

MULTI-LEVEL CLASSES PART ONE: DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION WITH LEARNING STATIONS

Last week in the Teacher’s Corner we looked at how to use learning teams to manage large classes. Another common issue that many English teachers deal with is having students from multiple levels in the same course. This makes planning for and meeting the needs of individual students quite difficult. This week in the Teacher’s Corner we will explore how to set up learning stations to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students from various levels.

LEARNING STATIONS

Stations are an excellent way to provide students with activities that are tailored to their abilities. Setting up stations and training students in proper procedures does take time, but the investment is worth it because it can help you meet students’ needs more effectively.

There are many different ways to include learning stations as part of your instruction. Some teachers choose one day of the week to use stations while others designate a portion of the class period every day. Before you get started, consider the amount of time you have, the number of students you have, and how many learning stations you plan to set up.

GROUPING STUDENTS AND CREATING A SCHEDULE

Once you have decided which stations you plan to set up, you can divide your class into groups according to the number of stations. For example, if you have five learning stations, divide your class into five groups. To address the different levels in your class, plan to have one station where students work with you, the teacher. For this purpose, create groups based on English level so that you can create activities in your teacher-led station based on what each group of students needs. (See more about teacher-led groups below.) Give each group a name, create a chart like the one below, and post it in the classroom so students can refer to it.

Learning Station Groups				
Blue	Red	Yellow	Green	Orange
Jose Emilia Kristin	Miguel Li Bardan	Anaam Sarah Catherine	Juan Ayden Tomas	Yasin Sarmila Maryan

Ali Fin	Jeffrey Marisol	Viet Suchita	Cing Ginny	Alahama Beth
------------	--------------------	-----------------	---------------	-----------------

After forming groups, determine how often you would like students to work in learning stations and create a schedule to post in the classroom. Two examples, one for daily learning stations and one for a single day of learning stations, are shown below.

Learning Station Schedule (Daily)					
<u>Stations</u>	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Writing	Blue	Red	Yellow	Green	Orange
Reading	Orange	Blue	Red	Yellow	Green
Games	Green	Orange	Blue	Red	Yellow
Listening	Yellow	Green	Orange	Blue	Red
Teacher	Red	Yellow	Green	Orange	Blue

Note: Teachers who have students work in learning stations for part of each day usually divide the class period. Part of the time is allotted for the teacher to deliver a lesson and the other part is used for students to work in learning stations. The amount of time you spend on each of these activities depends on the needs of your class. Many teachers also create station activities based on the content they are teaching each week.

Learning Station Schedule (Single Day)					
<u>Stations</u>	Time	Time	Time	Time	Time
Writing	Blue	Red	Yellow	Green	Orange
Reading	Orange	Blue	Red	Yellow	Green
Games	Green	Orange	Blue	Red	Yellow
Listening	Yellow	Green	Orange	Blue	Red
Teacher	Red	Yellow	Green	Orange	Blue

Note: For a single day where groups rotate through all of the learning stations, you will need to divide the class period into equal amounts of time. This way each group will spend the same amount of time working in each learning station. When you are planning, it is important to add transition time (time for students

to clean up and move to the next station) into the schedule. Keep in mind that younger students require more time to transition. You can label each column in the schedule above with the amount of time that works for your class.

Setting clear expectations and rehearsing the procedures ahead of time will help your stations run smoothly. It also helps to use a timer that makes a sound, such as a kitchen timer or one on a mobile phone. Alternatively, you can loudly and clearly utter a consistent phrase such as, “Groups please rotate!” or “Change stations!” so that students become accustomed to your signal.

IDEAS FOR LEARNING STATIONS

The table below suggests learning stations that do not require a lot of materials or planning. Of course, any activity that you can train your students to work on independently can be used as a learning station. The goal of the stations is to have students practice English, whether they are listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Usually, working in a group on the activities described below allows students to use multiple skills at the same time.

Station Name	Materials	What Students Do
Writing	Photos/illustrations, old magazines, picture dictionaries and/or regular dictionaries, previously studied vocabulary word lists, nonfiction books on familiar topics, graphic organizers (such as beginning-middle-end, main idea and details), posters describing previously studied types of writing (narrative, poetry, informative, persuasive, etc.), specific questions or topics you want students to write about (can be written on the board or posted in the writing area)	Create lists, cut out magazine photos and label them or use them create a story, write essays/stories using vocabulary words, use graphic organizers to plan fiction or nonfiction pieces of writing, research a topic and write about it, respond to specific prompts or questions, write journal entries, or create posters.
Reading	A classroom library (if available) or books selected by students or the teacher, printed reading passages and response questions, tablets for students to access e-books or online reading resources, any books or reading materials students are currently studying, graphic organizers	Use the reading materials in the station to read independently, read aloud to or together with a peer, or take turns reading parts of a text (if sharing materials). Respond in Learning Station Journal by drawing, writing about the text, or answering specific questions. Complete a graphic organizer based on the chosen text.
Listening	Any device (stereo/boom box, phone, tablet, computer, etc.) that can be used to play a recorded text or dialogue for students using headphones or speakers. Recordings can be teacher-created, found online, or materials specifically created for a listening center.	Listen to the text or dialogue at least two times. Respond in Learning Station Journal by drawing and labeling, listing words, writing a response, or answering specific questions posted by the teacher.
Technology	Tablets, computers, mobile phones, or other technology and internet access if available	Use educational apps or games, research a specific topic, use educational software to practice specific skills, or visit teacher-selected websites for specific

		purposes.
Games	Items needed to play familiar games used in the classroom or other learning games such as board games, cards, bingo, crosswords, or puzzles.	Play a single game as a whole group, or choose games to use with a partner or portion of the learning station group.
Teacher	Lessons or activities prepared for each group of students based on English level. The activities can be used to teach new concepts, review concepts that students need extra help with, or provide a challenge to advanced learners.	Work with the teacher to learn, review, or reinforce a specific skill or concept. Complete an activity or task tailored to the group's needs and abilities.

COLLECTING AND GRADING STUDENTS' WORK

To keep track of the work your students complete in stations, provide a composition book or notebook for each student. Write the student's name on the front and then designate sections of the notebook to each of the stations the student will visit. The pages can be divided by using sticky notes, paper clips, or by simply folding a page at the beginning of each section. Train students to use the appropriate section of the notebook in each learning station and to write the date on each entry they make.

Notebooks can be stored in one area of the classroom, such as a specific shelf or in bins. They can be stacked according to station groups so that a group member can easily distribute them each time students work in learning stations. If you prefer, students can keep track of the notebooks individually. Since the notebooks will only be used in class, there is no need for students to take them home.

Work that students complete in the teacher led station can be assessed for a grade. To keep students accountable and monitor their progress, you should also choose to grade some of the work they complete in stations. This can be accomplished by choosing a date or station and then checking each student's notebook for completion for that specific day or activity.