

Teaching English in Mixed Ability Classes University of Tashkent for Applied Sciences, Tashkent City

Yokubov Iskandar Kobilovich, Botirbekova Gulchexra Abdumutalovna

Email: iyakubov84@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

the purpose of this article is to find out how upper secondary English teachers should work in order to reach the weaker students. I am interested in what has been written about mixed-ability classes, the challenges they present and most of all how teachers of English need to work in such classes to reach all students, especially the weaker ones.

Naturally, this is not an easy problem to solve and it would be wrong to suggest that there are any simple solutions. A fundamental step, however, is to talk to the class about the situation and to present it to them as a normal situation and one that the class as a whole has to deal with. This is probably best done in the mother tongue of the students. As most of the solutions to the problem depend on cooperation between the members of the class, it is essential to stress the need for teamwork and for the class to use English whenever possible in classroom communication. The use of pair and group work is essential if you are to involve all the members of the class. A fundamental technique here is the use of questionnaires and interviews. By pairing off weaker and stronger students and involving both in the preparation and implementation of the questionnaire you should ensure maximum participation of all the students. You can then get the weaker students to interview the stronger ones and vice-versa. Of course, this may be frustrating for the stronger ones, but if they are able to see their role as that of “helper” or even mentor, it may also have a positive effect. A second area of activity that can be productive in mixed ability classes is project work. Again, this can work successfully using mixed groups where the stronger help the weaker, but another approach is to form groups that are at approximately the same level and assign different tasks that are appropriate to the level of each group. By adjusting the complexity of the task, you can ensure that each group has a task that it can carry out successfully, thereby providing the correct level of challenge for the higher

level students and not demotivating the weaker ones. A third area is that of homework. If you set the whole class the same homework task irrespective of level, then you will have to expect very mixed results. To this end, giving weaker students less demanding tasks can help both to motivate them and to give them further practice in areas of the language which they have not yet mastered. Assigning more challenging tasks to the stronger students in the group should ensure that they remain motivated and continue to make progress. It is more work for the teacher but, ultimately, it should produce results. Choral drilling can be an effective way of involving weaker or shy students. If applied judiciously (in other words not all the time), it can give excellent practice in rhythm and intonation, as well as reinforcing word order and grammatical structure. Finally, be diplomatic in your questioning techniques. Try to avoid putting weaker students “on the spot” by nominating them to be the first to answer a question in open class. Instead, try to encourage a culture of attentive listening in the classroom so that you ask a stronger student first and then ask a weaker student to repeat the answer. It may take time but, once this style of interaction becomes habitual, it can be very productive in terms of class dynamics. To conclude, all classes are mixed ability to one extent or another. Extreme cases, when you have near native level speakers with beginners, can be very challenging for the teacher. In these cases it’s important to remember that all students will get something out of the class, but not necessarily the same things, and not necessarily what you aim to teach them! For example, the beginners may begin to get a grasp of your classroom language whilst the stronger students may begin to be able to put a new tense into use.

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