

TEACHING SPEAKING IN LARGE MULTILEVEL CLASS

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Abstract: Makalah ini membahas tentang bagaimana mengajar speaking di kelas multilevel besar. Sebelum membahas tentang prinsip-prinsip kelas multilevel besar, pembahasan diawali dari keuntungan-keuntungan dan tantangan-tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para dosen/guru dalam mengajar kelas multilevel besar. Hal ini akan memberikan persepsi yang seimbang tentang pembelajaran di kelas multilevel besar. Selanjutnya akan dibahas tentang prinsip-prinsip menangani kelas multilevel besar yang berhubungan dengan peran dosen/guru and prinsip-prinsip yang harus diterapkan. Beberapa kegiatan yang cocok untuk pengajaran kelas komunikatif disajikan sebagai alternatif untuk dikembangkan lebih lanjut oleh para dosen/guru.

Kata Kunci: kelas multilevel besar, pengajaran speaking, aktivitas speaking.

Introduction

There are many very different notions of what constitutes a large multilevel class. Though students are carefully graded into several level of proficiency, there is a great difference between the students who talk fluently but inaccurately, and those who read and write well yet cannot manage to produce a single coherent spoken sentence. H. Douglas Brown in his *Teaching by Principle* writes about the possibilities of classes that have 600 students, but notes that while such a number is unusual, classes of sixty to seventy-five students are not so exceptional around the globe.

In this paper I will define large classes as classes of thirty or more students in adult or tertiary settings and multilevel classes as the kind of classes that have been roughly arranged according to ability, or simply classes that have been arranged by age group with no thought to language ability. These are classes in which students vary considerably in their language and literacy skills and are in need of a great deal of personal attention and encouragement to make progress.

Coping with speaking classes of thirty or more student with varying levels of ability and motivation is many teachers night-mare. We are given classes made up whichever student come along with no attention paid to their ability level in English in general, let alone a single area such as Speaking.

Large numbers of students in crowded rooms, combined with limited time per lesson means that we are pressured from all sides to get through the curriculum as efficiently as possible. The question which remains, though, seems to be "What are we trying to achieve and how can we best achieve it?"

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To enable our students to pass the final exams, we must make sure that they have the reading and structure skills set out in the textbooks which are set by the government. So, most of our time is spent going through the books but we often tend to overlook or be less concerned about the students ability to really use what they are learning in real communication. Now, you must say “We do encourage our students to speak.” But, if this is so, why is it that a large number of high school graduates cannot use their English in active communication but rather, tend quickly forget what they’ve spent six years studying?

Based on the above reasons, teachers need to consider the way of teaching and the activities which can be used in teaching speaking. In this paper, I will discuss the benefits and challenges of large multilevel class, the principle of coping in large multilevel class and the activities which are suited to communicative class work.

Benefits and Challenges of Large Multilevel Class

The benefits

Although teaching in the large class is far from easy, there are certain advantages that we should be aware of:

1. **There are always enough students for interaction.** The presence of a large number of students made the class infinitely more multileveled, increased the interest, energy level and linguistic output of the entire group.
2. **We get a rich variety of human resources.** In a large multilevel class, there are a great many opinions, a great many points of reference, perhaps many cultural backgrounds, many temperaments, many world-views and values, many different experiences and many styles of learning. This wealth of dissimilarity can be used to our advantage in creating interesting, varied, meaningful and student-centered lessons.
3. **The teacher is not the only pedagogue.** Since there are so many levels of language ability, it is only natural that the more able students quickly assume the role of teacher-assistants. In such classes, students can learn as much from one another as they learn from the teacher. Cooperation works better than competition in the large class.
4. **We are never bored.** Since we must constantly be aware of many simultaneous activities and processes as well as variety of incoming stimuli, working with large multilevel classes provides us with a steady challenge. It summons the best and the most effective aspects of both our intellectual and emotional natures.
5. **Professional development occurs naturally.** Although experience in any classroom helps us to develop our technique, work in the large multilevel class truly forces us to invent and develop new ways of organizing material. These are the classes that compel us to find better ways of setting

The Challenges

Once we have learned to cope in the large class, we are pleased with the challenges such an environment offers. Nevertheless, the job of teaching the large class also presents us with a great many obstacles.

1. **We often feel out of control.** As the class is so large, we often feel that we have lost authority. Classroom management becomes a formidable obstacle that must be overcome before we can even begin to think about real teaching. The key to overcome this is the organization as a good organization helps to promote good control.
2. **We sometimes feel trapped in the problems of management.** Because the classes are so large, a variety of managerial tasks is demanded of us. How do we make class management smooth and invisible? A few managerial techniques and workable routine can help us out.
3. **It is difficult to provide for individual learning styles.** Allowing each of our students to find his/her preferred and unique way and pace of learning is necessary. The principles of 'collaboration', 'personalization', 'individualization' and that of enlarging circle all point toward allowing students a sense of self in the large class.
4. **Activating the quiet student is difficult.** We often feel discouraged when only a few students participate and we cannot manage activating a great many others, who look and act bored. How can we find ways to keep those who over-participate calmer and more interested in what their fellow students have to contribute? Can we organize group work and pair works in such a way that our students have the best possibility for speaking out, practicing language, getting attention and experiencing immediate feedback? The principles of 'open endedness', 'interest' and 'variety' are fundamental to student engagement.

Principles of Coping in Large Multilevel Classes

If helping our students to become effective verbal communicators in English is to be one of goals, we need to discover what it is that will allow us to achieve both this and the other aims of reading and structure ability in the time available in class. So, let us take a brief look, first all, at the role of the teacher in the English classroom.

As pointed out by Paulston (1984), there are several areas which we may consider when talking about what a good teacher can do to maximize the learning which take place in the class. The following points are basic thoughts in the theory of effective teaching practices:

1. Classroom management-The teacher must effectively manage the materials, available time and space and the students so that learning may occur.
2. Clarity of instruction-The teacher must make clear to the students what task and exercises are set and how the students will be able to accomplish these tasks. Important teacher activities are to complain, outline, summarize and review.
3. Maximizing student work time-The teacher must give instructions and explanations briefly and concisely to allow most of the class time for the students to be involved in completing as signed tasks.

4. What is success?-The teacher must make sure that the students know what they are aiming for so that they know when they have been successful or at least what they have to do to achieve success.

Hess (2001) suggested some practical principles for coping in the large multilevel classes. There are ways of coping, as well as functional principles and strategies that can turn a struggle into a challenging trial.

1. Variety – Variety is important in all teaching. A variety of activities and techniques is important in all learning situations but particularly relevant in the large multilevel class because varieties of tasks can accommodate different level in our class.
2. Pace – Correct pacing means that we should handle each activity and phase of activity at the tempo and momentum suitable to it. This particularly important in the large multilevel class because without correct pacing, we can lose control and make our students either bored or frustrated and in a large multilevel class such students become troublemakers and distract even the most fastidious and most motivated.
3. Interest- In the large class, interest is particularly important because as soon as a group of students lose interest, they are likely to either cause trouble or create the kind of distraction that will focus on them rather than on the lesson.
4. Collaboration- Collaboration means working together and cooperating. Collaboration is good teaching in all classes: through collaborative learning, students participate more, they learn how to compromise, they negotiate meaning, and they become better risk-takers and more efficient self monitors and self evaluators. In a large multilevel class collaboration is a must as teacher simply cannot be everywhere at the same time, and cannot service the immediate needs of all students.
5. Individualization- Individualizing student work help us to deal with the problem of finding the person in the crowd. It also help to keep everyone challenged, interested, and occupied with tasks that are neither too difficult or too easy.
6. Personalization- It is important that students feel they are related to as individuals and are not simply numbers on a list. In large classes, it is important to provide opportunities in which students may share opinions, relate to their own future plans, explore their ideas on important issues, take stands on controversial topics and apply special knowledge to current concerns.
7. Choice and open-endedness- Open-ended exercises allow students many possibilities for choosing appropriate language items and gearing the exercise to their own level of competence.
8. Setting up routines- In the large class, where so many personalities interact and so much human energy is expended; both teacher and students need the comfort and stability of established routines. The class operates much more smoothly if early in the term certain conventions are established.

9. Enlarging the circle- We want to involve as many students as possible and we are worry if only a few students participate. There are several ways in which we can enlarge the circle of active attention in our classes.
10. Question the kind of questioning we use- In the large multilevel class it is important to ask the kinds of questions that arouse interest and create maximum student involvement.

Activities Suitable to Communicate Class Work

The next point to discuss is what activities teachers can use in conjunction with the set texts to improve the speaking performance of the students. To this end, many educators these days are advocating the use of what is known as the communicative approach. This approach, as defined by Littlewood (1985), sets out with the aim of giving the learners the ability to use the target language to communicate. He describes these activities as "...those where learners are engaged in a meaning-focused activity..." and "...using the language ..." which they have been taught earlier for some other purpose rather than just merely handling it.

Juric (1989) takes this idea and also goes on to point out that not only should both the students and the teacher be involved in activities which emphasis natural communication, but they should also use the target language as a means of communication in the day-to-day working of the class. Thus, the value of communicative activities, then, is that they focus on students' attention on things other than language and create conditions in which the targeted forms already taught are applied in a non-deliberate way.

A most necessary part of communicative activities is that there will be many people talking at the same time as is usually involves the students working in pairs or small groups. In a large class this can lead to a higher noise level than usual but can still be controlled by the teacher. Underwood (1987) suggests that, for younger learners, the teacher may need to explain the purpose of asking them to work in pairs or small groups, especially if they have not been accustomed to this style of activity before. Not only this, but she also recommends firmness in dealing with noisy or troublesome students at least on the first few occasions in order to maintain control. Students can be corrected as the teacher is circulating among the groups, monitoring the work in progress.

Of course, by reading just a few books, you can find hundreds of ideas for the actual activities which are suited to communicative class work but here are a few popular ideas which you may adapt for you own purposes and students:

- a. Strips stories-short texts should be divided into sentences, distributed to the members of a group (5-10 students is ideal) for them to memorize then work together to put the sentences into their correct order.
- b. Picture differences – pairs of students have pictures which are similar except for a number of differences which they must identify by discussing their pictures without showing each other.

- c. Twenty questions – one member of each small group should think of an object, occupation, personality or something similar for the others to discover through a limited or unlimited number of yes/no questions.
- d. Following directions – one student should see a complete picture or construction and direct his/her partner/s to produce an identical picture or construction.
- e. Problem solving – groups of students are provided with the outline of a problem to discuss with the aim of choosing and justifying a course of action.
- f. Find you partner – pairs (or more) of picture or word cards should be distributed to the students with instructions to find a partner with the same card by asking questions, not by showing the cards to each other.
- g. Missing information – pairs of students have tables of information which are incomplete and, to complete their own tables, they must exchange information with their partner.
- h. Pooling information – as above, students must exchange information to get the complete picture of a situation before solving a related problem.

Conclusion

From these few suggestions and reminders, it should be evident to everyone that despite the possible difficulties associated with large numbers of students in speaking classes, through the use of pair work and group work, we teachers can cope. Moreover, communicative activities really do lend themselves to this type of situation and, in so doing, increase the active learning time of the students, allowing them to get the maximum amount of practice during the lesson. Finally, one point which should not be overlooked in any discussion about the use of communicative activities is the fact that they are enjoyable and the fun aspect can motivate the students to participate to their fullest. So, try out some of these ideas and pleasant teaching!

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