

ADAPTING A RESOURCE FOR MULTI-LEVEL CLASSROOMS

It is likely most English language teachers have had to teach a group of learners who vary greatly in their language abilities. In order to successfully teach and meet the diverse learning needs of students in multi-level classrooms, teachers must use strategies to differentiate learning. This often requires teachers to spend extra time preparing and adapting materials to meet the needs of all of their students. This week's Teacher's Corner walks teachers through a resource while annotating the many ways it could be adapted to fit the diverse language needs in a multi-level classroom. The multi-level adult classroom in this scenario includes some true beginners, false beginners (students who lack the skills to be considered intermediate learners but have some language competency) and low-intermediate learners.

LEVEL

Multi-level beginning class

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Speaking
Listening

GOALS

During this activity, students will be able to:

- Practice asking directions in a way that aligns with students' language levels

MATERIALS

- Copy of [Dialog 15](#) from "Dialogs for Everyday Use" (see Appendix A)
- Copies of adapted dialogs (see Appendix A); make sure enough of each level are printed for the students at each language level

PREPARATION

- Adapt the dialog for three different levels of learners (Step One).

- Pair students by language level: true beginners, false beginners, and low-intermediate learners (Step Two). This activity is best done if learners have had some previous practice reading and following directions.

STEP ONE: PROCEDURE FOR ADAPTATION

Adaptation for True Beginners, False Beginners, and Low-Intermediate Learners

Begin by asking questions about what language knowledge the different levels of learners have. Also consider what learners need to know when asking for directions. For example, for many true beginners, the original dialog includes too many colloquialisms and new vocabulary words for them to use it successfully. At the same time, a low-intermediate learner with better speaking skills might feel very comfortable using the dialog as it is. These learner differences need to be considered in order to make the lesson as effective as possible for all learners in the class.

Let's look at some ways to make adjustments, working through the dialog. Here are some ideas for line 1.

1. Consider the true beginner and how the question is asked in line 1:

Marilyn: *Excuse me. Could you tell me which way Dobson's bookstore is?*

Notice that the speaker, Marilyn, uses the polite but somewhat indirect phrase "Could you tell me..." as a way to begin her question. For beginners, this polite form might include too many words for a clear, recognizable question. In addition, while the use of the phrase to introduce the question is polite, true beginners will not be able to fully understand why the phrasing is used and how polite it is.

Instead, this line can be adapted to simplify the language, making it more familiar and direct. For example:

Marilyn: *Excuse me. Where is Dobson's bookstore?*

This simple change is much more representative of how true beginners are learning to ask questions: the question now has the Wh- word at the beginning of the question, followed by a verb, and then the object of the sentence. Rephrasing the question into a structure familiar to true beginners creates an opportunity for practice and success. At this point, true beginners in the class would be familiar with the question structure but would need time to practice and fine-tune the question for use in speaking.

2. Now, consider the false beginner and the first line of the dialog.

Marilyn: *Excuse me. Could you tell me which way Dobson's bookstore is?*

The false beginner comes to class with some language knowledge and background. This student may or may not have encountered colloquialisms but is more likely to be familiar with some speaking patterns and routine questions than the true beginner. In this case, the phrasing of the question might prove too difficult for a false beginner as well. The question could be simplified for this group of students as well, but another sentence could be added to increase the challenge.

Marilyn: *Excuse Me. I need some help. Where is Dobson's bookstore?*

The single addition of the sentence, *I need some help*, adds a very small amount of language to increase the difficulty, but it is a sentence that some false beginners have encountered if they have had interactions with other English speakers.

3. The low-intermediate learner would be the most capable of carrying out the original dialog but might need some minor changes to give them an effective tool for practice.

Marilyn: *Excuse me. Could you tell me which way Dobson's bookstore is?*

The low-intermediate learner might be familiar with the polite phrasing of the question but might not have used it. Now is a chance for this group of learners to try using that phrasing, but in a more

simplified way. Giving learners a chance to practice some pragmatic aspects of American English will help them understand how Americans use language and begin using it themselves.

Another option is to keep the sentence added for the false beginner group.

Marilyn: *Excuse me. I need some help. Do you know where Dobson's bookstore is?*

By altering the question slightly, but offering a polite alternative, the low-intermediate learners have a chance to practice English as it is used by native speakers.

4. Now that the first line has been adapted for each group, try the same techniques on adapting the second line. The rewritten dialog models are included in Appendix A, as is the original.

STEP TWO: PROCEDURE FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

1. Tell students that today they will practice asking for directions with a partner.
2. Warm up by asking the entire class a direction question that is familiar to them:
 - a. Write this question on the board and say it to the class: *Where is the bathroom?*
 - b. Indicate for students to respond.
 - i. Some students might respond by pointing and others might respond with language.
 - c. When you hear someone respond with language, write his or her answer on the board and repeat the answer for the entire group.
 - d. Offer two alternative answers and write those on the board as well.
 - e. Now ask a student to ask you a question using a place they are familiar with, such as the bank.
 - i. Encourage the student if unsure with the question ("Where is...?").
3. Explain that now the class will work together to practice asking directions.
 - a. Group the students by their language level. If the class is large, put them into groups of 2 or 4 according to their level.
 - b. Hand out the adapted dialogs to each group according to their level.

- c. Tell all of the groups to practice reading the dialog aloud together.
 - i. Start by circulating around to the true beginner groups and model the dialog for them with one group member.
 - ii. As you circulate to the false beginner group, once again model the dialog and ask them if they know what *I need some help* means.
 - iii. Check in with the low-intermediate group modeling the dialog, and ask if there are any words they would add to the dialog. Encourage the low-intermediate group to add other information if they are able.
4. After the groups have practiced a little, have them work in pairs to practice both parts of the dialog. After they have practiced three times, have them switch partners with someone else and repeat.
5. When everyone has practiced the dialog with two different partners, put the students into large groups according to levels and have pairs present the dialog to the rest of the group. Ultimately, each pair of students should perform the dialog.

EXTENSIONS

If a dialog proves too easy for one group, offer them the dialog of the next level. For example, if some of the true beginners are doing an excellent job with their dialog, give them the dialog for the false beginners. If the low-intermediate learners are doing really well with their dialog, encourage them to work in pairs to write a similar dialog asking for directions. Teachers can always ask students to rewrite a text based on their own language knowledge. This is a way to further adapt a text and assess what language students have in their lexicon.

APPENDIX A

Dialogs for Everyday Use

Dialog 15

“Asking Directions”

Marilyn: Excuse me. Could you tell me which way Dobson’s bookstore is?

Nancy: Yes, it’s that way. You go two blocks, then turn left. It’s on the corner opposite the post office.

Marilyn: Thanks I’ve only been in town a few days, so I really don’t know my way around yet.

Nancy: Oh, I know how you feel. We moved here a year ago, and I still don’t know where everything is.

Sample Adaptation for True Beginners

Marilyn: Excuse me. Where is Dobson’s bookstore?

Nancy: It is close. Walk north for two blocks, then turn left. The bookstore is across the street next to the post office.

Marilyn: Thank you.

Nancy: You’re welcome. Have a good day.

Sample Adaptation for False Beginners

Marilyn: Excuse me. I need some help. Where is Dobson’s bookstore?

Nancy: It’s close. You go north for two blocks, then turn left. The bookstore is across the street on the corner and next to the post office.

Marilyn: Thank you so much.

Nancy: Of course. Have a good day.

Sample Adaptation for Low-Intermediate Learners

Marilyn: Excuse me. I need some help. Do you know where Dobson's bookstore is?

Nancy: I do. The bookstore is easy to find. Head north for two blocks, then turn left. The bookstore is on the corner next to the post office.

Marilyn: Thank you for your help!

Nancy: Anytime. Have a great day!

Marilyn: You too!