# MULTI-LEVEL CLASSES PART TWO: DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION WITH TEACHER-SUPPORTED GROUPS AND LEVELED TASKS

Last week in the Teacher's Corner, we presented the basics about how to address the needs of students from multiple levels in your classroom through learning stations. This week, we will focus on suggestions for how to use teacher-supported groups either in conjunction with learning teams or learning stations, or as a stand-alone strategy. Additionally, we will discuss how to create leveled assignments to differentiate instruction for your students.

## TEACHER-SUPPORTED GROUPS

If you are using the learning teams described in Week One of this month's Teacher's Corner, you can differentiate instruction by assigning only a portion of your class to learning teams. While more advanced students can benefit from a learning team that works without teacher assistance, beginners have different instructional needs. For these lower proficiency students, create a teacher-supported group. Note that this group can still be called a learning team so that students do not feel singled out. The difference is that you will work directly with this teacher-supported "learning team" rather than the students completing work independently. You can include this group on a list of learning teams posted in the classroom so that the difference is less obvious to students.

Once you have given the signal for learning teams to assemble, the students you have selected for the teacher-supported group can join you for an alternative activity. This group can meet in a designated area of the classroom, such as a specific table or open area where everyone can sit comfortably. Use the extra time with lower level students to provide additional instruction or practice, review challenging concepts, or provide an alternative task that is better suited to their level of English. Gathering these students in a small group will also make them more comfortable. They may be more likely to participate and ask questions than they are as part of the whole class.

If you are not using learning teams, you can still provide additional support to your beginner level students in a small group. After you present a lesson, give the class a practice activity to work on independently. Then, simply gather the students who need extra support or an alternative assignment in the area you have designated. Teacher supported groups can also be used to challenge more advanced students. Follow the same procedure, but instead gather your most advanced students to work on a more complex task or assignment.

americanenglish.state.gov

**PLANNING AHEAD**

When using teacher-supported groups to differentiate, you will be more effective if you decide which students to include ahead of time. You can create several different groups based on the levels in your classroom. Then, make a schedule of which group you will meet with each day. Use the groups and schedule to plan the activities and type of support you will give to your students. A sample schedule is shown below. If you plan to post the schedule in your classroom, give each group a name rather than listing the students' levels.

| Day | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group | Beginner:<br>Miguel<br>Li<br>Bardan<br>Jeffrey<br>Marisol | Advanced:<br>Anaam<br>Sarah<br>Catherine<br>Viet<br>Ro | Beginner:<br>Miguel<br>Li<br>Bardan<br>Jeffrey<br>Marisol | Advanced:<br>Anaam<br>Sarah<br>Catherine<br>Viet<br>Ro | Beginner:<br>Miguel<br>Li<br>Bardan<br>Jeffrey<br>Marisol |
| Activity | Review vocabulary from the unit by playing concentration as a group. | Create a skit using new vocabulary from the unit. Start writing script. | Match vocabulary words and definitions and then write sentences with words as a group. | Create a skit using new vocabulary from the unit. Finish writing a script and practice it. | Review vocabulary words and definitions. Use words to fill in the blanks in a short passage on the unit topic. |

Creating several groups and scheduling time with each one works well for classrooms with many different levels. However, sometimes a majority of students in a class are at the same level, and there is a smaller portion of beginner or advanced level students who have different needs. In this situation, it works best to create a group (or a few groups) with the students who are outliers and meet with them more frequently. How often you meet and with which students can also be adjusted based on the content of your lessons. For instance, if you know certain students struggle with a particular verb tense, you can give them extra practice in a teacher-supported group.

If you are planning to include a teacher-supported group as one of the learning stations described in Week Two of this month's Teacher's Corner, the same idea applies. Plan the activity based on the needs of the students you will work with according to the learning station schedule. This is a great opportunity to provide targeted instruction to small groups of students.

Another option to address multiple levels in the same class is to assign different tasks on the same topic. Planning for this is similar to creating different assignments for a teacher-supported group because you base the task on the needs and abilities of your students.

Let's use an example class with 5 beginner-level students, 23 intermediate students, and 7 advanced students. As teachers with limited time, we often do what will benefit the majority of our students. Therefore, we might give this class a task suited to the intermediate level since they are the majority. If we do this, the advanced students might find the work too easy and become bored while the beginners might struggle.

The 5 beginner-level and 7 advanced students could definitely benefit from work that is better suited to their capabilities. While our curriculum or government standards may require that we teach certain topics and skills in a set course, we can support all of our students by considering their abilities when we plan lesson activities. Below are some sample topics you might teach in an English course and examples of how you can create leveled tasks for each one. Note that these example tasks would be assigned to students after you have provided a lesson or series of lessons on the topic.

| Topic | Beginner | Intermediate | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| Poetry | Give students a poem with one or two words missing per line. The words should all be the same part of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives) or from the same category (colors, animals, foods). Have them choose their own words to fill in the blanks and create a new poem. If needed, provide a word bank. | Provide students with an example poem similar to the one you want them to create. Provide a document with the first one or two words of each line followed by a blank. Allow students to create their own poem by writing the rest of each line independently, referring to the example as needed. | Ask students to create their own poems independently. Examples of poems you have studied in the lesson can be referred to for support if necessary. |
| Post Reading (Fiction) | Give students a simple graphic organizer with three sections, one each for the beginning, middle, and end of a story. Low beginner level students can draw pictures to represent what happened in each part of the story or chapter you have read. They can add words or simple sentences, or orally retell the events. | Have students write 3-5 sentences for each part of the story or chapter (beginning, middle, and end). Have students identify the setting, characters, and major events. A graphic organizer can be used if needed. | Ask students to write an essay describing the events in the text you have read. Require them to include sequence words such as *first*, *next*, *then*, and *finally*, as well as to identify the characters, setting, and major events. Ask them to include a paragraph predicting what they think will happen next or providing an alternate ending. |
| Post | Provide students with a graphic | Give students the same graphic | Give students a blank graphic |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Reading (Nonfiction)** | organizer appropriate for the text being used, such as a timeline. The graphic organizer should be partially completed (at least half of the dates and events filled in). Ask learners to work in pairs or small groups to fill in the missing information using the text. | organizer as the beginner level students, but with less information provided (perhaps only the dates). Have students work in pairs or small groups to fill in the missing information using the text. | organizer. Provide them with instructions about how it should be completed. Have students work independently to fill in the missing information. For an extra challenge, ask students to summarize the information in writing. |
| **Vocabulary** | Give students a matching activity where words and definitions must be correctly paired. Then, have them refer to the words and definitions to fill in the blanks in sentences with the vocabulary words missing. This can be completed independently or in pairs. | Require students to fill in the blanks in sentences with vocabulary words missing. Then, ask learners to write their own original sentences using the new words. | Provide students with a list of the vocabulary words. Ask them to create a cohesive composition or short story using all of the new words correctly. |
| **Grammar Concepts** | Ask students to identify the new concept in a text or choose from several options. For example, if you have taught the future tense, ask them to highlight verbs in the future tense in a story. Have students explain why they chose the words. | Provide learners with a list of verbs to change to the future tense. Have students write sentences that correctly use the future tense of each verb. | Ask students to create a poster explaining the future tense and giving examples. The poster should include when and why the tense is used, how the verb changes, and sample sentences. Students can work in small groups and present the posters when they are finished. |

Teaching students with varying English levels and abilities in the same classroom can be overwhelming. However, with a bit of planning, teacher-supported groups and leveled assignments can help you provide instruction that is more appropriate for all of your students.