MIXED ABILITIES IN THE YOUNG LEARNERS CLASSROOM

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TERMINOLOGY

According to Penny Ur, mixed ability is a misleading term. She suggests using “heterogeneous” (not similar) as opposed to “homogeneous” (similar).

If not a one-to-one, it is a mixed ability or heterogeneous class.

The most challenging are classes whose members are particularly, or unusually heterogeneous.
Who are you in this classroom?
**Heterogeneous in what ways?**

- Age and maturity range
- Current level of English
- Potential learning ability
- Motivation
- Learner independence and autonomy
- Personality
- Learning styles
- Confidence
- Discipline
- Interests
## Learning Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Auditory</th>
<th>Kinesthetic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Visual Icon]</td>
<td>![Auditory Icon]</td>
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## Multiple Intelligences

- **Nature Smart** (Naturalist)
- **People Smart** (Interpersonal)
- **Number Smart** (Logical/Mathematical)
- **Picture Smart** (Spatial/Visual)
- **Self Smart** (Intrapersonal)
- **Body Smart** (Bodily-Kinesthetic)
- **Music Smart** (Musical)
- **Word Smart** (Linguistic)
# Advantages and Disadvantages of Heterogeneous Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hard to find suitable materials</td>
<td>1. Variety of ideas</td>
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<td>2. Uneven pace of the lesson</td>
<td>2. Opportunities for more interaction between students</td>
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<td>3. Students are either under-challenged or over-challenged</td>
<td>3. Opportunities to make classes more learner-centred</td>
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<td>4. Unequal participation</td>
<td>4. Opportunities for peer help and peer correction</td>
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<td>5. Difficult to manage discipline</td>
<td>5. Natural information gaps</td>
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<td>6. Students lose interest and motivation</td>
<td>6. Professional challenge and development</td>
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OVERALL STRATEGY

Weaker students need extra ___________, while stronger students need extra ________.

Weaker students need extra support, while stronger students need extra challenge.
Specific Strategies

- Class doing completely different tasks
- Class completing the same task, but early finishers get a complementary task
- Compulsory vs optional tasks
- Students work on open-ended activities which allow them to respond at their own level
- Graded tasks at different levels of difficulty
- Collaborative tasks where everyone has their own role contributing to the groupwork
- Ignoring the problem
- Letting students take initiative and responsibility for their learning
AN EXAMPLE OF A COMPLEMENTARY TASK

Fast finishers then copy the word, draw and colour a picture of the animal, and / or make their own jigsaw words for another learner.
CLOSED-ENDED VS OPEN-ENDED TASKS

A) Can you complete these sentences?
• If I saw a thief in my house, ...
• I’d scream and scream if...
• I’d ring for an ambulance if...

B) You’ve just started corresponding with an Australian boy or girl. Put these words in the correct order to make questions that you could ask him or her.
• old / ? / How / you
• you / do / Where / ? / live
• got / you / any / ? / Have / brothers / sisters / or
• school / do / go / ? / What / to / you
• subjects / favourite / what / your/ ? / school / are / at
• do / do / in / what / your / ? / you / spare / time
AN EXAMPLE OF A GRADED TASK

1

When I wake up in the mornin’ light
I pull on my jeans and I feel all right.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
I pull my b___ jeans on, I pull my o___blue jeans on.
It’s the weekend, and I know you’re free
So pull on your jeans and come on out with me.
Oh ’cause I need to have you near me, I need to feel you close to me.
I need to have you near me, I need to feel you close to me.
You and me, we’ll go motorbike ridin’ in the s___
And the wind and the rain.
I got money in my pocket, I got a tiger in my tank
And I’m king of the road again.
I will meet you in the usual p___.
You don’t need a thing except your pretty face, all right.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
Aw, here we go, mama.
You and me, we’ll go motorbike ridin’ in the sun
And the wind and the rain.
I got m____ in my pocket, I got a tiger in my tank
And I’m king of the road again.
When I wake up in the mornin’ light
I pull on my jeans and I feel all r___
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue j___on.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old b___jeans on.

3

When I wake up in the mornin’ light
I pull on my jeans and I feel
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
It’s the_____, and I know you’re_____.
So pull on your jeans and come on out with me.
Oh ’cause I need to have you near me, I need to feel yo____ to me.
I need to have you near me, I need to feel you close to me.
You and me, we’ll go motorbike ridin’ in the _____
And the____ and the___.
I got_____ in my_____ I got a tiger in my_____.
And I’m king of the road______.
I will meet you in the usual______.
You don’t need a thing except your____ face, all right.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
Aw, here we go, mama.
You and me, we’ll go motorbike ridin’ in the _____
And the____ and the_____.
I got____ in my____ I got a tiger in my_____.
And I’m king of the road______.
When I_____ up in the mornin’ light
I pull on my jeans and I feel_____.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
I pull my blue jeans on, I pull my old blue jeans on.
ANOTHER GRADED TASK

- **higher level learners**: brainstorm 20 inventions of the last 150 years
- **mid level learners**: label 15 pictures depicting inventions
- **lower level learners**: match words to pictures of inventions
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TIPS

- Allow weaker students more planning time
- Pair work: for speaking pair up students with similar abilities; for controlled practice let stronger students help weaker ones
- Keep groups small (pairs or groups of three)
- Instructions: tolerate stronger students explaining to weaker ones what to do
- Remind smart students that they don’t know everything
- Include tasks everyone can do regardless of their abilities (drilling, crafts, board games)
- Diversity in marking tests
Praise students for their efforts and achievements, which are measured not in comparison with others, but in comparison with where they started.
THANKS TO MY COLLEAGUES

- Jennifer Hillhouse
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For ideas and inspiration
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Thank you very much!