American Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (AJHSSR)
e-ISSN : 2378-703X
Volume-03, Issue-08, pp-117-128
www.ajhssr.com
Research Paper Open Access

Foundations and Frameworks for Second Language Mixed-Ability Classes

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ABSTRACT: Having taught a broad range of language skills, content-based, and teacher training courses over the past three decades in South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and the United States, to include students from all over the world, often in the same class recently for the Division of International Studies department at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) in Seoul, South Korea, I have had more than my fair share of mixedabilityclasses. Moreover, one of the questions I've gotten asked most often over the years in my HUFS graduate school and TESOL certificate classes is about the best way to successfully handle them. Mypat answer has typically been about teaching to the core middle students and playing around with groupings and mentoring. Not content with these quick, incomplete responses, I decided to dive in and take a closer look at what the research is and what other teachers have experienced and do in similar situations. The paper will begin by exploring the reasons for mixed ability classes and then move into strategies for successfully dealing with them. From there, it will focus on three language teaching approaches (Community Language Learning, Communicative Language Teaching, and Cooperative Language Teaching) that can be supportive foundations. Finally, it will focus on the four languages skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and lesson planning frameworks (PDP, EIF, TBLT, and ARM), as well as example lessons (to included needed modifications) for each one, as a way to illustrate practical classroom approaches and considerations.

KEYWORDS: *language teaching approaches, lesson planning, mixed ability classes, reflective practice, strategies*

I. MIXED-ABILITY CLASSES

Clearly, all classes are mixed ability to one extent or another, and no two students are alike, especially in terms oflanguage proficiency, reasons forstudying English (whether its compulsory, to pass an exam or get a job, for pleasure and personal interest, etc.), desire to learn, ways of learning, previous learning experiences, background and general knowledge, maturity and age, personality, identity (which is shaped by heritage and social milieu), ways of relating to and interacting or working with others, ability to focus or pay attention, interests, preferences for classroom teaching or methodology (to include content and materials), learning or working speed, among many others (Kelly, 1974; Bowman, 1992; Shank & Terrill, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999; Scrivener, 2011; Bowen, 2013; Dudley, 2016) Dealing with the reality of these (i.e. any combination of factors) is a very common problem for most teachers, particularly in terms of student attention, motivation, cooperation, frustration, and boredom, which can be coupled with a teacher's lack of positive attitude and awareness of the need for an effective wayto appropriately handle them (Bowman, 1992; Dornyei, 2001). And potentially troublesome logistics (e.g. large classrooms, desks and chairs that are fixed or difficult to arrange, students sitting closely together in rows, lack of space for needed movement, etc.) surely don't make things any easier (Baker &Westrup, 2000). Fortunately, however, there are a range of solutions or strategies that can help teachers in just about any context without the need to overextend themselves (especially in terms of potentially planning multiple variations of the same lesson for students at different levels, as well as effectively dealing with assessment and homework) (Hess, 2001).

In her book, "The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners," Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999) provides an overview of how teachers can differentiate instruction for mixed-ability classrooms. Simply put, teachers can differentiate content (what students should know, understand, and be able to do), process (lessons, activities, or tasks designed to help students come to make sense of or own the content), and/or product (how students will demonstrate and extend on what they have come to know, understand, and be able to do) – all of which are used for the purpose of achieving teacher and student clarity, duration and retrievability of

knowledge, and power of learning according to the students' readiness, interests, and learning profile through a range of instructional and management strategies (e.g. tiered lessons, varied texts, classroom organization, etc.). In other words, these comprise the what (the curricular element a teacher has modified in response to learner needs; content, process, product, and learning environment), how (the student trait to which the differentiation responds; how the teacher differentiates in response to student readiness, interest, or learning profile), and why (the teacher's reasons for modifying the learning experience, specifically in terms of access to learning, motivation to learn, and efficiency of learning) of classroom differentiation.

A starting point for helping mitigate the problematic issues in mixed-ability classrooms would be a detailed needs analysis that targets many of the issues listed above. This will help with course design, materials development, lesson planning, and activity and task selection. Once this important data is collected, it's important to organize and summarize the results in a clear, understandable way, and then present it to students, whom teachers will want to seek agreement and cooperation from. Not only will this help learning to happen and prevent any unnecessary hindrances, students will be deeply involved in and committed to the process, which will ultimately make a class run smoother overall. Periodic feedback will also be helpful to make sure that a teacheris on track and to determine whether any adjustments might be necessary. In other words, some type of survey, class discussion, or even use of a dialogue journal will allow everyone to regularly reflect and act on what unfolds in the classroom over time(Cummins, 2018).

In addition to a detailed needs analysis, it's important to create and then enforce a set of class rules, which should be done cooperatively together with students. Begin with a list of thecore essentials (e.g. come to class, hand assignments in on time, participate actively, treat others as you want to be treated, respect other people and their property, be responsible for your own learning, etc.) and build and/or refine from there. It's a good idea to limit the list to those items that contribute to successful learning and an orderly environment, and be as specific and clear as possible. Additionally, consequences for breaking the rules (e.g. loss of privilege, take a break or timeout, etc.) will need to be established and agreed upon. Furthermore, it will be important to discuss each one, to include explaining the rationale behind it and asking for examples of how it can be broken, as well as emphasize the main point of creating the rules in the first place, which is to make everyone's time in class more enjoyable and productive (Bowman, 1992; Shalaway, 2005).

Right from the get-go of any class, it's important establish a classroom community and good rapport. Harmonious relationships based on affinity happen when people connect, interact well, and respond favorably to one another. When that happens, there is a higher degree of motivation, increased comfort levels, improvement in quality of work, greater satisfaction, enhanced communication, and more trust, which all help create conditions conducive to learning. The keys to establishing and building good rapport are respect, approachability, open communication, caring, and a welcoming attitude (Scrivener, 2011). Maintaining rapport depends on actions (i.e. what students and the teacher alike do) (Weimer, 2010). Establishing, building, and maintaining rapport goes a long way to creating a welcoming safe, calm, andjoyful learning environment and healthy classroom with lots of positive energy, as well as good behavior management (especially when being serious about learning), which makes it well worth the investment and energy, especially in terms of reduced anxiety levels (i.e. lower affective filters) and higher degrees of confidence and motivation (Lessow-Hurley, 2003; Wright, 2005).

An important part of a classroom community is how students interact with one another. In addition to having students work alone and at their own pace, they can work together in pairs, small groups, large groups, and as a whole class. In terms of effectiveness, research on and many articles about groupings, as well as my own personal experiences in a wide variety of teaching contexts over the past three decades, is quite mixed. For example, Tomlinson (1999) argues that grouping lower level students with higher level ones isn't effective. Not only do lower level students stay remedial, they also perceive themselves as different, difficult, inferior, or negative in some way. This is understandable, but if the classroom community is strong and supportive, this effect and associated feelings can be minimized. The only way to find out is experiment in an effort to see what works and what doesn't. In doing so, vary or change groupings on a regular basis, but be wary of stratification, especially in terms of gender, nationality, and faith. The idea is to emphasize teamwork and cooperation. See if higher level students can effectively support lower level ones, yet don't over-rely on this as it could prove to be frustrating or patronizing. Or put higher level students together in an effort to see if they can push each other to work to their full potential. Through monitoring, assessment, and feedback, teachers should be able to make any necessary adjustments or improvements.

A large part of a healthy and well-functioning community is the organization, direction, and management the teacher provides. In addition to constantly observing, monitoring proportionately, and being tuned-in to any and all student signals, teachers have to target a potentially broad range of interests, provide engaging and challenging content, offer a wide variety of activities and tasks that appeal on multiple levels, select or evaluate and adapt appropriate materials, appeal to different sensory preferences, respect the readiness level of each student, focus on the essentials (i.e. what's vital for students to understand, recall, and be able to do), ensure that activities are well structured and concrete, be mindful of sequencing and creating connections between and

within lessons (to include smooth transitions), build on knowledge and expertise students already have, personalize (to make learning more real, relevant, memorable, and meaningful), make activities and tasks manageable, be careful with teacher language, facilitate understanding of new language and content, maximize student participation and ensure equal opportunity, provide any needed scaffolding, be diplomatic with questioning techniques, and offer praise or appreciation and positive constructive feedback (to include adjusting facial expressions and gestures depending on the level of each student) (Scrivener, 2011; Ur, 2012). In doing so, givestudents opportunities to explore essential understandings at degrees of difficulty that escalate consistently with skill development, as well asprovide some level of choice and control, encourage thought, wondering, and discovery (i.e. help students to be resourceful and think for themselves; make sense of their own ideas), focus on communicative competence, use time flexibly (according to students' needs), try to keep things relatively light (i.e. reduce fear of or refrain from making a big deal of mistakes as any emphasis on a gap in ability will only embarrass students, frustrate others, and create divisions), and recognize and appropriately deal with emotional states. All of this will require a lot experimentation, adaptation, juggling, and problem-solving (Supple, 1990; Dornyei, 2001; Brown, 2002).

Pacing is another important classroom issue, both in terms of speed at which the classes progresses and how quickly students at different levels work with the content and materials. No matter how swiftly or slowly things move, make sure that all students get something out of the class; that they've learned something, improved in some way, and had a meaningful experience (Dudley and Osvath, 2016). Not only for the course overall, students can be encouraged to set appropriate and achievable learning goals, and regularly reflect on them (especially in terms of identifying or noticing gaps in their learning in an effort move ahead and know where to place their attention and energy). In addition to helping all students achieve their goals, don't be afraid to have high expectations of them (i.e. expect them to grow, with as many ladders or scaffolding as needed) (Ur, 2012). Towards this end, teachers might consider structuring lessons with more open-ended and creative possibilities, provide different levels of the same task (e.g. same stimulus but different approaches), have extra tasks or extension activities for those who finish earlier than others, and/or develop ongoing projects (Ur, 2012).Put another way, teachers need to think about how they can differentiate learning outcomes, input, process, and output (Tomlinson, 1999). Multi-option assignments are another possibility, with choice and control being a motivating factor (Dudley and Osvath, 2016).

Homework is yet another helpful tool. As well as adjusting the level of demand, lower level students can be given opportunities to play catch-up. In addition to extra in-class monitoring, additional assignments (to include a menu of different possibilities), tutoring, and extended classes can help narrow the gap between higher and lower level students. In order to avoid the perception of remedial work to make for some innate deficiency, emphasize how more practice opportunities will result in a greater degree of learning and growth, which should be a real confidence booster. In a similar way, you can push higher level students with assignments that are more complex, open-ended, abstract, or multifaceted, depending on their wants and needs (Tomlinson, 1999).

With work done both in and outside of the classroom, assessment is clearly a vital matter. In addition to dialogue journals for self-awareness and empowerment, students can track their progress and accomplishments with portfolios and student-teacher conferences. Through this, they can engage in self-assessment by setting personalized learning goals, drawing up action plans that suit their language level and learning preferences, reflecting on and analyzing their own work, and taking full responsibility for evaluating their own progress (Hess, 2001). Not only will this help students take control of their own learning, they'll be able to clearly compare current and past levels of knowledge and abilities, see the extent of improvement which sustains their motivation to learn, and eventually become more autonomous and self-reliant. Moreover, through discussions with each student, teachers will be able to understand how to make instruction more responsive to learner needs (i.e. it's a way for teachers to study and learn from students as a basis for current and future planning) (Dudley, 2016).

Finally, as teachers are their own best resource, ongoing reflection is crucial for classroom success and professional development. Obviously, a big part of reflective practice is taking a step back before you take the next one forward. For mixed ability classes, regularly thinking about the students, lesson preparation, classroom teaching, and assessmentcan all be very beneficial and instructive (Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Listen &Zeichner, 1996; Farrell, 2013; Farrell, 2018), especially in terms of the two things a great class boils down to:

1 Engagement (when a lesson captures students' imagination, snares their curiosity, ignites their opinions, and/or taps into their souls; the magnet that attracts their meandering attention and holds it so that enduring learning can occur).
2 Understanding (when a student has "wrapped around" an idea, incorporated it accurately into his or her inventory of how things work, and, essentially, owns it – that is, can explain it clearly with examples, use it, compare and contrast it with other concepts, transfer it to unfamiliar setting and contexts, combine it with other understandings, pose new problems that exemplify or embody the concept, generate questions and hypotheses that lead to new knowledge and further inquiries, etc.) (Barell, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999; Ur, 2012)

Routinely doing as much as you can above can go a long way to ensuring both ofthese.

II. LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES

Although all language teaching approaches and methods can be helpful foundations (in addition to the important points mentioned above) for mixed-ability classes, three definitely stand out: Community Language Learning, Communicative Language Teaching, and Cooperative Language Learning.

Community Language Learning

Community language learning (CLL), developed by Charles A. Curran, a professor of psychology at Loyala University, Chicago, represents the use of Counseling-Learning theory to teach languages (i.e. it is rooted in Rogerian counseling, where one person gives advice, assistance, and support to another who has a problem or is in some way in need) (Curran, 1976; Moskowitz, 1978; La Forge, 1983; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

With CLL, students decide what they want to learn, perform best and improve most when they have a choice in what they practice, are members of a classroom community and learn through interacting with others, listen attentively to the teacher or other students at a higher levels of proficiency, freely provide meanings they wish to express, support classmates, openly report deep inner feelings and frustrations as well as joy and pleasure, become sources of help for other learners as they develop and progress, and reflect on both language learning and what they experience (Curran, 1972).

Learning is achieved collaboratively and cooperatively (not competitively), at one's own pace, and in a climate of sharing and caring, as well as involves consensual validation (or "convalidation") in which mutual warmth, understanding, and a positive evaluation of the other person's worth develops within the classroom community (La Forge, 1983).

The teacher takes a humanistic approach and engages the whole person. In other words, the teacher is like a nurturing parent who shows an understanding of students' anxieties and fears by creating an accepting atmosphere where they feel free to lower their defenses, uses the language of feeling to encourage and support students, encourages initiative and independence, helps develop communicative competence (by providing them with opportunities to guide their own learning and take an increasing responsibility for it in a non-defensive way), builds from the unknown to the known, frequently and warmly invites students to express how they feel, is sensitive to their level of confidence and gives them just what they need to be successful (to include being sensitive to their reactions and requests, as well as knowledgeable of each student's uniqueness) (Brown, 1977; Richard & Rodgers, 2001).

Communicative Language Teaching

The primary goal of communicative language teaching (CLT) is communicative competence – that is, knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes, varying use of language according to the context, producing and understanding different types of texts, and maintaining communication despite having limitationsin one's language knowledge via various forms of communication strategies (Hymes, 1972; Brumfit& Johnson, 1979; Canale& Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1991; Savignon; 1983; Richards, 2006).

Studentsneed routinely interact in personalized ways and make use of their own experiences in contributing to classroom learning (to include sharing thoughts, values and judgments in the target language), are encouraged to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom, are responsible managers of their own learning (i.e. they need to be able to manage the process of meaning making and negotiation), require feedback, and ultimately gain confidence in using the target language because of their increased responsibility to participate (Breen, 1980; Littlewood, 1981; Johnson, 1982; Finocchiaro&Brumfit, 1983; Skehan, 1998).

The teacher organizes the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities, sets up situations that students are likely to encounter in real life (that necessitate communication), uses social interaction activities aimed at giving learners an opportunity to use the language in an appropriate social context, makes use of functional communication activities aimed at developing certain language skills and functions – ones that involve meaningful interaction (to pass from strictly guided tasks through semi-guided to free-communication tasks with focus on fluency) talks less and listens more (by maximizing student talking time),becomes an active facilitator of students' learning, plans lessons according to learners' preferences and needs, sets up and modelsactivities and tasks, steps back andobserves, monitors, advises, facilitates, and assesses (as the students' performance is the goal) (Littlewood; 1981; Breen, 1980). In doing so, teachersneed to encourage students to communicate from the very beginning, give them the chance to express themselves individually (i.e., ideas and opinions), help them in any way that motivates them to work with the language, discourages use of the native language (both for communication in class or to explain something), and lowers affective filters by making the classroom environment fun and enjoyable (Piepo, 1981).In other words, teaching is always done with a communicative intent, often with authentic materials (in order to give learners the opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used), and enhances student security by providing ample opportunities to interact cooperatively with other classmates (Finocchiaro&Brumfit; 1983).

Cooperative Language Learning

Cooperative language learning (CL), widely viewed as an extension of the principles of CLT, aims to make maximum use of collaborative activities involving pairs and small groups of students in the classroom, which includes learning self-accountability and motivation to increase the learning of others. Like CLT, the central premise is for learners to develop communicative competence by conversing in socially or pedagogically structured situations (i.e. it stresses the role of social interaction, much like the theoretical work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky) And similar to CLL, the classroom environment is cooperative, not competitive (i.e. students work together to accomplish shared goals, which are mutually beneficial to all involved) (Olsen and Kagan, 1992; Johnson et al, 1994; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Advantages of CL include increased frequency and variety of second language practice through different types of social interaction, potential for cognitive development and enhanced language skills, and opportunities for students to act as resources for one another, which results in a more active role in their own learning (McGroarty, 1989).

The success of CL depends on the nature and organization of group work, which requires a carefully designed sequence of learning that leads to social interaction in a motivating way and mutually enhanced language learning. For this to happen, successful groupwork requires positive interdependence (i.e. mutual support), effective group formation, individual accountability (for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning), social (teamwork) skills, and structuring and structures (i.e. ways of organizing student interaction) (Olsen and Kagan, 1992; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The classroom environment is learner-centered as opposed to teacher-fronted. This means that is teacher is responsible for creating a highly structured and well-organized learning environment in the classroom, to include setting appropriate and achievable goals, planning and structuring tasks, establishing the physical layout of the classroom, assigning students to groups (as well as, possibly, roles), and selecting materials and time (Johnson et al, 1994; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Once class gets underway, the teacher becomes a facilitator, moving around the class in an effort to help students and provide any necessary scaffolding as needed. This helps limit teacher talking time, which gives a boost to active student participation and practice with the target language.

By looking at the classroom environment, nature of learning and teaching, and the role of students and teachers, it's easy to see how the three approaches overlap with one another and how they can align with the needs of mixed ability students. There are myriad activities that can be used for each one, but those are too large for the scope of this paper. For that reason, in the next section, I'll focus on four different lesson plan frameworks with their roots in each of these approaches – ones that can greatly benefit students in mixed ability classrooms as they maximize opportunities for meaningful communication in cooperative and mutually supportive ways.

III. LESSON PLAN FRAMEWORKS FOR THE FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

Lesson planning is obviously a cornerstoneof mixed-ability classroom success. Below I'll focus on the four language skills and a different framework for each one. I'll begin by briefly highlighting what each language skill is and what teachers should do, highlight an appropriate framework and how it works with an example lesson (to include listing some commonly used activities within each of the three stages), underscore their methodological roots, and emphasize how they can be beneficial and modified for students at varying levels of proficiency.

Before doing so, it's important to note that all four frameworks that I'll focus on have three stages (i.e. beginning, middle, and end), with each one comprised of carefully sequenced tasks. For all steps in the lesson (i.e. for practical implementation purposes), teachers should try to follow the procedure below as much as possible in an effort to be clear and concrete for effective cooperative (collaborative) pair and group work:

1 Be clear about the activity or task goal, student groupings, and time limit
2 Explicitly model the activity or task (via materials, PPT, a students, pair or group of students, etc.)
3 Ask comprehension check questions to ensure understanding (i.e. have students repeat your modeled instructions back to you – e.g. "What do you do first? Then? Are you going to work alone or in pairs? How much time do you have?")
4 Hand out materials (so that attention is on you when modeling and asking CCQs)
5 Students complete the task (in pairs, groups, or as a whole class)
6 Monitor students, provide any necessary scaffolding, and make yourself available for any questions they may have while completing the activity or task
7 Check in with students upon completion of the activity or task (e.g. share answers)
8 Give feedback on the work done during the activity or task and on the final outcome (i.e. process and result)

Considering the methodological approaches and the nature of cooperation and collaboration, it's vital to emphasize the what makes pair and group work (as well as whole class interactions) both effective and ineffective. Let's start with effective. Common goals and objectives, commitment to both the group and processes, preparation and responsibility for getting work done on time, ability to stay focused and on task, positive critical input and support, level of comfort, history of working together (to include knowledge, trust, and appreciation), and ongoing reflection will help ensure that things will go as smoothly as possible, and, for this reason, should be clearly communicated to students. In contrast, self-interest, disrespect, judgments, assumptions, distractions (to include being off task), lack of concern for quality of work, domination (one person over others), and rushed pacing are among the many derailment possibilities and, therefore, should be avoided or prevented as much as possible (which will require active and proportionate monitoring from the teacher).

Listening

Listening is an active, purposeful process of making sense of what we hear (Nunan, 2003). In our own lives every day, we mainly listen to communicate (i.e. engage in social rituals), gather and exchange information, and to enjoy ourselves.

In the classroom, teachers should strive to expose students to a range of listening experiences (in an effort to connect what they're doing in class to their lives outside of it) and ways of processing information (both top-down and bottom-up), make listening purposeful and meaningful (not just a memory test), help students understand the process of listening and how they might approach it (i.e. teaching listening strategies like planning, monitoring, and evaluating, which align well with the three stages of the lesson framework below), and build students' confidence in their own listening ability. Furthermore, teachers need to consider the text (i.e. relevance, interest, and background knowledge), level of difficulty (i.e. length speed, density, culture, lexis, etc.), and authenticity (e.g. tv shows, movies, music, internet content, etc.), be clear about the aim of both the lesson and individual steps, always give students a specific task, provide any necessary scaffolding while listening, build on success, and review, recycle, and make connections with other course content(Helgesen& Brown, 2007)

The lesson framework that is most beneficial to help achieve this is PDP: Pre (before listening; beginning), During (while listening; middle), and Post (after listening; end). The objective of the "pre" stage is to help students prepare to encounter the text in the second stage of the lesson. This requires establish rapport, creating interest, activating background knowledge, and focusing on a few key lexical items (those that affect comprehension of the main idea and key details of the text only). Some frequently used tasks are brainstorming, mind-mapping, warm-up questions, predicting, visuals (picture, video, graph, table, chart, etc.), vocabulary exercise (e.g. matching), and quiz (i.e. background information about the topic). Three or four of these should suffice before moving on to the "during" stage, which is all about comprehension of the text. Teachers need to give students multiple opportunities to listen to the text, each time with a different purpose and gradual increase of challenge. The key sequence for this is easy to difficult, general to specific, and concrete to abstract. In other words, teachers first need to check or assess general understanding (i.e. gist or main idea), then move on to check or assess specific understanding (i.e. key details and those at a deeper level) before ending with a comprehensive understanding (summary) or language focus (word level) task. Common ways to check comprehension are providing a title for text or asking what the speaker is trying to convey or impart before moving on to assess students' understanding of the key details via true/false, multiple choice, cloze, scramble, note-taking, graphic organizer, and creative (e.g. drawing or miming) tasks. At this point, students should be ready to move beyond the text in the third, "post," stage. To wrap up the lesson, students need activities that both reinforce and extend on what was learned in the lesson, as well as opportunities to interact with one another, critically discuss or write about and personalize the content, and connect the topic or theme to their lives before ending the lesson in a fun, memorable, and meaningful way. Some frequently used tasks are lexis review, grammar exercise, role-play, debate, mini-presentation, survey, and creative projects (e.g. designing a poster) (Wilson, 2008)

Before implementation, teachers need to make sure that the topic, content, materials, and target language are all appropriate, relevant, and interesting to the students, learning objective includes measurable activities to assess students' success, lesson appeals to different sensory preferences and learning styles, instructions are clear, concise (with sufficient details), and easy to follow, and the amount of teacher-talking time is minimized and student-talking time is maximized.

An example of this is a PDP lesson I designed around Graham Hill's TED Talk titled, "Less, stuff, more happiness" for intermediate level adults. The target language is lexis from the talk and the aim is to be able to successfully identify the main idea and key details of the text. Assessment is in the form of comprehension checks built into all the second stage, "during," tasks. In terms of background knowledge and abilities, adult students have experience living in, traveling to, and staying at different places. For this reason, they should be very familiar with the message of the talk and much of the language the speaker uses to convey it. As for challenges and solutions, five minutes of text without subtitles could be overwhelming for intermediate level

students, specifically in terms of cultural accessibility, density, lexis and grammar, and speed (especially the combination of these). But, the nine PDP tasks in the lesson, especially the way they are sequenced, effectively addresses these.

In the "pre" stage, there are three tasks (in this order): visuals and prediction, warm-up questions, and vocabulary. For visuals and prediction, students are shown three PPT pictures – one of Graham Hill sitting on a large box at the beginning of his TED talk, a second one of a small apartmentthat he once lived and redesigned in New York City, and a third one with the words, "Life Edited," which is the name of the organization he created and runs. For the box picture, students are asked to guess what's in it and why he's starting his talk by sitting on it. For the apartment pictures, students are asked if they notice anything unusual about it (specifically about how seemingly sparse it is). And for the "Life Edited" picture, students need to guess what it means and what type of organization Graham Hill runs. Following this, students discuss three personalized warm-up questions (e.g. "Do you think you have too much stuff at home or do you and your family live in a more minimal way? Do you think you could pare down and live with fewer things and still be happy/content? Why or why not?"). The "pre" stage then ends with a vocabulary matching exercise (eight items in total).

The "during" stage follows the easy to difficult, general to specific, concrete to abstract sequence: (1) two main idea questions (i.e. "What's in the box? What would be an appropriate title for the talk?"), (2) two comprehension questions (i.e. "What does Graham suggest? What are three approaches to this?"), and (3) summary (by using the information from the previous two steps). Students are given an opportunity to listen to the text three different times, each time with a different task and increase in the level of challenge.

For the post stage, student begin by critically discussing the content (i.e. "Do you agree with the message can is trying to impart – that less might actually be more?"), then respond in writing by answering a question about ways to simplify and downsize their lives today (i.e. 3-5 positive edits they could employ right now), and end the lesson in a creative way through a redesign project (i.e. they have to imagine that Graham and the LifeEdited team have offered to redesign their home in an effort to create multifunctional spaces and housewares and then create a simple blueprint and detail the changes they would make to each room in the house, all in an effort for space efficiency, which they'll share in small groups, and later with the whole class).

Throughout the entire lesson with authentic content, the students are working cooperatively/collaboratively together in pairs or small groups in an effort to support one another and there is a fair amount of personalization in the first and third stages, which are two important listening strategies for mixed-ability classes. But, there is just one learning outcome for all students versus differentiated listening aims (e.g. "By the end of the lesson, all/most/some students will be able to…"). Furthermore, there aren't any optional or extra tasks to challenge higher level students in any of the three stages, nor is there variation for assessing comprehension (e.g. circle the best of three titles for the talk or true/false instead of comprehension questions for lower level students). In other words, this lesson is a one-size fits all in its current state, but some essential modifications could easily remedy this to keep all students engaged and motivated from beginning to end, and is exactly what teachers of mixed ability class need to consider when creating them.

Speaking

Speaking is a productive oral skill, which consists of generating systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning (Baily, 2005).In the classroom, teachers should give students practice with both fluency and accuracy (which is determined by learning outcomes), provide opportunities for students to talk using different forms of interaction (to include maximizing student talking time and opportunities for personalization), plan speaking tasks that involve negotiation of meaning (e.g. clarifying, repeating, interrupting, explaining, etc.), design classroom activities that involve guidance and practice in both transactional (to get something done, which is very predictable) and interactional (for social purposes, which is very unpredictable) speaking, and help students notice the gap between where they're at and native speaker ability (Nunan, 2003).

One lesson framework that is beneficial to help achieve this is EIF: Encounter (stage 1; beginning), Internalize (stage 2; middle), and Fluency (stage 3; end). The context for this example lesson is low-intermediate young adults. The target language is present perfect versus simple past. By the lend of the lesson, all student will be able to accurately use both present perfect and simple past tenses to ask questions and make statements about past life experiences. As for assessment, students will write the rules for the differences between the present perfect and simple past tenses, and then use the correct form in a travel interview without any target language support. In terms of background knowledge and abilities, students have a general understanding of both tenses and most or all of the vocabulary used in the lesson. Because EIF in an inductive (rule-discovery) framework (versus the more familiar PPP framework that is a deductive, rule-driven model), students may have trouble coming up with grammar rules instead of being given them, as well as when to use the two different verb tenses in different situations. But, by giving students many opportunities to discover the rules through inductive-based tasks, by having students work in pairs so that they can cooperatively learn from each other, and by writing the rule on the board (or showing the rule on the TV screen via PPT) once the students correctly form or create them, there should be a sufficient about of scaffolding throughout the lesson.

As an inductive framework, the objective of the (first) “encounter” stage is to have students demonstrate what they know or are able to do through two to four carefully sequenced rule discovery tasks. Teachers assess students’ knowledge and abilities only (i.e. there is no explicit teaching). At the end of this stage, a final encounter task is done, which functions as a transition to the second stage of the lesson. The purpose is to ask students about the target language (i.e. what it is and the rules for it), which may require some degree of clarification. The (second) “internalize” stage is all about controlled to semi-controlled practice, usually three to four tasks (e.g. split sentences, substitution drills, sentence transformations, etc.). These should suffice before moving on to the (third) “fluency” stage, where students demonstrate if they mastered the target language or not by doing one or more free practice tasks without any target language support. While this is happening, the teacher monitors and then provides final feedback to wrap up the lesson.
An example of this is an EIF one of my colleagues created for the present perfect. The “encounter” stage begins with several “Have you ever…?” questions (e.g. “Have you ever been to New York City?”). This is followed by a game called “Card Attack!” where students have to identify the base form, simple past form, and past participle. The third step is a two-part scramble exercise in which students have to put words in the correct order to form present perfect questions and statements. The final transition step requires students to identify the target language and its rules, which the teacher clarifies if necessary. All of this helps set up four controlled practice steps in the second stage. The first is to write two personalized statements and questions using the rules in the transition step (e.g. “I have been to Thailand. Have you ever been to Thailand?”), which they state, ask and answer (to include the use of follow-up questions) in a whole class mingling situation. The second step of this stage is to do a (whole class) “find someone who” exercise, which requires writing three sentences about experiences they’ve had in the past(e.g. “I have seen a Broadway play.”) and putting them in question form (i.e. “Have you ever seen a Broadway play?”) when interacting with their classmates. The third step of this stage involves a chart that compares the present perfect and simple past, which necessitates making a rule about the differences between the two forms. The “internalize” stage ends with an s-shapes game board that includes several squares of tasks all related to the present perfect. To conclude the lesson in the “fluency” stage, all target language support is removed and students are paired together for a travel interview role-play. They’re required to use the present perfect as much as possible throughout the task.

This is a communicative grammar lesson, where every task is speaking-based. Just like the PDP lesson, there is a lot of cooperation (collaboration) from beginning to end. For mixed ability classes, the follow-up questions in “encounter” Step 1 are open-ended, so higher level students can be encouraged to challenge one another here (i.e. it would be helpful to pair students with those that have a similar level of proficiency).If students are properly paired, teachers could vary the “Card Attack!” game with different sets of verbs (ones that vary in terms of levels of difficulty). This could also be used for the sentence scramble tasks. For the transition, the higher-level pairs could support and guide the lower level ones. For the “internalize” stage, both statements and questions and “find some who” are both open-ended as well. And higher-level pairs could support and guide students through the present perfect vs. simple past and game board tasks. To end the lesson, the travel interview is also open-ended. For all the opened-ended tasks, teachers could grade the level of difficulty of each one. If pacing proves to be an issue, some optional steps could be added to any of the three stages. In short, there are a lot of options for modification and extension for mixed-ability classrooms, as well as structured support, with this lesson and framework.

Reading

Reading is a fluent process of readers combining information from a text and their own background knowledge to build meaning, with comprehension as the goal.
In terms of principles, teachers should be mindful of students’ language levels and exploit their background knowledge, help them build a strong vocabulary base, teach for comprehension, work on increasing reading rate, teach reading strategies, encourage readers to transform strategies into skills, build assessment and evaluation into their teaching and strive for continuous improvement as a reading teacher. Additionally, practice and training in reading should be done for a range of reading purposes. Reading should also be used as a way to help develop language proficiency, reflect and be a bridge to reading done outside of class (in the real world), and be related to and integrated with other skills. Finally, students need to interact with and contribute meaning to texts (which need to be interesting to them), enjoy reading and feel motivation to read, and read a lot (as much as possible) (Anderson, 2008).
In addition to PDP (which, as a receptive skill, works best for reading), task-based language teaching (TBLT)is another very helpful framework to address these. TBLT is made up of three stages: pre-task (stage 1; beginning), task cycle (stage 2; middle), and language focus (stage 3; end). In the “pre-task,” the teacher introduces the topic and task. The task cycle involves planning for the task summarizing it, and then the teachers provides a model. For language focus, the teacher draws students’ attention to the target language and then they get to practice using the clarified forms.

There's a really good example of a TBLT reading lesson by Gonzalo Galian Lopez from the University of Reading that's in the appendix of "Task-Based Language Teaching" by FarahnazFaez and ParvanehTavakoli's from the ELT Development Series (TESOL Press) (2019) that I modified to some degree. The context is low-intermediate level adults. The topic is transport, specifically the best way to get around a city. As for background, the students know vocabulary related to the topic and grammar in order to make comparisons (both comparatives and superlatives). Moreover, the tasks in the lesson provide opportunities for learners to put this language into use in meaningful contexts.
For the pre-task, the teacher introduces the topic and asks the class to brainstorm vocabulary about different forms of transportation they can use when visiting a new city. To start the task cycle, students first have to prepare a list of transportation methods for getting around during their stay and then discuss the advantages and disadvantages of three or four formsin an effort to choose the most suitable one, all of which is done with a graphic organizer (i.e. boxes with plusses and minuses). After this, the students summarize what they discussed and present the best ways of getting around to the class, to include highlighting what would be most suitable and reasons why. To end the second stage, the teacher introduces the target language through four short (paragraph length) transportation method texts for London (i.e. trains, buses, bicycles, and taxis). To do this, a jigsaw method is utilized. After summarizing each text in turn, the students have to do a true-false quiz to check comprehension, which includes drawing attention to both superlatives and comparatives (e.g. "The subway is the quickest way to get around the city." "Buses can be quicker than the subway if there isn't too much traffic."). From here, the lesson moves into the (third) "language focus" stage. The teacher reads through the true-false statements and asks the students if they noticed any particular words being used repeatedly. Next, the teacher asks what the words are, what part of speech they are, what the differences is between the two, specifically what they are (i.e. superlatives and comparatives), and supports and clarifies as necessary. Finally, students have an opportunity to work with the clarified forms by circling back to the beginning of the task cycle and repeating it, but this time in writing with a focus on the target language.

Like PDP and EIF, there is a lot of cooperation (collaboration) throughout the entire lesson. For mixed-ability classes, brainstorming should be easy for all, but higher-level students could be encouraged to include other less common form like electric scooters and Uber or Lyft. For the beginning of the task cycle, the higher-level students could be encouraged to give detailed responses for both advantages and disadvantages, while lower level could tick off things on a list(to include an option for "others" at the end). An additional task for higher level students here could be listing the most cost effective and/or environmentally friendly means. For the summary and presentation, in addition to just doing it themselves, higher level students could help shape what needs to be communicated, provide assistance with pronunciation and delivery, and support a lower-level student when speaking for clarification purposes (as that would be good language practice). To end the "task cycle," the level texts and true-false questions could be modified in terms of length and ease. To introduce the target language at the beginning of the third stage, higher-level students could be asked to turn over their true-false worksheet, while lover students can both listen and read at the same time. For rules and usage, higher-level students can obviously provide some support for clear understanding. And peer review could be used for writing to wrap up the lesson. These are just a few ideas to help shape this lesson for a mixed-ability class, but there are certainly possibilities to make it inclusive for all students in beneficial ways.

<u>Writing</u>

As a productive skill, writing is a series of contrasts. In other words, it's a physical and mental act, its purpose is to both express and impress, and it's both a process (of steps) and product (final version) (Harmer, 2004)
In terms of general principles, it essential to understand your students' reasons for writing (i.e. know what their goals are and what they want to achieve, which can be done via a needs analysis), provide many opportunities for students to write (as writing requires lots of practice and variety, to include responses to reading, journal entries, paragraphs and essays, summaries, activities, etc.). make feedback helpful and meaningful (i.e. tell students what they did well and what they need to work on and get them to keep an error log in an effort to encourage self-correction), and clarify for yourself, and for your students, how their writing will be evaluated, to include avoiding subjective evaluation by developing rubrics that clearly show how the key elements of writing will be assessed (Nunan, 2003).
The real key to classroom success is to follow the eight steps of the writing process (below) repeatedly in a very systematic step-by-step way for paragraphs, essays, and the nine patterns of development (argument, cause and effect, classification, comparison and contrast, definition, description, illustration, narration, and process), which includes analyzing the structure and all of the component parts (i.e. lots of models or examples), as well as working on exercises for them.

1. Exploring (consider your topic, audience, and purpose)
2. Developing (narrow your topic, use a prewriting strategy, select and discard ideas, and make a detailed plan or outline)

3. Drafting (write your first draft)
4. Sharing (get feedback from your classmates)
5. Revising (check unity, support, organization, and style)
6. Editing (proofread for grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.)
7. Publishing (write your final draft)
8. Assessing (see what you did well and what you need to work on)

In addition to many excellent textbook and textbook series from the major publishers, a helpful framework for addressing this is ARM, which stand for "Activity Route Map." This is mentioned in Jim Scrivener's book "Learning Teaching" (Macmillan Books for Teachers) (2011), but is presented in six stages, which I've reduced to three and works for all four skill and three language systems (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) with variations largely in the second stage. As a very versatile framework, it is comprised of "lead-in" (stage 1; beginning), "set up and run the activity" (stage 2; middle), and "close, feedback, and post activity" (stage 3; end). For writing, the "lead-in" needs to help create interest, activate background knowledge, focus on key lexis, and, most importantly, provide a mode text with either structural analysis questions or an exercise. In the second stage, "set up and run," the focus is on writing a text that mirrors the example by following the steps of the writing process. To end the lesson, closing equals sharing (i.e. sharing the final drafts with the class), which is followed by feedback done in the lesson (e.g. asking what was challenging, interesting, fun, etc.) and a speaking post-activity that reviews the lesson in some capacity.

By way of example, I developed a lesson titled, "Favorite Movie," which is a brief three-part review: summary, reaction, and recommendation. The context is intermediate young adults, and the aim reflects these three parts (by following the steps of the writing process). In the "lead-in," there are three parts. The lesson begins with some basic warm-up questions about the types of movies students enjoy, if they've seen anything good recently, and how much reviews and movie trailers influence their decision to see a movie or not. This is followed by a lexis matching exercise. To end the first stage, there is a three-paragraph model review for "Birdman," to include five structural analysis questions (about the number of parts in the review, how it begins and what words are used, what the purpose of the second and third paragraphs are, and how the review ends). This properly sets of the second stage, "set up and run," where students write their own movie review based on the model. To do this they have to follow the steps of the writing process (in this order): beginning (discussing what their favorite movie is with a partner and then writing down what they said afterward, beginning with "___ is a movie about…"), brainstorming (5-7 reasons why they liked the movie – e.g. acting, cinematography, OST, etc.), selecting (circle three of the most important ones from their brainstorming list), organizing (putting the three reasons in emphatic order), drafting (write all three parts, to include "There are three reasons why I like this movie" in the second paragraph and words like "must-see or "two thumbs up" in the third one), revising (checking for unity, organization, support, and style), editing (proofreading for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization), and finalizing (adding, deleting, and or modifying any part of their text).When all students are reading, it's time to close by sharing the final drafts. Closing involves asking the students what the most challenging aspect of writing the movie review was and if there might be anything the teacher could provide to make it easier to do. And the lesson ends with a post-activity, which is to watch the movie trailer for "Birdman" and ask if the students would like to see it or not, to include reasons why. Although not in the lesson, students could do the same with their movies with their cell phones.

For mix-ability students, there are a lot of possibilities for level adjustment. For example, to begin the "lead-in" stage, there could be a variety of warm-up questions (e.g. easy to difficult), and additional ones for higher level students, as well as different pairing and groups (i.e. high with low or high with high). Whole class mingling is yet another option, as is speed talking which resembles speed dating (i.e. students can discuss one question with someone else before switching and talking to another classmate about a different question and so on). The length and level of the text could also be modified to suit different levels of students, to include degree of difficulty of lexical items. Furthermore, the structural analysis questions would be affected by this modification and could be adjust as needed, too. In fact, some students could answer questions while others worked on some type of exercise. It really depends on how much scaffolding might be needed. In the second stage, all students would need to work through the steps of the writing process, but higher-level students could be required to brainstorm more and write at a greater length, and be a peer review mentor to lower-level students (to include helping with grammar and lexis). In the final stage and step of the lesson, students could watch the trailer on their phones, with teachers giving the option to use subtitles or not. If teachers collect the reviews, there could additional language focus work, to include self and peer correction (to include the use of correction codes). Again, these are a few ideas to help all students get something meaningful out of the lesson.

IV. **Conclusion**

As mixed ability class are much more the norm than the exception, the aim of this paper is to help teachers begin thinking about the possibilities of differentiation and cooperation, especially when designing lessons for the four skills. Three terrific books for activities are "The English Language Teacher's Handbook: How to

Teach Large Classes with Dew Resources" by Joanna Baker and Heather Westrup (Continuum) (2000),"Teaching Large Multilevel Classes" by Natalie Hess (Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers) (2011), and "Mixed-ability Teaching" by Edmund Dudley and Erika Osvath (from Oxford's "into the classroom" series) (2016). But, really, any activity book and Internet resource can be of value. Sure, the challenges include extra planning and time, classroom management issues (to include loss of control, lethargy and indifference, distractions, commotions, poor or inadequate planning and/or execution, etc.), catering to different sensory preferences and preferred ways of learning, and dealing with levels of student participation (to include domination be a few and lack of for whatever reason). But, on the plus side, there are always plenty of opportunities for a variety of student interactions and support, and the myriad challenges mixed ability classes pose help us grow professionally and become better teachers overall. As mentioned in different parts earlier, interest, variety, pacing, personalization, choice and open-endedness, rules and routines, equal participation, and the manner in which we interact with our students (to include questions)all help in this regard (Hess, 2011). It's all about lay down a strong, positive foundation and working out from there, often times experimenting to see what works and what doesn't with engagement and understanding at the fore, and regularly reflecting on and reacting to that – which, after all, is what good teaching is all about.

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