MULTI-LEVEL WORLD LANGUAGE CLASSES: STATE OF THE FIELD

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The idea for the study began with discussions with an overwhelmed colleague who was given multiple multi-level classes and limited support.

There is limited research on the effects of class sizes on learning (Robinson, 1990).

Research can be drawn from other fields but little exists specific to world language.

There is a long time lapse – last research was published in 70s and 80s (Hunter & Barr-Harrison, 1979; Levy, 1982; Strasheim, 1979).
• Multi-level courses are not a new phenomenon.
• They have proliferated over the past few decades due to:
  – declining WL enrollments
  – diminished LEA school budgets for non-STEM subjects, and
  – competition with AP and advanced level content area classes scheduled at the same time as WL classes.
DEFINITIONS FOR MULTI-LEVEL/MULTI-GRADE

• The assigning of multiple levels of students in the same class period.

• Multi level / Multi grade / mixed classes and other terms are used interchangeably.
  
  • For the present research project, the working definition is:
    
    • Multi-level world language classes in which more than one ability level is combined with another in the same class time period (Strasheim, 1979).

• It is not differentiated instruction that occurs naturally in the classroom.
MULTI-LEVEL/GRADE STUDENT COMPOSITION

Includes…

• classes with a significant diversity of language proficiency so that more advanced students aren’t held back and newer students aren’t struggling.

• students grouped by proficiency basis; students who are heritage learners; variations that exist in coursework and teaching models that may conflict with a proficiency-focused classroom (Commins, 1996).
REALITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS: WHY MULTI-LEVEL CLASSES EXIST

- Multi-Level classes are not always the result of an administration decision.
  - No classes may be offered in a system unless they meet minimum class size requirements. Some WL classes don’t meet this quota.
  - The world language program may offer an extensive sequence of advanced courses in which few students can or do enroll.
  - The multi-level class is offered in place of paying a teacher for an overload, in the absence of additional staff.
REALITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS: WHY MULTI-LEVEL CLASSES EXIST (Continued)

• The school is trying to continue offering a language in which a very small minority of the total student population is interested (i.e., Latin, Russian);
• The budget of the school necessitates using a teacher’s services in another subject matter area in addition to a WL class and gives the WL teacher the option of teaching a ML class or not teaching a particular language/level.
• World language teachers volunteering to offer multi-level classes in an effort to preserve a more extended sequence and to provide students with opportunities to continue to study and develop proficiency.
• There may be typical enrollment attrition due to a lack of interest in advanced levels of a particular WL.
• Offering multi-level WL classes can be seen as a victory---allowing a WL or an advanced level of a WL to be taught rather than be eliminated completely from the curriculum.
• “Make the best of a bad situation” (Hunter & Barr-Harrison, 1979, p. 426).
Multi-Level Classes Conflict with ACTFL’s Core Practices for Single-Level WL Classes

**ACTFL Core Practices**

**Use Target Language For Learning**
- Students AND teachers speak, listen, read, write, view, and create in the target language 90% or more during classroom time: comprehensible input, contexts, and interactions.

**Use Authentic Cultural Resources**
- Present interactive reading and listening comprehension tasks using authentic cultural texts with appropriate scaffolding while promoting interpretation.

**Design Communicative Activities**
- Teachers design and carry out interpersonal communication tasks for pairs, small groups, and whole class instruction.

**Plan with Backward Design Model**
- Instructors identify desired results THEN determine acceptable evidence THEN plan learning experiences and instruction.

**Teach Grammar as Concept**
- Use in context. Students focus on meaning BEFORE form.

**Provide Appropriate Feedback**
- Oral corrective feedback in speech or writing elicits output beyond a simple yes or no response.
WHAT WE NEEDED TO KNOW: Research Guiding Questions

- What does the current research base report specifically about multi-level classes?
- How extensive is the use of multi-level courses?
- Why are multi-level courses being used?
- When multi-level classes must exist, how can they be managed or even leveraged for success?
Mini course approach:
At the advanced levels of language study, combined classes lend themselves well to the mini-course approach to instruction. Units of study can be built around cultural differences, historical figures, artistic achievement, current events, literary genres, environmental problems, national economy, and many other topics.

“Grammar can be formally incorporated into these units and systematically presented and drilled; linguistic competence need not be sacrificed” (Hunter & Barr-Harrison, 1979, p. 427)
APPROACHES USED IN MULTI-LEVEL WL CLASSES (Continued)

Learner grouping (Taole, 2017)
• pairs, mixed level, like level, and large group
• differentiating the curriculum, multi-grade planning of different activities for different groups of students to accommodate learner diversity

Organization and routines
• forces students to take responsibility for their own learning
• not completely teacher reliant or waiting on teacher for time effectiveness
Curricular mapping and differentiating the curriculum

- Planning is essential, though time-consuming; discovering broad areas of similarity or common topics is important.
- Identifying topics that can be taught concurrently to different grades requires knowledge of the curriculum of all levels/grades.
- Plan different activities for different groups of students to accommodate learner diversity.
- Plan multi-level assessment --- assessing different tasks for different level students.
- Common approach is to have a joint introduction and conclusion to a lesson with differing tasks in-between.
APPROACHES USED IN MULTI-LEVEL WL CLASSES (Continued)

Strategies

• Learning stations
• Technology/Web 2.0 interactive tools
• Group work (proficiency-balanced with specific tasks accountability)
• Individual research/project (with specific guidelines/rubrics)
• Joint activities suitable for 2 levels
• Students help develop instructional materials for other WL levels
• Creative and personal performance (i.e., YouTube videos)
YOUR INPUT: PILOT SURVEY DRAFT

- Review draft of Qualtrics survey together
References


THANK YOU FOR YOUR INPUT!