



DESIGNING INCLUSIVE LESSON PLANS: REACHING EVERY STUDENT IN A MULTI-LEVEL CLASS

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Glossary

- Multi-level classroom: A class where students have varying levels of ability or knowledge.
- Differentiation: Tailoring instruction to meet individual needs.
- Scaffolding: Support given to students to help them achieve learning goals.
- Inclusive education: Teaching that ensures all students, regardless of ability or background, can participate fully.
- Tiered assignments: Tasks at different levels of complexity based on student ability.
- Blended learning: A mix of traditional face-to-face and digital instruction.
- Formative assessment: Ongoing evaluation used to adjust teaching strategies.
- Summative assessment: Final evaluations that measure student learning at the end of a unit.
- Learning styles: Preferred ways of processing information (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.).
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): A framework for designing curriculum that meets the needs of all learners.

Abstract: *Teaching in multi-level classrooms presents challenges in balancing diverse student needs while maintaining academic standards. This article explores how to design inclusive lesson plans that cater to students of various abilities using strategies such as differentiation, scaffolding, peer learning, and blended learning. By implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and leveraging technology, educators can create dynamic and equitable learning environments. The article provides practical techniques and sample frameworks to help teachers plan effectively, ensuring that every student is engaged, challenged, and supported in their learning journey.*

Modern classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, not just in terms of culture or language, but also in terms of academic ability. Teachers around the



world often face the challenge of instructing students at vastly different levels of understanding within a single classroom. These multi-level or mixed-ability classes require thoughtful planning, creativity, and flexibility.

An inclusive approach to lesson planning is critical for success in such settings. Inclusivity means that every student, regardless of their proficiency level or background, is considered during the planning process. This article presents a comprehensive guide to designing lesson plans that are inclusive, practical, and effective in reaching every student. It examines core strategies including differentiated instruction, blended learning techniques, the use of formative assessments, and peer collaboration.

1. Understanding the Multi-Level Classroom

Multi-level classrooms can arise in any educational setting. Whether in language classes where students range from beginners to intermediate learners, or in mainstream subjects where prior knowledge varies widely, the core issue remains the same: how to ensure that no student is left behind, and no one is held back.

The diversity in such classrooms might include:

- Varying cognitive abilities
- Differing learning speeds
- Multiple intelligences and learning styles
- Emotional and social maturity levels
- Linguistic and cultural differences

Recognizing this complexity is the first step toward building inclusive lesson plans.

2. The Principles of Inclusive Lesson Planning

An inclusive lesson plan is built around the principle of equity—not equality. This means adapting the learning process so that every student has what they need to succeed, rather than giving everyone the same thing.

Key principles include:

- Flexibility in content delivery: Offering information in different formats (video, audio, text).
- Multiple ways to engage: Using a range of activities and tasks.
- Adjustable levels of challenge: Designing tasks that allow all students to work at a level that is appropriate yet still demanding.
- Regular feedback and assessment: Identifying gaps in understanding and adapting instruction accordingly.

These align with the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, which promotes accessibility from the planning stage rather than retrofitting adjustments later.



3. Differentiation: Tailoring the Learning Experience

Differentiation is a cornerstone of teaching in a multi-level class. It allows a single lesson to meet the needs of all learners by adjusting:

a. Content

- Provide simplified texts for beginners and more complex readings for advanced students.
- Use visuals, infographics, and realia to make content accessible.

b. Process

- Assign tasks based on students' readiness levels.
- Use group rotations with stations: teacher-led, peer discussion, independent work.

c. Product

- Let students choose how they show their understanding: presentations, posters, essays, or recordings.

d. Environment

- Create a safe, low-pressure space with clearly defined expectations.
- Allow flexible seating or quiet zones for students who need focus.

Example:

In a reading lesson, a beginner might match pictures to words, while an intermediate student summarizes paragraphs, and an advanced student identifies the author's tone or purpose.

4. Blended Learning as a Differentiation Tool

Blended learning makes it easier to meet varied student needs. Teachers can:

- Flip the classroom: Students view video lessons at home, freeing class time for practice and support.
- Use adaptive platforms: Tools like Khan Academy or Duolingo adjust to each student's level.
- Provide enrichment or remediation: Fast learners access more complex tasks, while others revisit fundamentals at their own pace.

Blended learning also empowers students to become independent learners and take ownership of their progress.

5. Scaffolding: Building Bridges to Understanding

Scaffolding provides temporary support that gradually fades as students become more competent. Effective scaffolding includes:

- Modeling: Demonstrate a task before asking students to do it themselves.
- Think-alouds: Show the mental process behind solving a problem.
- Guided practice: Work together before assigning independent tasks.



- Sentence starters and writing frames: Help students structure their thoughts.

Scaffolding is especially helpful for lower-level learners but benefits everyone by clarifying expectations.

6. Peer Teaching and Collaboration

Collaboration in a multi-level class isn't just possible—it's powerful.

Benefits:

- Advanced students reinforce their knowledge by teaching.
- Lower-level students receive support in a less intimidating way.
- Students learn teamwork and communication.

Examples:

- Pair higher-level students with lower-level ones for partner work.
- Use jigsaw activities where each student becomes an "expert" in one area.

Caution: Pair students thoughtfully to avoid discouragement and ensure respectful interaction.

7. Using Formative Assessments to Guide Planning

Formative assessments are essential to inclusive planning. They inform teachers where students are struggling and succeeding, so adjustments can be made.

Examples:

- Exit tickets
- Quick quizzes
- One-minute papers
- Polls or online surveys
- Peer assessment checklists

These tools can reveal who needs more support, who's ready to advance, and what needs to be re-taught.

8. Creating Tiered Activities

Tiered activities ensure all students work on the same concept but at different levels of difficulty.

Example: Writing Task

- Beginner: Fill in a paragraph using word banks.
- Intermediate: Write a short description using given vocabulary.
- Advanced: Create a narrative using new vocabulary and complex grammar.

This approach encourages participation without embarrassment or boredom.

9. Designing the Inclusive Lesson Plan Framework

A sample framework for a multi-level English lesson:



Lesson Stage Activity Differentiation Strategy

Warm-up Vocabulary matching game (visual aids) Use images for low-level learners; synonyms for advanced

Presentation Video + transcript Slower speed, subtitles, or glossary for support

Practice Group reading task Assign parts based on reading level

Production Writing task Tiered based on skill level

Assessment Quiz (digital) Adaptive or optional challenge questions

Homework Blended task Watch video + complete digital quiz at own pace

10. Challenges and Solutions

challenge: Managing time effectively

Solution: Use blended learning to offload direct instruction.

Certainly! Here's the comparative section in plain text format, ready for you to insert directly into your article:

Comparative Theoretical Foundations: Tomlinson vs. Rosenshine

Both Carol Ann Tomlinson and Barak Rosenshine are widely regarded for their contributions to differentiated and inclusive instruction. While their approaches differ in focus and application, they offer complementary strategies for supporting multi-level learners in diverse classrooms.

1. Focus and Theoretical Foundation

Carol Ann Tomlinson is best known for her Differentiated Instruction (DI) model, which emphasizes customizing instruction based on student readiness, interest, and learning profile. Her model is rooted in constructivist principles, where learning is seen as an active, individualized process.

Barak Rosenshine, on the other hand, developed the Principles of Instruction, grounded in cognitive science and explicit instruction. His model emphasizes structured, teacher-led teaching practices designed to improve information retention and task success for all students.

2. Approach to Multi-Level Classrooms

Aspect	Carol Ann Tomlinson	Barak Rosenshine	Lesson Adaptation
Customizes content, process, product, and environment to fit learners' levels	Yes	No	Yes
Uses clear modeling, scaffolding, and guided practice to ensure clarity for all students	No	Yes	Yes
Planning Begins with assessment of individual needs (pre-assessment) and offers tiered tasks	Yes	No	Yes
Begins with structured lesson plans with daily review and clear objectives	No	Yes	Yes
Learner Autonomy High – students often choose how they learn or show their understanding	Yes	No	No
Low to moderate – teacher directs learning path to minimize confusion	No	Yes	Yes
Teacher's Role Facilitator and planner of varied pathways	Yes	No	Yes
Direct instructor and content deliverer	No	Yes	No
Feedback Emphasizes ongoing, formative feedback	No	Yes	Yes
Recommends immediate corrective feedback after modeling or practice	No	Yes	No



Let's take a writing lesson in a mixed-ability classroom:

- Tomlinson's approach would involve tiered assignments: beginners may use sentence frames, intermediate students write guided paragraphs, and advanced learners write freely with creative prompts. All students are working on the same skill (e.g., descriptive writing) but at appropriate challenge levels.

- Rosenshine's approach would emphasize modeling a descriptive paragraph sentence by sentence, followed by guided practice, checking for understanding, and gradually releasing responsibility to students as they become confident.

While Tomlinson emphasizes personalization and student choice, Rosenshine focuses on clarity, cognitive load management, and skill mastery. In a blended or inclusive learning environment, combining both models can lead to optimal outcomes:

- Use Rosenshine's structure for introducing new concepts clearly and efficiently.

- Follow with Tomlinson's differentiation to allow students to explore, apply, and express their understanding at their own level.

Tomlinson Differentiation by readiness, interest, and learning profile Ideal for open-ended projects, tiered assignments, flexible group work

Rosenshine Structured, explicit instruction based on cognitive science Ideal for foundational skill-building, concept introduction, and whole-class instruction

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"Comparative Theoretical Frameworks in Inclusive Lesson Planning"

Let me know if you'd like me to continue with the conclusion or references in the same style!

Challenge: Addressing all levels without overwhelming the teacher

Solution: Plan flexible lessons with reusable templates and rotate activities.

Challenge: Limited resources or tech access

Solution: Use printed tiered materials or encourage group sharing of devices.

Designing inclusive lesson plans for multi-level classrooms is not only possible—it is essential in today's educational landscape. By embracing differentiation, blended learning, scaffolding, and ongoing assessment, educators can meet the diverse needs of every learner. The aim is not to create individual lessons for each student but to build flexible pathways within a single lesson that allow all students to thrive.



Inclusive planning requires time, reflection, and sometimes trial and error. However, the benefits—higher student engagement, improved outcomes, and a stronger classroom community—make it a worthy investment. As teachers become more confident in these approaches, multi-level classes transform from a challenge into a rich and rewarding teaching experience.

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