

Creating a Multilevel ESL Learning Community for Adults

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Abstract : When offering conventional level-appropriate ESL classes for adults is not feasible, a multilevel adult ESL class can be formed to benefit those who need to learn English for daily function. This paper examines the rationale, the process, the contents, and the outcomes of a multilevel ESL class for adults. The action research discusses a variety of assessments, lesson plans, teaching strategies that facilitate lifelong language learning. In small towns where adult ESL learners are only a handful, often advanced students and inexperienced students have to be placed in one class. Such class might not be viewed as desirable, but with on-going assessments, careful lesson plans, and purposeful strategies, a multilevel ESL class for adults can overcome the obstacles and help learners to reach a higher level of English proficiency. This research explores some hand-on strategies, such as group rotating, cooperative learning, and modifying textbook contents for practical purpose, and evaluate their effectiveness. The data collected in this research include Needs Assessment (beginning of class term), Mid-term Self-Assessment (5 months into class term), End-of-term Student Reflection (10 months into class), and End-of-term Assessment from the Instructor (10 months into class). A descriptive analysis of the data explains the practice of this particular learning community, and reveal the areas for improvement and enrichment. This research answers the following questions: (1) How do the assessments positively help both learners and instructors? (2) How do the learning strategies prepare students to become independent, life-long English learners? (3) How do materials, grouping, and class schedule enhance the learning? The result of the research contributes to the field of teaching and learning in language, not limited in English, by (a) examining strategies of conducting a multilevel adult class, (b) involving adult language learners with various backgrounds and learning styles for reflection and feedback, and (c) improving teaching and learning strategies upon research methods and results. One unique feature of this research is how students can work together with the instructor to form a learning community, seeking and exploring resources available to them, to become lifelong language learners.

Keywords : adult language learning, assessment, multilevel, teaching strategies

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