

Script for Making the Most of the Multilevel Class

Podcast 4: Group Work that Works! Part 1

NARRATOR

Making the Most of the Multilevel Class. Podcast 4.

Welcome to the fourth in a series of seven podcasts, entitled *Making the Most of the Multilevel Class*. These audio presentations were developed for the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project, or CALPRO, by adult education curriculum specialist Jayme Adelson-Goldstein and CALPRO research analyst Catherine Green.

Making the Most of the Multilevel Class was created to serve adult education instructors working in classes with learners of varying proficiency levels. Many of the instructional strategies presented in this series work equally well with both native and non-native English speakers--in ESL, ABE and GED classes. This series focuses on multilevel ESL classes and draws examples from ESL content.

And now let's join Jayme Adelson-Goldstein for our fourth installment, *Group Work that Works! Part 1*.

JAYME ADELSON-GOLDSTEIN

Hi! I'm Jayme Adelson-Goldstein and I'm an interpersonal learner. I say that in the spirit of full disclosure. But even with my bias, I can objectively state that research acclaims group work as a powerful learning tool, increasing learners' retention and use of lesson content. This podcast is the first of a two-part exploration of groupwork in the multilevel classroom. In this segment, we'll look at types of groups and ways to form them, as well as effective group management strategies.

Group work exploits the diversity of the multilevel classroom, allowing learners to build their interactional and group management skills through authentic exchanges. On a purely practical level, group work provides the practice time each level needs. Grouping learners can mean putting them in pairs, in teams of 3-6 learners or, even, in larger teams. Groups can be informal, created on the spot: for example, "turn to your partner and name three things you do in the morning." Or they can be formal, with learners assigned to a group in order to complete a task. Long-term formal groups work well in managed enrollment programs, but formal groups also work in open-entry/open-exit classes if the groups complete the task within a single class session.

At the guided practice stage of the lesson, pairing or grouping learners with classmates who are at approximately the same proficiency level, allows the learners within one level to work with the content and basic skills they need to achieve their leveled objective. Each level of like-ability groups can easily use different materials at each level, such as leveled student books, workbooks and worksheets that are part of your class' instructional materials. But a great time-saving technique is to use an activity template that can work with the groups

Script for *Making the Most of the Multilevel Class*

Podcast 4: *Group Work that Works! Part 1*

across levels, permitting you to demonstrate the activity for the whole class at the same time, while customizing the content of the activity to each level's needs. Peer dictation is a good example of this. In the sample lesson on time management we've looked at throughout this series, lower-level learners could dictate different times to each other (for example, 9 am, 7:08 pm, etc.); mid-level learners could dictate sentences such as "She gets up at 6 am" and higher-level learners could dictate more complex sentences such as "Tina doesn't complete her work on time because she gets distracted by her co-workers."

Other activity templates that work well for like-ability groups include labeling or writing about pictures prompts, interviews with level-appropriate questions, and picture differences where learners can circle, name or write out the differences they see.

At the communicative practice stage of the lesson learners are focusing on fluency development, and this is the perfect time for cross-ability (or mixed-level) groups. Cross-ability can mean either two levels or all three levels working together. By using assigned roles and tasks, all learners in a cross-ability group can fully participate in the activity. We'll talk specifically about cross-ability activities in Podcast 5.

For now, though, let's take a moment to discuss how to get learners into their groups. To place learners into like-ability groups at the beginning of the class, you can assign each level an area of the room and direct learners to their area as they come into class. You can also use three sets of colored index cards, one color for each of your three levels. By putting a a color card on each desk in the room, and giving students a color card as they enter, you can direct students to find a "matching" desk. This strategy allows you to put same-level pairs together but still keep the overall classroom levels mixed. Later, when you want to form mixed-level groups, you can have three pairs at different levels come together. If it is easier to have students seat themselves randomly at the beginning of class, you can have students participate in a mixer where they look for their same-level "match," using question and answer cards, picture and word cards, puzzle pieces or playing cards. Forming groups in this way allows you to plan your groups based on the learner population in that particular class session.

To create cross-ability groups, you can also use matching activities but plan to have the matchable items bring different levels together. It's also possible, if students are in like-ability areas in the room, to have students number off in their leveled areas to then create groups of #1s, 2s, 3s etc. If you've used color cards to create like-ability groups, you can use the color cards again by telling learners to group according to their cards. For example, *Make groups of five. Each group will have one blue, two green, and two yellow cards.* And naturally, you need to

Script for Making the Most of the Multilevel Class
Podcast 4: Group Work that Works! Part 1

model, demonstrate, and check learners' comprehension of any grouping activity, before you ask them to do it.

Learners need group management skills such as group facilitation, time management, and building consensus in order for their like-ability and cross-ability groups to be successful. Providing direct instruction in these skills is invaluable for learners' communicative success in the workplace and in the community. Using a "Do/Say" chart provides a list of the gestures and language students can use to demonstrate a particular skill. For example, to help learners manage time in their groups, you could elicit or identify things you do when time is almost up, such as pointing to a watch or clock or holding up fingers to indicate the number of minutes left. These ideas would go in the "DO" column of the chart. Because this is non-verbal language, all levels can produce it. Having learners physically demonstrate these gestures as a class and in pairs is great fun! Next, elicit or identify things people say when time is almost up such as "one more minute," "We're almost out of time" or "We have to move faster" and so on. These expressions go in the "SAY" column and can be taught as meaningful "chunks of language" for all learners. It is helpful, however, if a few of the expressions are short enough for your lowest-level learners to use easily. Once the "Do/Say" chart is created, let students know you will be observing their group work to see how they use their new skill.

Other tools for successful group management include setting time limits and using a quiet signal. Setting time limits for an activity helps learners stay on task. You can purposely make the time limit shorter than necessary, in order to call time, check in with the class and then provide more time for groups that need it. Calling time in the midst of enthusiastic pair or team activities requires a quiet signal. My favorite is a harmonica, but my colleagues ring bells, turn the lights on and off, or even turn up music on a CD player. Time limits can be tricky in multilevel environments because each level may need a different amount of time to complete its activity. However, by having a follow-up activity ready for groups that finish early, you can "manage" this issue. Here's how it works: let's say that A-level pairs are practicing a set dialog, while B-level pairs are working on substituting new language in a longer set dialog, and C-level pairs are writing an original dialog. In this scenario, the A-level learners will probably finish their task first, so a follow-up task might ask A-pairs to complete a fill-in-the blank version of the dialog or copy the dialog into their notebooks, while B- and C-level learners complete their tasks.

Today we've looked at ways to form groups and manage them. In Podcast 5, we'll take a look at cross-ability group activities and how they increase learners' language proficiency while simultaneously building the authentic communication skills learners need to function successfully in the multilevel society outside the

Script for *Making the Most of the Multilevel Class*
Podcast 4: *Group Work that Works! Part 1*

classroom. Until then, I'm Jayme Adelson-Goldstein, remind you yet again to breathe and laugh.

NARRATOR

You have been listening to *Group Work that Works, Part 1*, the fourth installment in CALPRO's series of podcasts, *Making the Most of the Multilevel Class*. Be sure to check out the Group Work area of the Virtual Workroom, for activity templates and tools that support like-ability groupwork. We hope you'll join us for our next podcast, *Group Work that Works! Part 2*.

I'm Catherine Green and this has been a CALPRO podcast, produced in association with OTAN, the Outreach and Technical Assistance Network.

CALPRO is a state Leadership Project funded by the California Department of Education, Adult Education Office. This presentation is copyright CALPRO 2009.