

Key Resource: Working with multigrade classes

Introduction

What counts in teaching is not the size of the class, nor the age or grade of the pupils in it, but the quality of the teaching. In this key resource document are some suggestions for teaching classes with pupils of different grades. You might also find it helpful to see the Key Resource: Working with Large Classes.

Active learning strategies for multigrade classes

The following teaching strategies are for whole class or mixed-grade groups:

- **Round:** Each pupil has a two- or three-minute opportunity to express his or her point of view on a given topic while others listen. For older pupils, the topic can be controversial or thought-provoking, such as 'Education is valuable for my daily life.' For younger pupils, choose a simple topic, such as 'What I like about school.' This activity will provide you with a range of viewpoints to consider when delivering your lessons, as well as building a sense of 'safe participation' and confidence among your pupils.
- **Brainstorming:** Ask pupils to think individually about an issue or problem – for example 'Why is water becoming scarce?' or 'How can we improve our school?' – and to list its possible causes. Stress that people working together can create more than an individual alone.
- **Simulations and games:** Ask pupils to role-play a situation; for instance, 'What would you do if you were confronted by a bully?' By creating situations that are momentarily real, your pupils can practise coping with stressful, unfamiliar or complex situations.
- **Peer teaching:** Randomly select pupils to find out about a specific topic and then teach the basics of the material to a partner, group or the entire class.

Involve your pupils

- The classroom is for everyone. Pupils can be very helpful in managing the classroom's physical space, and it helps them to develop a sense of responsibility.
- Involve your pupils in developing classroom rules! Ask your pupils to identify what behaviours are acceptable and what behaviours are not acceptable. Make only a few rules that emphasise appropriate behaviour. Remember that penalties should be consistent with the nature of the misbehaviour and based on positive discipline to help your pupils to learn good behaviour
- Encourage 'experts' from the community to come to class to talk about special skills and knowledge. You can even ask older pupils in the class to act as peer teachers and to work with different grade-based groups.

Group exercises and cooperative learning

- In a large class, pupils working in pairs or larger groups can help each other and learn from each other. Have pupils from the same grade working together – but also mix up the grades to encourage peer learning

- Group exercises give pupils an opportunity to meet and work with one another, a good step towards building a sense of community. In the 'real' world, working with others is an important skill. Giving your pupils more opportunities to work together can help them develop this skill and releases you to work with groups of pupils of different grades.
- Small-group work encourages pupils who may be reluctant to participate in a large- class setting to participate more. Cooperative learning also helps to hold pupils' attention – a special concern for large classes – and to increase pupil thinking.

Multigrade teaching and group work

- When designing your group exercises (or even individual exercises), the task that the pupils are to complete should be specific and clear to the group. This does not necessarily mean the group is all of the same grade. Variations of a similar task such as completing some or all of a worksheet, solving a similar problem but of different levels or answering specific questions selected from a range on the chalkboard, will keep your pupils focused
- Development exercises. Place a group of pupils in a real or simulated situation and ask them to solve a problem. This can be the same problem for all grades but the response might be different. Alternatively, write a question or statement with mistakes in it on chalkboards around the room. These mistakes can be structural (such as grammatical errors) or mistakes in interpretation (such as errors in judgement or in the use of facts) specific to a grade group. In mathematics, for example, you can give different groups of pupils a 'story problem' to solve; in science, you can ask all the groups, whatever the grade, to classify a group of seemingly unrelated objects into categories and justify why they chose these categories.
- Topic exploration exercises. Assign each grade group a specific topic to study (research), and give them access to resources they can use to learn about it. These resources can be books, or they can be people in the community who have knowledge about how to do a special activity.
- Simple exercises. These exercises focus on developing a particular skill, such as drawing, editing, quick problem solving, etc. In mixed grade groups, the pupils practise and are given feedback by their fellow group members. At the end of the exercise, volunteers demonstrate their new skills for the class.

Evaluation of group work

- Require some type of group product for exercises that can be graded. (Remember: grading ten papers or projects is much easier than grading 60.)
- Carefully observe the groups and their members. Praise individual participation as well as the quality of group work.
- Occasionally, require an individual product based on group work, such as a one-minute paper about an issue learned from the exercise, a short quiz or an oral presentation by randomly selected group members. This rewards pupils who were actively involved in group learning and discourages 'freeloading' or the non- participation of some group members.
- Sometimes, use self and peer evaluations at the end of an exercise; for instance, give each pupil in a group a 'score card' and ask him or her to give a grade to themselves and to each of his or her group members. This method is especially

helpful for judging how well the members of a large class participate, where it can be difficult for you to evaluate all individuals personally.

Assessment Strategies for multigrade classes

The following assessment strategies help give effective feedback and summative evaluations within a manageable workload for mixed-grade classes:

Giving feedback

To identify which pupils need more personalised feedback, and to manage the paperwork, use the 'portfolio' method. A portfolio is a file, such as a manila folder, containing samples of a pupil's assignments, such as essays, stories and reports; illustrations, pictures, maps and diagrams.

- Pupils' non-curricular activities can also be recorded, such as taking responsibility in a classroom activity.
- The material in a portfolio is organised in chronological order with each item containing a date and the context in which it was produced. It follows the pupil's successes rather than failures.
- Once the portfolio is organised, you and your pupils can evaluate their achievements. At least twice every semester or term, review the whole range of work to identify those pupils who need more individual attention.

Create exams that 'look' familiar to pupils

Exam questions should be in the same form as those that you used in quizzes, homework assignments, lectures or discussions.

Conduct review sessions

Set aside class time to conduct review sessions, either with the entire class or in groups. One third of the session time can be spent in a short lecture revising the major points of a topic, and then the remaining time for pupils' questions and/or a short practice exercise.

Develop exams that demonstrate learning achievement

Together with, standard multiple-choice exams:

- Add short essay questions; control the length of responses by providing pupils with a limited amount of space for answers (an 'answer' box).
- Ask pupils to answer questions using diagrams, flow charts or pictures. These are short and easy to grade, but can be very informative about pupils' analytical skills.
- For some multiple-choice questions, ask the pupil to choose the correct answer and then provide a one- or two-line explanation of how they got that answer.
- Give group examinations. The same grade can be assigned to all members of the group, based on the 'group product' they produce. For individuals, ask group members to anonymously grade each other, and then assign the average of the group's grade to each pupil.

- Ask pupils to write their own examination questions and answers based on your class lectures and activities. These can be used on actual tests.

Give prompt feedback on assignments

- Ask pupils to do assignments in group
- Assign a short in-class assignment for individual pupils and ask them to bring you their completed assignments when they finish. You can grade these on the spot and give them instant feedback. To avoid a line at your desk, ask your pupils to take numbered pieces of paper when they have finished their work and to come to your desk for feedback when their number is called.
- Ask older pupils in upper grades to help you grade your pupils' assignments.
- Occasionally pupils can exchange their assignments and they can grade each other's work.
- Give out an answer sheet so pupils can assess their own work, or set aside class time to go through the answers to the homework with the entire class.



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textbook. They offer activities for teachers to try out in their classrooms with their students, together with case studies showing how other teachers have taught the topic, and linked resources to support teachers in developing their lesson plans and subject knowledge.

TESSA OERs have been collaboratively written by African and international authors to address the curriculum and contexts. They are available for online and print use (<http://www.tessafrica.net>). The Primary OERs are available in several versions and languages (English, French, Arabic and Swahili). Initially, the OER were produced in English and made relevant across Africa. These OER have been versioned by TESSA partners for Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa, and translated by partners in Sudan (Arabic), Togo (French) and Tanzania (Swahili) Secondary Science OER are available in English and have been versioned for Zambia, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. We welcome feedback from those who read and make use of these resources. The Creative Commons License enables users to adapt and localise the OERs further to meet local needs and contexts.

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As well as the main body of pedagogic resources to support teaching in particular subject areas, there are a selection of additional resources including audio, key resources which describe specific practices, handbooks and toolkits.



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