**Teaching multi-level EL classes in Aotearoa NZ**

An increasing number of secondary school teachers, including ESOL specialists, are teaching multi-level classes with English Language Learners (ELLs) ranging widely in their English language proficiency, from the [*English Language Learning Progressions*](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Student-needs/English-Language-Learning-Progressions) Foundation to Stage 3. Sometimes these students will also vary in ages. In smaller rural schools, multi-levelling is the only provision option; in larger schools it may relate to budgetary and/or timetabling constraints. Multi-level classes present considerable challenges for teachers and learners, but they also provide opportunities for collaboration and individualisation, as we strive for student engagement and achievement of individual educational goals.

Individual needs assessment to ascertain ELL language needs and interests is essential to inform teaching and learning in all classes. In multilevel contexts, this will inform collaborative and individual task setting.

Judicious student grouping works well in multilevel settings. ELLs may be grouped in pairs, in groups at similar English language stages or across stages, or in teams. Teams must be cross-ability for competitive games. There are also times to teach the whole class, especially at the start of a lesson.

Individualisation allows students some freedom to choose the context and content in which they will develop their English skills. Teachers can create opportunities for ELLs to work on projects which interest them, as well as providing chances for them to practise language at their own level of English language competence.

Thematic planning facilitates differentiation for ELLs. It enables class or group conversations in which target vocabulary can be encountered in a range of modes with the frequency required for remembering. Students can read and write texts of the same genre at different levels on the same topic. Grammatical structures can be taught in groups based on ELLP writing analysis and next steps. Use of coded corrections can support individual ELLs to become more proficient in self-editing and peer editing can be used for formative purposes prior to writing final drafts.

Based on initial [*Vocabulary Levels Test*](http://www.er.uqam.ca/favicon.ico)assessment, ELLs can be grouped to work on building their vocabulary at the appropriate frequency level. This could include pair work using word cards and creating word maps to deepen word knowledge and use. Interactive websites e.g. *[Spelling City](http://www.spellingcity.com/)* and [*Vocabulary Exercises for the Academic Word List*](http://www.englishvocabularyexercises.com/AWL/index.htm) are useful for individualised vocabulary practice.

Individualised extensive reading programmes provide opportunities for ELLs read graded readers at appropriate levels for fluency and enjoyment. It is worthwhile building a library of graded readers for EL students. A wealth of information on extensive reading and graded reader titles is available on the [*Extensive Reading Foundation*](http://erfoundation.org/wordpress/) website. Some graded readers - mainly fictional classics – are available free on [Paul Nation’s wonderful website](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/paul-nation) . Non-fiction graded readers can be obtained at [*Macmillan Factual Readers*](http://www.macmillanenglish.com/courses/macmillan-factual-readers/)*,* and [*National Geographic Footprint Readers*](http://ngl.cengage.com/ng/tour/)*.*

Approaches and strategies exemplifying ESOL Principle 3 - Maintain and make explicit the same learning outcomes for all the learners - can be incorporated into lesson planning for multilevel classes to facilitate comprehensibility and the active involvement of ELLs at all ELLP stages. Pre-reading activities which provide opportunities for discussion e.g. [anticipatory reading guides](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Reading/Anticipatory-reading-guides) and focusing on key vocabulary e.g. [before and after vocabulary grids](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Vocabulary/Before-and-after-vocabulary-grid) are important. ELLs at lower ELLP stages will benefit from [shared](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Oral-language/Teaching-approaches-and-strategies/Reading/Shared-reading) or [guided reading](http://literacyonline.tki.org.nz/Literacy-Online/Teacher-needs/Reviewed-resources/Reading/Comprehension/ELP-years-5-8/Guided-reading) of challenging texts which others may read independently, while other [Jigsaw reading](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Reading/Jigsaw-reading) and listening activities enable students to read or listen to texts, or part thereof, at their individual levels and to share their understandings in a collaborative setting. [Reciprocal reading](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Reading/Cooperative-reading-Reciprocal-teaching) enables differentiation according to text complexity and assigned roles. [Three level guides](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Reading/Three-level-guides) also provide opportunities for ELLs to improve reading comprehension skills at their level. The Level 1 questions require them to simply search for information within a text. In contrast the information in Level 3 questions is extended beyond the text and students use the literal and inferential information and combine it with other information from their previous knowledge and experience. The questions can require them to generalise, hypothesise and be creative, discussing points of view.

[Split information](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Oral-language/Split-information-information-gap) or information gap activities e.g. barrier tasks or strip stories, in which students work in pairs and share information, often presented in two different formats such as a diagram and a paragraph, are useful for oral language practice in multi-level classes.

Grammatical structures can be taught in groups based on ELLP writing analysis and next steps. Use of coded corrections can support individual ELLs to become more proficient in self-editing and [peer editing](http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy/ESOL-teaching-strategies/Writing/Checklists-and-peer-editing) can be used for formative purposes prior to writing final drafts.

For more examples of approaches and strategies for teaching multi-level classes see: <http://esolonline.tki.org.nz/ESOL-Online/Teacher-needs/Pedagogy> .

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