Teaching English as a Second Language

Unit Thirteen: Integrating skills in a multi-level classroom

Integrating Skills in the ESL Classroom

Teacher and learner characteristics

The setting

Relevant languages

The four basic skills

Integrating Skills

- Instructor's teaching style must address the learning style of the learner.

- Learner must be motivated

- The instructional setting must provide resources and values that strongly support the teaching of language.
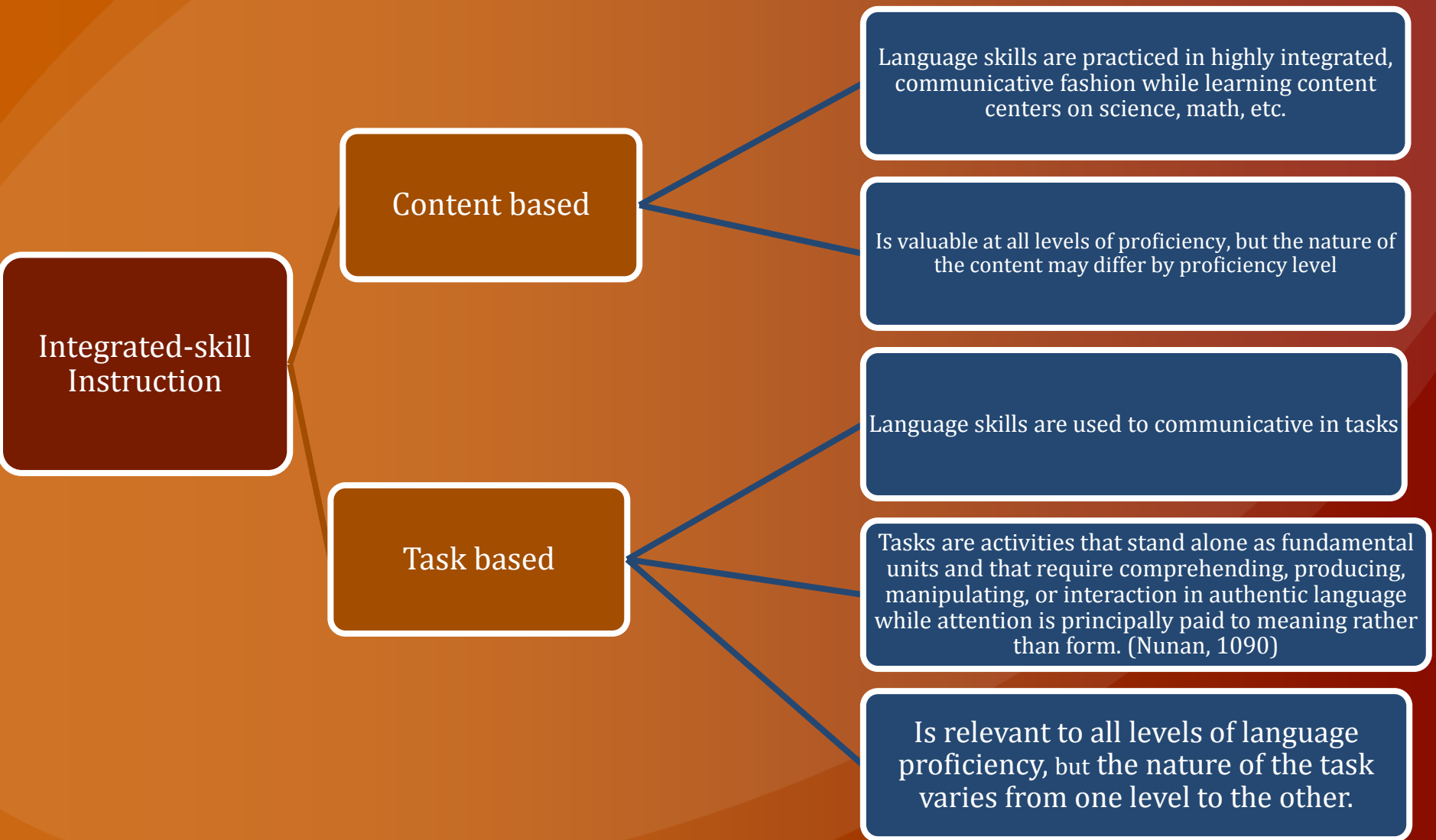
The Basic Skills: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking

The instruction of this skill strand of the tapestry is optimal in developing communicative abilities and is known as the integrated skills approach to teaching ESL.

Two Types of Integrated-Skill Instruction

Integrated-skill Instruction

Content based

Language skills are practiced in highly integrated, communicative fashion while learning content centers on science, math, etc.

Is valuable at all levels of proficiency, but the nature of the content may differ by proficiency level

Task based

Language skills are used to communicative in tasks

Tasks are activities that stand alone as fundamental units and that require comprehending, producing, manipulating, or interaction in authentic language while attention is principally paid to meaning rather than form. (Nunan, 1090)

Is relevant to all levels of language proficiency, but the nature of the task varies from one level to the other.

Advantages of Integrated Skills Approach

- Exposes learners to authentic language

- Challenges learners to interact naturally

- Helps learners gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language

- Stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest; it is a real means of interaction

- Allows teachers to track student progress in multiple skills at the same time

- Promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms

- Is highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds

Teacher Considerations

1) Learn more about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom (e.g. content-based, task-based, or a combination of both)

2) Reflect upon their current approach and evaluate the extent to which the skills are taught in conjunction with one another.

3) Choose instructional materials, textbooks, technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, writing, and speaking, as well as those associated skills of syntax, vocabulary, and so on.

4) Teach language learning strategies and emphasize that a given strategy can often enhance theh performance in multiple skills.

Multilevel Classrooms

Characteristics of a Multileveled Classroom

Previous experience with education

- Formal vs. informal education
- Expectations about learning/teaching
- Literacy skills

Country and culture of origin

- Classroom behaviors and expectations
- Tensions among groups in the class
- Native language

Individual factors
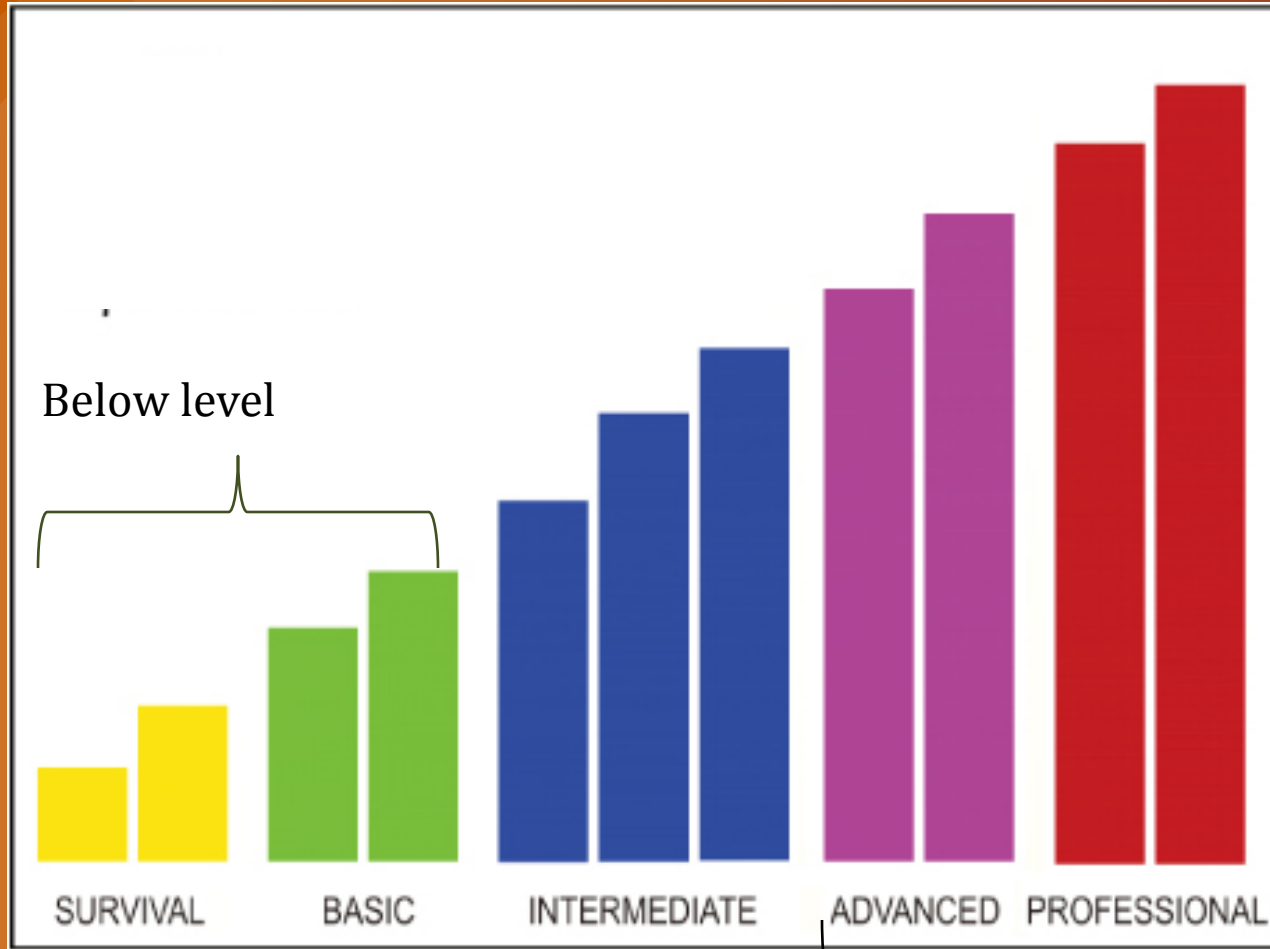
- Personality
- Motivation
- Attitude to new culture
- Age
- Learning style

Situational factors

- Situation in the new culture
- Access to English outside of the classroom

Proficiency Levels in the Multilevel Classroom

Below level

SURVIVAL   BASIC   INTERMEDIATE   ADVANCED PROFESSIONAL

Above level

Advantages & Challenges

Advantages

- Able to learn at their own pace

- Learn to work well in a group

- Become more independent learners

- Develop strong relationships with peers

- Become partners in the learning process

Challenges

- Finding appropriate teaching resources and materials

- Organizing appropriate groupings within the class

- Determining the individual needs of each student

- Ensuring that all students are challenged and interested

- Enforcing English only policies when teacher is occupied and students are working in small groups or in pairs

Differentiated Instruction

"The model of differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjust the curriculum and presentation of information to learners rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum." (Hall, Strangman and Meyer, 2011)

Instructional Strategies for the Multilevel Classroom

Needs Assessment

Grouping Strategies and Purposes

Using Native Languages

Project-based Learning and Thematic Instruction

Lesson Planning

Needs Assessment

The needs assessment process allows students the opportunity to express their individual needs and provides teachers with the information they need to help them develop appropriate lesson plans.

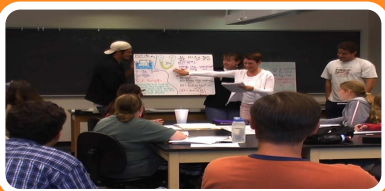# Grouping Strategies and Purposes

Pair work

- Two students working together

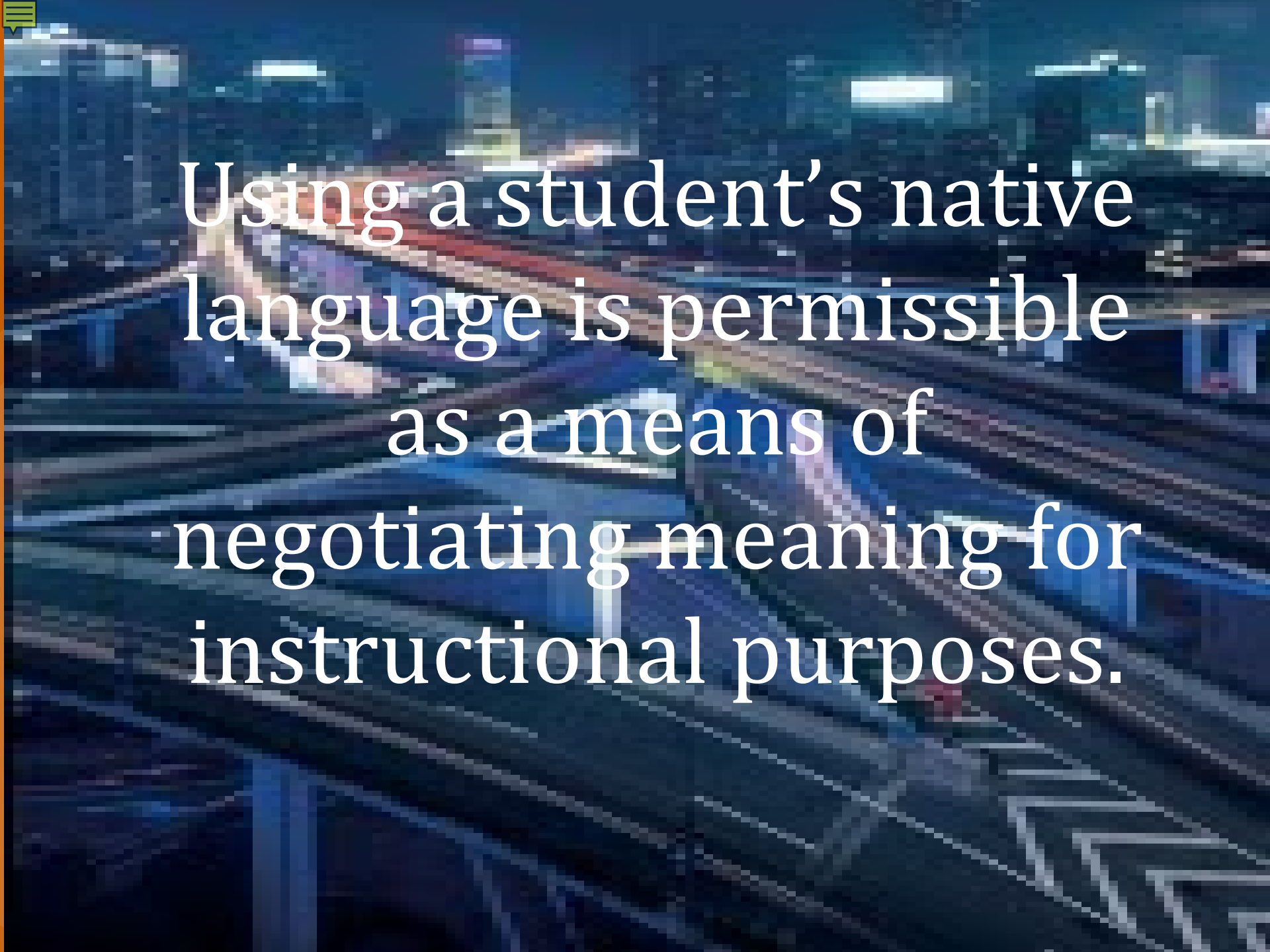
Group work

- Three to ten students working together

Teamwork

- Teams of students work together in competition

Whole class work

- The entire class participates in an activity

Using a student's native language is permissible as a means of negotiating meaning for instructional purposes.

Project-based Learning and Thematic Instruction

Project based learning

- Students are presented with a problem to solve or a product to develop
- Works best in student groupings (teams, pairs)

Thematic instruction

- Projects are organized around themes
- Students work in groups based on their interests rather than their English proficiency levels.

Lesson Planning

In the multilevel ESL classroom

Lesson Planning

"Teachers can prepare parallel lessons for learners at different levels. Planning should include strategies for managing a variety of group, pair, and individual activities."(Shank & Terrill, 1995)
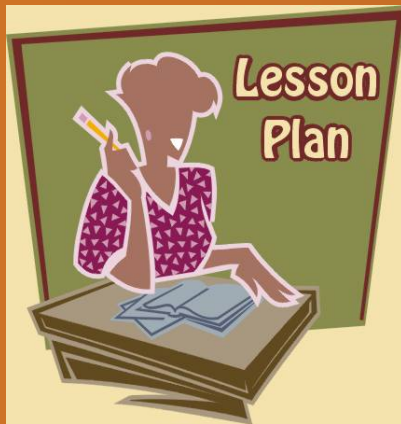
1. Allow for learner choice and use open-ended tasks that don't have a definite end

2. Assign different tasks to different ability-level students

3. Assign varying roles

4. Use different versions of the same dialogue or text: scripted; semi-scripted; discourse chains

5. Use role-plays with very complex to minimal roles; use picture prompts with no words

6. Language experience approach

7. Self access materials and computer labs

Allow for learner choice and use open-ended tasks that don't have a definite end

Sample scenario strips:

- It is stuffy in the room.

- You want to open the window

- You are in the lunchroom and want to look at someone's newspaper.

- You forgot your wallet at home and need to borrow $5.00 for a taxi.

- You have a doctor's appointment and need time off.

- You don't feel well and want to leave work early.

- You want a co-worker to help you understand an employee announcement.

Assign different tasks to different ability-level students

Although this can take more time to set up, the rewards are worth the effort. Teachers may worry that students won't understand why students in different groups have a different set of activities, but these worries are groundless. Students appreciate the effort put into creating specific tasks for different groups. Students are in class for a reason and it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that all learners, regardless of level, have their learning needs/wants met. One way to do this is through the use of multiple tasks for the same lesson.

Assign different tasks to different ability-level students

Teaching Vocabulary

Option A
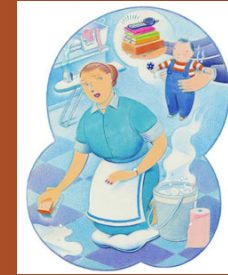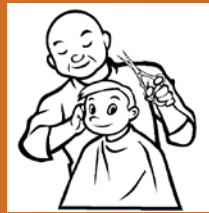
1. Taxi driver
2. Barber Hairdresser
3. Stock clerk
4. Parking attendant
5. Housekeeper
6. Waiter Waitress

Match each job to the appropriate duty. Work with a partner and discuss your answers.

_____ cleans houses
_____ drives passengers
_____ cuts hair

_____ stocks shelves
_____ serves food
_____ parks cars

Option B

Prepare a set of cue cards with the names of professions written on them and do the same as with Option A. Sort the words (i.e. professions) into these categories as well:

Jobs people in the group have done   Jobs they'd like to try

Option C

Small group discussions with these questions (name of profession written along the side of the page):

What jobs do people do outdoors/indoors?

Which are typically held by men/women in your culture? What about in the USA?

Which of the jobs would you be interested in and why?

What experiences have you had in your daily life with any of these workers or occupations?

Assign different tasks to different ability-level students

Multilevel Listening Task Examples

Listening Tasks for Multilevel Learners

Example 1

Give a visual cut-out of the country and have the students hold up their card if their country is mentioned in the broadcast. Alternatively, have students stand by a map and point to countries mentioned in the broadcast.
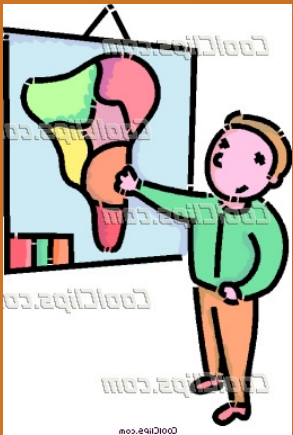
Example 2

Hand out pictures of things mentioned in the news. Students hold up their picture as the item or person is mentioned (you often find corresponding photos in the newspaper for the same day)

Listening Tasks for Multilevel Learners

Example 3

Give a list of countries (or cities and states), key words, or names that are covered in the news. Students check off the words as they hear them.

Example 4

List news topics on a handout and have students circle the topics that are covered in the news as they listen.

For example:

weather	crime	sports
national	international	local
government	people	business

Assign varying roles

➢ Students with stronger literacy skills can be scribes during group activities.

➢ Hesitant learners can be timekeepers; if they have developed literacy skills, give them cue cards with sentences like '*We have 10 more minutes.*' or '*We need to finish in 5 minutes.*'

➢ Students who like to dominate an activity could be asked to be a facilitator with some set ground rules; their job is to make sure everyone participates a set number of times.

Use different versions of the same dialogue or text

Scripted dialogue

Worker: I'd like to report an accident.

Supervisor: What happened?

Worker: I cut my hand

Supervisor: How did it happen?

Worker: Someone left a broken glass container in the sink and I picked it up.

Supervisor: Is it bad?

Worker: I don't know, but it hurts.

Supervisor: You'd better fill out an accident report and get it checked.

Semi-scripted dialogue

Worker: I'd _____an accident.

Supervisor: What_____?

Worker: I _____ my hand.

Supervisor: How did_____?

Worker: _____ a broken glass container in the sink and I _____ it up.

Supervisor: _____ bad?

Worker: I don't know, but _____.

Supervisor: You'd better_____ and get it _____.

Use different versions of the same dialogue or text

Limited literacy skills

Students create their own dialogue based upon a picture or a series of pictures.

Discourse chains

Worker	Supervisor
Report accident	Find out what happened
Explain what happened	Find out how it happened
Explain how it happened	Find out if it is bad
Tell if it's bad	Tell worker what to do

Use role-plays with very complex to minimal roles; use picture prompts with no words
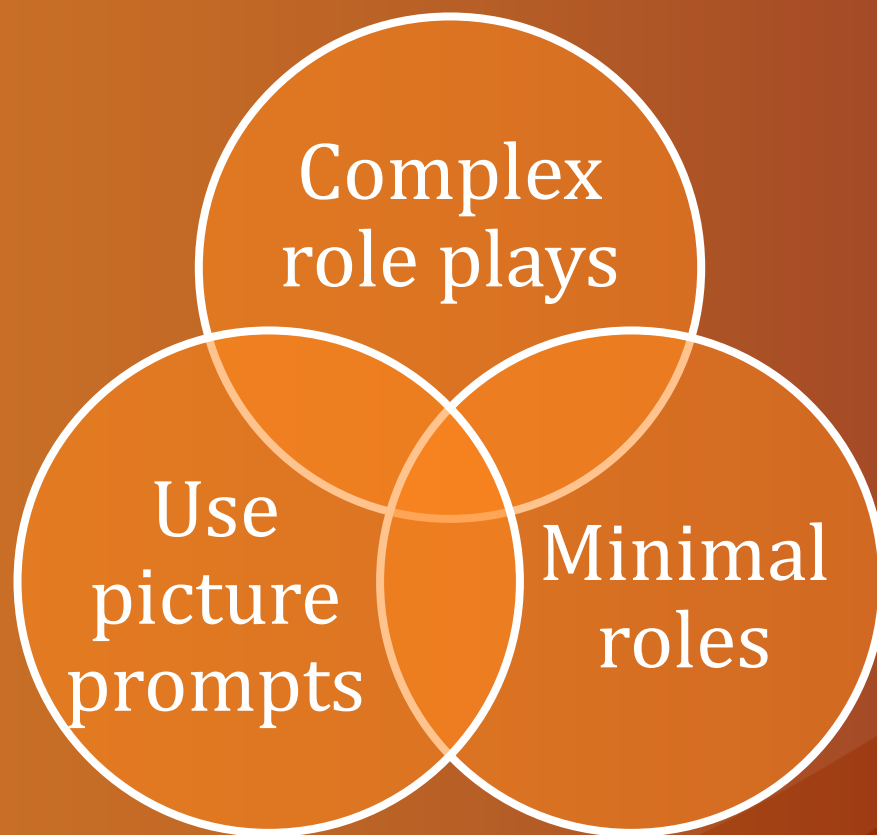
Language experience approach

Step Five: Student-generated texts are then used by the whole class for other practice activities.

Step Four: More literate learners write the story as it is told to them. Those with limited literacy skills draw pictures or verbally recount what they have understood.

Step Three: Pair more literate students with those with limited literacy skills. Have them tell their story to their partner.

Step Two: Students practice telling the story silently to themselves; ask students to think through the beginning, middle, and ending, as well as key points in the story.

Step One: Set up an event that could be used for language experience. OR
Have students think of an important event n their lives in the last (week, month, year).

Self access materials and computer labs

Materials

- Classroom collections of instructional materials

- Include all skill areas and levels

- Complete with answer keys

Computer assisted language learning (CALL)

- Higher retention rates

- Disconnect between lab and in-class instruction

Planning a Lesson for the Multileveled Classroom

Class together: Teacher intermittently lowers and raises instruction in lesson preview and presentation portion of the lesson

Assign leveled tasks: During the practice and evaluation stages of the lesson, students' tasks are leveled according to proficiency and language skill.

Ending the lesson: Review and assign whole class activity

TEACHING

SUPPORTING

EMPOWERING

ENGAGING

CARING

SHARING

REFLECTING

NURTURING

ASSESSING

TESTING

References

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