

Teaching mixed-ability classes

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2019

WHAT IS A HETEROGENEOUS CLASS?

A class which is varied in:

- ability •
- level of knowledge of the subject •
- •
- •
- •
- •
- •
- •

SOME PROBLEMS

- Providing for learning for all
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

SOME ADVANTAGES

Educational aspects:

- tolerance and respect for the 'other'
- cooperation
- mutual help

Richer personal resources

Challenge, teacher development

Some practical principles

SOME THINGS THAT CAN HELP

A. Keeping them motivated

1. Variation
2. Interest

B. Reaching the individual

3. Individualization
4. Personalization
5. Collaboration

C. Providing for learning at different levels

6. Open-ending
7. Compulsory + Optional

VARIATION

- Topic
- Demands: level, pace, amount
- Classroom organization: teacher-fronted, group work or individualized.
- Learning style: analytical / non-analytical, productive or receptive, active or reflective, solitary or collaborative
- Material: textbook, worksheets, the board, the computer ...

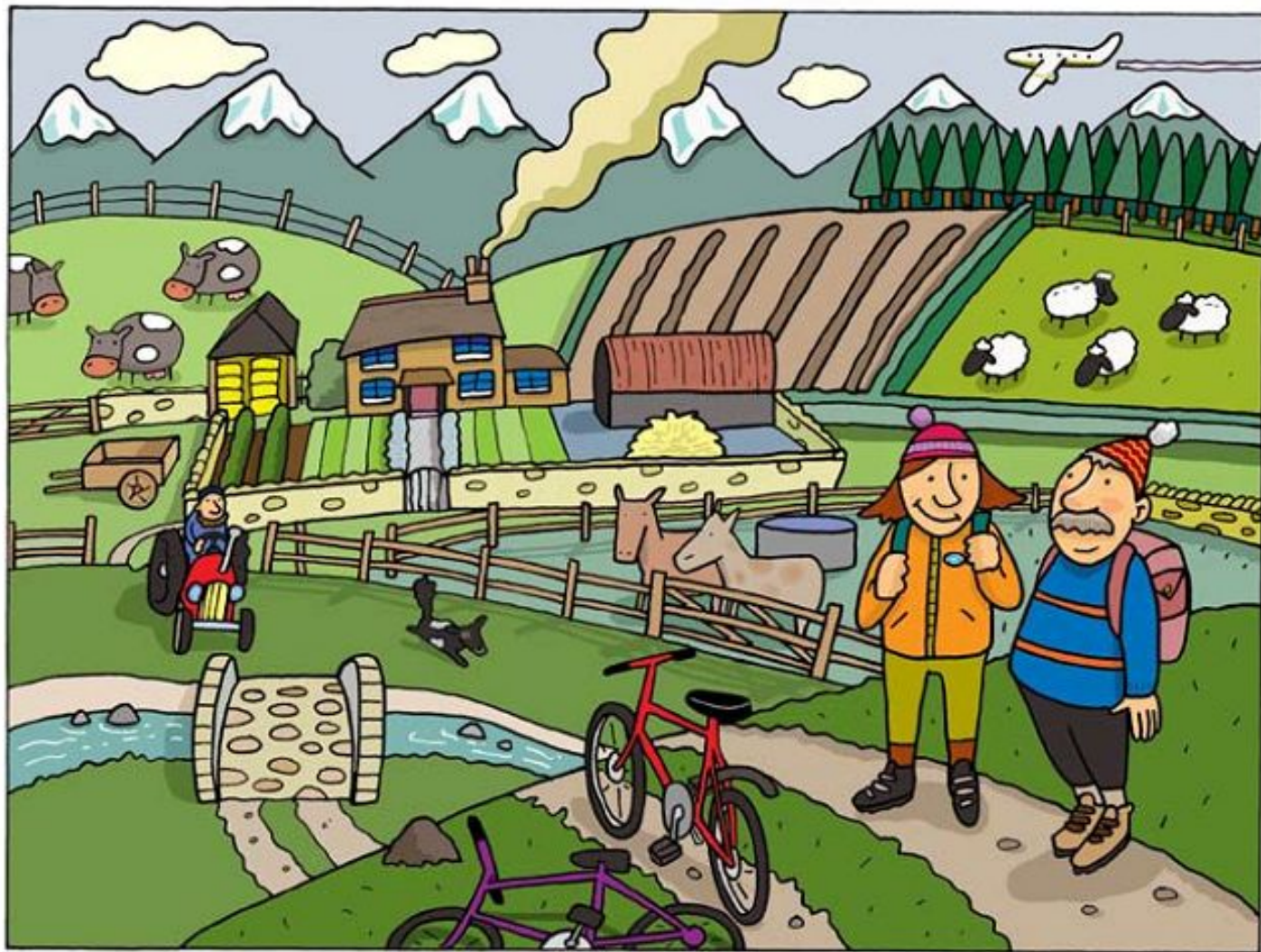
INTEREST

Very difficult to define

But essential: tasks may be 'too easy' or 'too difficult', and therefore boring

But even tasks that are of inappropriate level may keep students' interest if they are well-designed.





Say things about a picture

Students can contribute at a level appropriate to them

They can use vocabulary they know

They can use other students' contributions as models (peer-teaching)

Collaboration

Game-like

Factors that arouse and maintain interest

1. (Topic)
2. Visual stimulus
3. Success-orientation
4. Personalization
5. Open-ended responses
6. Full participation
7. Game-like challenges

INDIVIDUALIZATION

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

For example:

1. Learners choose **where** to start
2. Giving a **time limit** rather than a **quantity-of-work** limit: learners do as much as they can.
3. Learners choose **which** items they want to do.

Example 1: Full-class questioning

We'll try four ways of dealing with teacher-student questions.

Answers to Questions 4

1. *e*
2. criteria
3. /sk/
4. *centre*
5. *will not*
6. Virtually all the European languages, except for Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian
7. 'not' or 'the opposite of'
8. a leaf on a tree, and a page of a book (or the verb, to turn over pages as in the expression 'to leaf through a book')
9. About 300 million
10. A word that looks / sounds the same, but actually means something different e.g. *sympathetic actual*

Four different modes of interaction

1. Students just hear the questions, raise their hands are nominated to answer
2. Students read and hear, are nominated to answer.
3. Students prepare individually, then volunteer answers to items they know.
4. Students prepare individually or with partners, check their own answers.

What did you feel? What did you notice?

Conventional

- No pre-reading
- Questions done in order decided by teacher
- Individual preparation
- Teacher implies they have to do all the questions
- Teacher implies they should know the answers

More 'heterogeneous'

- Possibility of pre-reading
- Questions done in order chosen by students
- Possibility of collaboration (choice)
- Teacher says OK not to finish
- Teacher says OK not to know all the answers

Example 2: Vocabulary

Fill in any four of the opposites to the words on the page.

Then pass it on. Fill in another four on the page you received... then pass it on.

boring interesting high low floor ceiling

general specific

day night diluted concentrated freeze melt

mountain valley full empty noisy quiet

vague exact, precise white black

friend enemy war peace asleep awake

success failure implicit explicit

center periphery simple complex, complicated

straight crooked smooth rough sick well, healthy, fit

exit entrance mandatory optional

Note

- (Could be any set of subject-specific questions)
- Items not numbered
- Choice of which to do
- Legitimization of 'not knowing'
- Work at your own speed
- Success-orientation
- Collaboration, not competition
- Full participation

PERSONALIZATION

Allowing for contributions that reflect personal taste, experience, opinion etc.

My favourite ...

I remember ...

Agree / disagree ...

Grammar/vocabulary practice

cat	black	big	Do you want a...? I want a...?
dog	white	small	
pony	brown	medium	

'Mingling'

I like _____ ing ...

One chore I hate doing is ...

I would love to go to ...

Something that really irritates me is ...

Oral fluency

What is the best metaphor for a lesson?

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

COLLABORATION

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

Enables more interaction between students and engagement with the task

Enables peer-teaching

Two types of collaborative activities

1. Full-class sharing through:
 - Class brainstorm
 - 'Pass it round'
 - Online forums / wikis / other types of sharing
2. Pair or group work
 - collaborative pair/group work
 - 'mingling'

Example: Recall and share

bicycle

because people

independent

embarrassed

friend

encourage

privilege

building

enough

Not all tasks work as group/pair 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

Allow individuals to work on their own if they prefer?

OPEN-ENDING

Cues allow for many possible right answers:
creative thinking

So that:

1. More learners can get to respond.
2. Learners can respond at different levels

Examples:

Closed-ended:

Jenny is a baby. Jenny *can* / *can't* ride a bicycle.

Open-ended:

Jenny is a baby. Jenny can't ride a bicycle, but she can smile.

What else can / can't Jenny do?

Open-ending

Most textbook exercises are closed-ended: items have one pre-determined right answer.

Why?

Conventional 'default' way of doing things: gap-fill, matching, multiple choice.

Easy to check.

Lower-order thinking skills.

May or may not be easier.

Making closed-ended exercises into open-ended ones

Can be done mainly with 'gapfills'

But also with matching exercises and multiple-choice

The result: more learning, more interesting, more individualized.

Write 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)

Write 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~~)

Write the correct past form

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

Making closed-ended exercises into open-ended ones

Can be done mainly with 'gapfills'

But also with matching exercises and multiple-choice

The result: more learning, more interesting, more individualized.

You can...

read ...

... a chair

sit on ...

...a television program

watch...

...a cake

wear ...

...books

eat ...

...a shirt

Or design your own

New...

...bread

Young ...

...teachers

Interesting...

...drivers

Fresh..

...ideas

Dangerous

...lessons

...babies

...developments

How about this one?

a princess a helicopter

a snake a rabbit an umbrella

a box of matches a telephone

the sun glasses

night

Other possibilities for open-ending 1:

Creative thinking

Practice of can/could; creativity

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

Adjective-before-noun, vocabulary

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

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

Other possibilities for open-ending

2: Originality 'Lateral thinking'

Comparative of adjectives

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

Both...

Think of some ways in which a lesson is like a wedding.

Interrogatives

Find six questions in your subject to which the answer is ... twelve... (always ...of course! ... Nobody knows)

Writing

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

Negative sentences

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.

COMPULSORY PLUS OPTIONAL

1. Activities

2. Tests

Activities:

The class is given a 'core' task, do-able by everyone.

They are also given an optional task which may be done by some.

Key words in the instructions:

‘Do at least’

‘Do X ... and do Y if you have time’

Write the items in the appropriate 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

people	clothes	food	things	colours	animals

**Find at least three things to put in each column,
more if you can!**

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

people	clothes	food	things	colours	animals

Tests

Most of the test is compulsory, and is given a grade out of 100%

A final section is optional, and gets 'bonus' points.

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: practical principles for teaching heterogeneous classes

1. Vary your lessons
in speed, level, topic, material
2. Maintain interest
visual stimulus, open-ending, game-like process, personalization etc
3. Let individual students work at their own pace and level, enable choices:
Start where you like, time-limit, do as much as you can
4. Let students help each other, collaborate
Especially in recalling or brainstorming activities
5. Give opportunities to express personal experiences, opinions, tastes...
open-ended cues, application to personal situations
6. Allow for responses at different levels
brainstorming activities, open-ended cues
7. Have as many students as possible activated simultaneously
avoid teacher-student one-right-answer 'ping-pong'; use individual, pair or group work, or multiple responses to a single cue

Thank you for your attention and
participation

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