas that would not work in your teaching situation
- which teachers use ideas which could work in your situation, but which you might need to change a little.

2 When you have done step 1, talk about your decisions with some other teachers.

Teacher A

I have large classes with up to 60 learners and there are many levels of ability. I adapt the activities in the coursebook for stronger and weaker learners. For example, I write some more difficult questions for the stronger learners, and/or some easier questions for the weaker learners. In this way the learners are all able to achieve something positive. But sometimes the learners don't want to choose the easier questions because they think they will learn less, but if they do the activity as it is in the coursebook they find it too difficult and only get a few questions right, or sometimes none.

Teacher B

My classes aren't so big, but I still have to manage learners with different levels. What I do is get learners to work on an activity with others of different levels. This works well as the stronger learners help the weaker ones. Sometimes the parents complain that their children suffer by working with weaker learners, but I try to show them that helping the weaker learners develops the stronger learners' understanding of the activity, and at the same time the weaker ones learn a lot from working with stronger learners.

Teacher C

To help learners of different levels in my classes, what I do is move them into three colour groups of four or five learners each: a red group, a blue group and a green group. Each colour means a different level: red means easier, blue means medium and green means harder. I give the different colour groups different work to do. The learners choose which colour group they want to work in – and this often changes – learners don't always choose to work at the same level every time.

Teacher D

In my school learners are not allowed to move their desks or change where they sit. To manage the different levels in the class I put different activities on the board and the learners choose the ones they want to do or the activity they can do. The stronger learners generally do more of them than the weaker ones. I go round the class to make sure everyone is working on something and give them advice about how long to spend on it and what to do next.

Handout: Adapting activities

Activity 1

You have taught this vocabulary: watch TV, go to the park, do your homework, have a shower, go to bed, make your bed.

To practise, you ask your students to do the following exercise:

Choose the correct word in these questions. Then, ask and answer them with a partner.

- When do you **watch/have** TV during the week?
- How often do you **do/go** to the park?
- How long do you spend **making/doing** your homework every day?
- Do you **make/do** your bed every day?
- Do you **have/do** a shower in the morning or in the evening?
- What time do you **go/have** to bed?

Task 1: Look at these two speaking activities. Decide which is more suitable for A2 level and which is more suitable for B1 level. Why is this?

Activity 2

You have done a reading about pupils' experiences of their first day at school and would like to focus on vocabulary for feelings.

You check understanding of difficult vocabulary such as *excited, worried, frightened, nervous* and *scared*.

Then you ask students to tell each other how they felt on their first day at school and why.

Task 2: Discuss with a partner how you could adapt the A2 activity for a higher level and the B1 activity for a lower level.

Handout: Adapting a listening task

Task 1: Look at these questions and the tapescript and decide how you could adapt this task for weaker learners.

Beechen Wildlife Park

The park is closed on (14)

The park has more (15) in its animal collection than other parks in the country.

This season the park has a new baby (16)

Tapescript

Have you ever visited Beechen Wildlife Park? It's open every day apart from Tuesdays. It's open from ten until six during term time and school holidays. There are later opening hours on Sundays, and earlier closing on Fridays. Check our website for details.

At the wildlife park you can see a wide range of animals from tiny frogs to enormous elephants. You'll be amazed at all our giraffes, and as for our zebras, well, you'd have to go abroad to see more of them in one place!

Even if you've visited before, come and see what's different this season. Our monkeys are now in an exciting new area, and be among the first visitors to see the tiny lion born right here in the park just this month.

Several local buses stop near the park, and there's a route for bikes past our main entrance. Visitors are shown round in special vans, so you can get better views of the animals than you would from cars, so bring a camera!

Most animals here are free to go round their area of the park as they wish, so visitors don't always see them all, and the space per animal here is greater than other wildlife parks. Each animal receives the amount of care that we believe is suitable for its needs.

And at the moment, we've got a special offer for all school groups. You and your friends can have your photos taken. This will be with a life-size model of the animal of your choice. It looks just like the real thing – you can collect it after a few minutes and it's absolutely free. So enjoy a snack or a look in the gift shop while you wait. And then (fade)

Handout: Adapting a listening task (cont.)

Task 2: Now look at questions 17–19 below and adapt the questions for weaker learners in a similar way.

Listening • Part 3

Questions 14 – 19

You will hear some information on the radio about a wildlife park. For each question, fill in the missing information in the numbered space.

Beechen Wildlife Park

The park is closed on **(14)**

The park has more **(15)** in its animal collection than other parks in the country.

This season the park has a new baby **(16)**

The park has its own **(17)** for visitors to travel round in.

Each animal has more **(18)** in their area than in many wildlife parks.

The park is offering free **(19)** for school groups.

Handout: Strategies for differentiation (A)

There are different kinds of changes that we can make for weaker learners and for stronger learners. Divide the following strategies for differentiation according to which group of learners they are most suited for. Note that some strategies may be used with both groups.

Strategies for differentiation

A Add another task linked to the first task for the learners to do after they finish.

B Reduce the number of questions/activities.

C Replace the task with a different, more difficult task on the same topic.

D Monitor carefully when activities are set up to support these students.

E Add another task on a different topic.

F Give these learners less time to complete the task and after you've checked their answers, ask them to go around the class to check the answers of learners in other groups.

G Do individual tutorials with these learners to explain why you've given them a more difficult task.

H Replace the task with a different, easier task on the same topic.

I Give these learners more time to complete the task.

J Give these learners a choice of task.

K Give these learners a choice of self-study activities to do when they have completed the task.

L Add more questions/activities.

M Allow learners to complete as many of the questions/activities as they can/want to.

N Do individual tutorials with these learners to explain why you've given them an easier task.

O Monitor carefully when activities are set up to extend these students.

P Use different pairings/groupings depending on ability.

Handout: Strategies for differentiation (B)

There are different kinds of changes that we can make for weaker learners and for stronger learners. Complete the table with some strategies for differentiation (ways of adapting activities or organising the classroom/your teaching) that are suitable for weaker learners and for stronger learners. Some ideas may work with both types. There is an example to help you.

Reduce the number of questions/activities.

Classroom activity: Describing pictures

Timing 30 minutes

Materials old magazines or internet pictures; **worksheet: Describing a picture**

Rationale To give students practice in giving and understanding descriptions.

Procedure

- 1 Using magazines or the internet, ask students to find two or three pictures of people doing an activity together.
- 2 Divide students into groups of four and give each group a name or letter to identify it. Give students **worksheet: Describing a picture** and in their groups they must choose one of their pictures and work together to think about the answers to the questions. Students can make notes of vocabulary and structures they might need.
- 3 When they have prepared their answers to the questions, they must take turns in practising answering them one by one in the group.
- 4 Gather in the pictures and stick them on the board together with some of the other pictures they found (as distractors) and give each picture a number.
- 5 Regroup the students moving one from each group of four into another group of four.
- 6 Ask each student to describe their picture to the whole class. The others in the group have to guess which picture they are talking about and write down the name of the group and the number of the picture. You could devise a table to complete like the one below.
- 7 **N.B.** Stronger students can describe from memory while weaker students can use the list of questions or notes they have made.
- 8 Ask students to return to their initial groups and compare their answers.
- 9 Follow up with written descriptions of the pictures for homework for students to read and compare in another lesson and/or ask students compete to see who can talk for the longest about a given image to develop long turn taking.

Example table

Worksheet: Describing a picture

Look at your picture and discuss the answers to these questions:

- 1 Is the scene inside or outside? How do you know?
- 2 Is it day or night? How do you know?
- 3 What's the weather like? How do you know?
- 4 How many people can you see?
- 5 How old are they?
- 6 Describe their hair/eyes/faces.
- 7 Describe their clothes.
- 8 What are they doing? How do you know this?
- 9 What other things can you see in the picture? Where are they? What do you think the people will do next?

● Classroom activity: Presentations

Timing 30 minutes

Materials PowerPoint access (if you don't have technology in the class, students can create 'slides' with posters)

Rationale To give students the opportunity to talk about a topic that interests them and provide listening practice for their classmates.

Procedure

- 1 Look through the contents page of your coursebook and ask students to choose a topic that interests them. Group together students that have similar interests.
- 2 In their groups, ask students to decide on an aspect of that topic that they would like to talk about. Give some suggestions to start them off, for example:
- 3 famous people – a description and life story of a famous person
- 4 food and drink – favourite food and drink, why they like it, key ingredients
- 5 a country – where it is, geography, famous sights.
- 6 Ask students to work together to produce a short presentation on the topic and decide who is going to talk. They can take it in turns to talk about different slides, or have one or two speakers.
- 7 The rest of the class must listen to the presentation and write a question each to ask the presenters. Stronger students can write more than one question. Get them to ask their questions and the presenters to answer as appropriate (one question per presenter or the person that has an answer).

Classroom activities

Classroom activity: Jigsaw reading

Timing 20 minutes

Materials **worksheet: Reading texts A and B**(cut into two sections); some pictures of a tropical beach resort

Rationale Students find information from different texts according to their level and then work with others to make a decision to give them graded reading practice.

Procedure

- 1 Show students pictures of a tropical beach resort and ask them where they can find places like this, what the weather might be like, what activities people can do there, etc.
- 2 Write question words on the board to elicit questions students could ask about this kind of place before they go on holiday there, e.g. What's the weather like? Where is it? What activities can you do there? Where can you stay? What kind of food can you eat? How much does it cost? Ask students to write down the questions in their notebooks.
- 3 Cut up the **worksheet: Reading texts A and B** and give pairs either text A or text B (if possible, according to level). They must work together to try to answer as many of the questions as they can. They should write down the answers in their books.
- 4 Students then change pairs to work with a student who had the other text. They tell each other what they know about the place. decide if they would like to visit this place

and explain why. Draw attention to the difference between the two texts – a postcard and a short description of a place – and pick out any useful language for these kinds of writing.

Follow up

Students can find out about another holiday destination and write either a postcard or a short description. These can be read by other students who again decide if they would like to go to that place.

Worksheet: Reading texts A and B

Student A

Dear Sally,

We're having a wonderful time here in Thailand. The beaches are beautiful and the weather is fantastic. I've been sailing and my brother went scuba-diving yesterday and saw incredible coloured fish.

The only problem is the food. It's very spicy so I burn my mouth when I eat!

I think I prefer the food at home.

Wish you were here!

Love x

Read the postcard below and try to answer as many of the questions as you can.

Student B

Read the description below and try to answer as many of the questions as you can.

Come to Koh Tao!

A small island in the Gulf of Thailand, Koh Tao has many attractions. If you want to swim in warm water, and see amazing coral reefs and sharks, this is the place for you. There are many scuba-diving schools where you can learn

to dive and opportunities for sailing to some of the other islands in the area.

You can stay in wooden bungalows on the beach or in a luxury hotel with balconies overlooking the turquoise blue water. Try out the great restaurants serving typical local food, chicken or seafood curries with coconut milk sauce and plenty of noodles.

Prices range from around 800€ to 1,300€ for a seven-night stay, depending on the season and accommodation.

Classroom activity: Dictogloss

Timing 10 minutes

Materials none

Rationale This activity aims to raise students' awareness of grammar and paraphrasing.

Procedure

1 Prepare a long sentence of about 20 words, for example: 'Last Saturday Susan and Jenny spent a wonderful day in London where they went shopping for clothes and CDs' or 'If my mum won the lottery I'd ask her to send me to Toronto, Canada, so I could study English and make lots of new friends'.

2 Tell the students that you are going to dictate a long sentence. They cannot write while you are dictating but should listen carefully. When you finish they can write what they remember of the sentence. Dictate the sentence. Then dictate the sentence a second time. Once again the students may not write until you finish dictating.

3 Working in pairs the students must then compare their sentences and create one new sentence. Two pairs then get together and write one final sentence.

4 Write the sentence on the board. Ask students to compare the sentence they have written and decide if any differences are incorrect English or if they have written an alternative way of saying the same thing.

Follow up

Work on clauses or the grammar included in the text.

Variation

You can dictate a longer text allowing students to write key words as they listen and then trying to reconstruct the text.