Managing multilevel (and large) classe. Sam Ling Gibson, 2018.

ASK

Sources: Hess, N., (2001). Teaching Large Multilevel Classes. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press; Field, J. (2002)., The changing Face of Listening. In Richards, J.C. & Renandya, W.A. (eds.), Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Agheshteh, H.A. Hessam Aldin. (2008). Teaching in the Large Multi-level classes. Roudehen: Islamic Azad University; Scrivener, J. 4th ed (2014)., Classroom Mamagement Techniques. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://fspsscience.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/80214878/Leveled_20Questions_20for_20ELLs-Handout.pdf; Roberts, M. (2007). Teaching in the Multilevel Classroom. From: www.pearsonlongman.com/ae/download/adulted/multilevel-monograph.pdf

Teaching classes where the English proficiency level of individual students is varied is often the norm for teachers. Even within CEFR bands, e.g. B1 or B2 there can be significant differences which pose a challenge in trying to deliver your class objectives effectively to all students.

In the past, with a mixed-level (or heterogeneous) class, many teachers chose to effectively teach 2 different classes at the same time to the higher and low-level students. However, this is a lot of work for the teacher, and research now shows that this is not necessary. However as this guide will show, simpler strategies can be used which still allow objectives to be reached, and a dynamic class in which keeping both the higher and lower-level students engaged is possible.

There are basically 2 options for dealing with multilevel classes, which Roberts (2007) refers to as "like-ability" (students of the same proficiency level work together), or "cross-ability" (mix of levels). Scrivener (2014) suggests a mix of both, e.g. one half or one task in mixed level groups and the other in similar-level. This guide will identify the pros and cons of each before giving strategies for each, as well as strategies which work with either of the methods of grouping students.

like-ability – same levels together	cross-ability- mixing levels
Pros	*Pros*
• *Students of similar needs can be matched* • *Above-level students do not feel frustrated at the lower pace of below-level students.* • *Similarly, vice-versa- lower-level students do not feel that they do not understand the language and/ or material.*	• *Higher-level students can help lower-level students* • *Teacher should let the higher level students know prior, telling them they will be ʹteaching assistantsʹ, and that in teaching language and concepts they are memorising and understanding them better.* • *A class identity and cohesion may form and develop.* • *Weaker students benefit from hearing stronger students.* • *Can encourage an atmosphere of mutual respect and support*
Cons • *Above-level students can finish early or find the task too easy- see below to counter this.* • *May lose a cohesive class identity* • *Some students may feel superior to others*	
	Cons • *Higher-level students can become frustrated*

	unless activities are interesting, personalised and open-ended. • *Strong students dominate and talk over weaker ones*

Strategies for having similar-level groups together

Text based work
Considering that getting used to academic texts in English is key, and the course often prescribes core and recommended readings, we should "instead of simplifying the language of the text, simplify the task that is demanded of the student, which will not blur the use of authentic materials in the class" (Field, 2002).

An example of this, from Agheshteh (2008) is to have ´Tiered tasks´, i.e. modified versions of the same question for different groups. For example, from an academic text, you could have slightly different questions for different levels of groups. Depending on the critical thinking skills you want to focus on, use Bloom's taxonomy (see ASK document and link above) to determine these tiered questions. For example the evaluating part:

lower level students could be asked questions such as
- Do you agree with the author …?
- With the outcome …?
- Is it better if …?

Midlevel:
- How important is …?
- What would you cite to defend that actions …?
- How would you prove ..?
- How would you evaluate …?

And high-level:
- Do you agree with the action …?
- With the outcomes …?
- What is your opinion of …?
- Can you assess the value or importance of …?
- Would it be better if …?
- What would you recommend …?
- What would you cite to defend the actions …?
- What judgment would you make about …?
- Based on what you know, how would you explain …?
- What information would you use to support the view …?

This differentiation can be adapted to a worksheet, and here is an example from Scrivener (2014, pp90):

2   Set the same task in a choice of versions. For example, offer an open writing task for stronger students (Worksheet A) and a similar task for weaker students, but with added support, e.g. guiding questions, a partially-written text or a list of ready-made phrases (Worksheet B).

A

You are going to make a short business trip to Sydney, Australia. Write an email to the Royal Swan hotel, asking if they have any vacancies. Explain when you want to stay, and ask about the prices. Think of one special request you have for your stay, and enquire about that too.

B

You are going to make a short business trip to Sydney, Australia. Write an email to the Royal Swan hotel. Use the notes below to help you.

	Dear Sir or Madam,
Ask if they have any vacancies for three nights beginning 7th January.	Do you ...
Say that you need a single room with Internet access.	I need ...
Ask how much it will cost.	How much ...
Make a special request. (Think what you want to ask for!)	I would like ...
Thank them. Say that you look forward to hearing from them.	Thank ...

Multilevel dictation
Choose a passage from a text that you will dictate two or three times (with increasing speed) then create a tiered activity accordingly:
- *the high level students have simply a blank page*
- *mid level have some of the words, but missing big chunks*
- *lower-level have smaller sections of text missing.*

http://www.analyzemywriting.com/ *is good for this as you can choose what % of the text to remove!*

Strategies for having mixed-level groups together

Promoting individualisation, (each student has tasks which reflect their language abilities):
- Personalised dictionaries for new vocab/ terms/ phrasal verbs etc.
- Portfolio projects.
- Individual infographic projects.
- Individual writing such as article reviews, text critiques, essays, single questions related to a text or lecture, or book reviews.
- Student created blogs where students present their ideas to the world.
- Students engage in forums on a given topic.
- Using additional language help, such as ASK at Rosario to help students at all levels improve on their weaknesses.
- Differentiate homework between levels
- Consider a different grading system for the language of the assessed pieces of lower level students. Make sure you give feedback to them to help future work.

2 minute talks
Give students topics or positions regarding a text from the class. They can work together to produce and the stronger students help with the weaker-students' language. Then they all present a part of the speech with greater confidence, or the more advanced students can ´represent´ the group

Fluid Pairs
In this activity the students are given a task that involves short exchanges with as many other members of the class as they can find: a survey of opinions, for example. The students move around the class, finding out the desired information from one peer before moving on to another.

Strategies for both of the grouping methods:

Split-and combine workflows
Here the whole class starts on the same thing, then, different group divide up and do varied tasks at a different pace or different challenge levels.

An Example from Scrivener (2014, pp89) is:

Technique: Split-and-combine workflows

A split-and-combine workflow is one where the whole class starts work on something together, but, later in the lesson, different subsections of the class separate off to do different work (maybe the same tasks at a different pace, or tasks that have a similar focus, but with different challenge levels). These groups then later come back together … and so on. For example:

Stage	Subgroup 1 (stronger)	Subgroup 2 (weaker)
1	Lead-in discussion.	
2	Teacher input on grammar point.	
3	Students work without supervision on Practice Exercise 1.	Teacher sits with subgroup to review and reinforce the input, answering questions and checking understanding.
4	Class does a restricted speaking exercise together (e.g. drill).	
5	Teacher sits with subgroup and offers more challenging speaking practice.	Students work on Practice Exercise 1.
6	Students work on Practice Exercise 2.	
7	Teacher checks answers to Exercise 1 with the whole class.	
8	Students from Subgroup 1 act as teachers to Subgroup 2 while they try to answer Practice Exercise 2.	

Particularly in multilevel and large groups interesting activities are key, for if students lose interest they will affect the learning of others. According to Hess (2001), an interesting activity will use one or more of the following aspects:

- arousing students' curiosity
- tapping into meaningful existential questions
- touching students' lives by personalizing the topic to their personal experiences.

See ask documents (critical thinking skills/ dynamic classes etc)

Personalisation
In allowing students to relate the class themes to themselves/ their community/ country etc., they can often understand the concept better and see how it does /does not impact upon their own lives. Additionally it keeps students more engaged and at their correct pace.

Most texts and speaking activities can be adapted in this way, for example:

Choice and open-endedness
-   This allows students to use language appropriate to their level. For example:
    o   Giving students the beginnings of sentences and they finish them.
    o   Brainstorming.
    o   Giving students a list of questions and finish allow them to do as many as they can, assuming that the higher-level groups will complete more. Another version of this is to have an additional question ready for those individuals or groups that finish first.
    o   Writing definitions to words/ concepts in their way.

Collaborative learning
Here students participate more, improve their comprising and risk-taking skills, negotiate meaning and concepts, improve their self-esteem and the general class atmosphere. In large multilevel classes collaborative learning is even more key as the students must use each other as language resources. Some strategies for collaboration are (Hess, 2001):

- Group work where students complete a task together
- Pair work in which students share ideas or quiz or drill each other.
- Peer review where students' analyse or comment on each other's written work (also reduces the burden on teachers).
- Brainstorming where students contribute ideas on a single topic.
- Jigsaw activities where students each contribute different aspects of knowledge to create a whole.
- Collaborative writing where a group collaborate to write a piece or writing.
- Collaborative community projects where groups investigate an aspect of the community and then report on it.
- Group infographic projects where students create an infographic that demonstrates a topic, issue or problem.

Target questions to students during whole class feedback- easier/ harder according to ability
Multilevel activities: these tasks are the same for all students, but allow the students to answer according to their language and abilities.
1) Making sentences.
2) Making stories or articles.
3) Poster-based tasks: put posters around the room with different questions on. Students walk round and add comments, ideas, and answers where they can. You can discuss the answers after as a class, and weaker students remain anonymous.

The quiet students
'Activating' the quiet students is an issue all teachers will come across, and this could be because of a) their personality in the L1 language (i.e. they are shy anyway), or that b) they feel intimidated or overwhelmed by the tasks, possibly because they are linguistically below-level. In addition to the activities above, here (and generally for language classes), it is good to gradually build their confidence by beginning activities in pairs, and then small groups, so the students can discuss the task in increasingly large groups. Finally, getting a higher-level student to represent the group in any whole-class feedback/discussion will avoid potential anxiety. After all, they have still contributed to the task, used the key language and feel a valued member of the team.

> Additionally, do not over correct the quiet students and explain that an answer with mistakes is much better than no answer. They are a language student after all!!

Or the very simple version, maybe if this is quite new and you're trying it for the first time!: (largely borrowing from Scrivener (2014). *More relevant for similar-levelled groups.*

Early and late finishers

1) early finishers: giving additional tasks
This can be asking them to combine previous answers into some compromise or summary viewpoint "*well done, I see you're nearly finishing the task. So, now see if you can write one extra answer summarising the key things the new Mayor must remember*".

2) early finishers: preparing a report or presentation
If they have finished a lot earlier, then the pair or group could prepare a public report, e.g. a presentation of their ideas or answers.

3) early finishers: joining other groups.
Here early finishers join other groups that are still working. They could be told to help them or just observe and give feedback when asked. Remember, tell them to ´help like a teacher´ i.e. not give the answers but to help the group decide and articulate their own.

4) Slow finishers: easing tasks
Like adding to some groups work, you can give slow finishers less questions, e.g. (just do questions 1-4 instead of 7, or "don't discuss the questions, I don't want you to agree or disagree".

See additional ask documents:
Blooms taxonomy- critical thinking skills http://repository.urosario.edu.co/handle/10336/14061