



Подготовка будущих преподавателей иностранного языка к работе в академически неоднородных группах

Г. М. Фролова

Московский государственный лингвистический университет, Москва, Россия
gmf.06@mail.ru

Аннотация. В статье освещаются некоторые вопросы подготовки будущих преподавателей иностранного языка, связанные с трудностями обучения иностранному языку в академически неоднородных группах. В статье обосновывается использование ролевых игр в ходе профессиональной подготовки или переподготовки преподавателей для повышения качества методической подготовки преподавателей и эффективности учебного процесса. Статья предлагает образцы профессионально ориентированных игр и методические рекомендации, которые могут способствовать повышению качества профессиональной подготовки будущих преподавателей.

Ключевые слова: методическая подготовка будущих учителей / преподавателей иностранного языка, овладение иностранным языком, академически неоднородные группы обучающихся, ролевая игра

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Original Article

Training Future Teachers for Work with Multi-Level Students

Galina M. Frolova

Moscow State Linguistic University, Moscow, Russia
gmf.06@mail.ru

Abstract. The purpose of the article is to explore teacher-training issues related to the challenges of teaching mixed-ability groups. The author suggests using role plays for the sake of training future foreign language teachers with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of teacher development and of foreign language acquisition. The article offers sample vocationally-oriented role plays and teaching recommendations which could help improve the efficiency of teacher training as well as the quality of the foreign language classroom.

Keywords: teacher training and teacher development, foreign language acquisition, mixed-ability (multi-level) groups, role playing

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching foreign languages to multi-level or mixed – ability students has always been very challenging, particularly for newly-qualified teachers. Teachers have to understand their audience's language backgrounds and learning styles to make their teaching methods and lesson plans as effective as possible.

A huge variety of teaching techniques and activities that can be applied in mixed-ability classrooms, including differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, project-based learning, and peer team work. It is important for teachers to be creative and adaptable, and to try new techniques if something is not working for a particular group of students [Tomlinson, 2017].

The goal of teaching in a mixed-ability classroom is to provide every student with an encouraging and comfortable learning environment, which in its turn will ensure an education that meets their individual needs and makes the most of their strengths. By taking a student-centered approach and using a range of different teaching strategies, teachers can help every student succeed and thrive in their learning environment. "If students are not at ease and don't feel good about their language class, there will be no communication. It is the teacher's responsibility to establish the proper atmosphere so that students can relate to the teacher and to each other in a positive and constructive way" [Celce-Murcia, 1984, p. 4].

To achieve this challenging goal, young teachers need to be aware of the problems they may encounter in the multi-level classroom. This is why teacher-trainers should raise would-be teachers' awareness of the likely problems, which is the first stage in dealing with them.

ROLE-PLAYING AS A MEANS OF DEALING WITH MIXED-ABILITY STUDENTS

One of the most efficient techniques used for teacher-training is role-playing.

Role-playing in training takes place between two or more would-be educators who get together for exploring a specific issue. It helps them to become familiar with difficult situations and get to know how others might respond in that same scenario [Фролова, 1987].

Role-playing clearly promotes effective interpersonal relations and social transactions among participants. It includes taking part in various exercises and activities that can improve communication and boost the teacher's engagement and motivation. One of the essential benefits of role-playing in teacher– training is that it builds confidence.

Educators face innumerable situations within a safe environment, which gives them the confidence to understand the concept, identify problems, and learn ways to tackle the given situation effectively. In other words, role-plays assist in handling difficult situations and develop problem-solving skills.

Let us have a look at the following sample role-plays meant for preparing future teachers for work in multi-level groups.

Role-play 1

Act out an International Conference of professors of Moscow State Linguistic University and professors of a foreign University (can be negotiated and agreed on with the teacher-trainees). They are to take part in a discussion devoted to the challenges of teaching foreign languages to multi-level classes.

The purpose of the conference is to compare and analyze different opinions of the representatives of Moscow State Linguistic University and the professors of the 'foreign' University on the following issues:

Teaching techniques and activities for mixed-ability classrooms

Using Differentiation strategies in the Classroom

On the agenda are the following questions:

- Is it possible to meet every student's needs? What techniques can help the teacher achieve this goal?
- What differentiation strategies are important for multi-level audiences?
- In what way is it possible to establish a good motivating environment for students of different backgrounds and goals?
- Should professors pay attention to a motivating environment in the classroom? What advantages can this environment provide?

The speakers are to express their opinions and share their experience and knowledge concerning the issue of teaching techniques and activities for mixed-ability classrooms. They should use the questions listed above, discussing them and responding to them.

This role-play gives the participants an opportunity to share and exchange their own opinions on the issues raised, as well as to listen to their peers' teaching and learning experiences. Such practice can be very useful for them, as they can see how others might respond and deal with a problem in this or that classroom situation.

Role-play 2

Act out a meeting of professors of Moscow State Linguistic University and professors of a foreign University (can be negotiated and agreed on with the teacher-trainees). They are to take part in a discussion devoted to the problems of teaching foreign languages in mixed-ability groups.

The main aim of the meeting is to compare and analyze different views of the representatives of Moscow State Linguistic University and the professors of the 'foreign' University on the following issue:

Planning lessons for multilevel classrooms

The participants are to discuss the following questions:

- Why is it important to plan a lesson for a mixed-ability group of students very carefully?
- What is the teaching value of analyzing lessons?
- What resources and techniques do you find useful in order to monitor your students' progress?
- How can discipline in a mixed-ability class be improved if a problem occurs? What skills should professors have?
- Why is it crucial to have extra tasks for every foreign language lesson when working with a multilevel audience?

The speakers need to interact with each other discussing the importance of planning lessons for multilevel classrooms very carefully.

Answering and discussing the questions, the speakers should provide some arguments from their teaching or learning experience.

Role-play 3

Act out a meeting of professors of a foreign University (can be negotiated and agreed on with the teacher-trainers) and professors of Moscow State Linguistic University devoted to the problems of choosing appropriate course books for students who learn foreign languages in a mixed-ability group.

The main goal of the meeting is to compare and analyze different opinions of the representatives of Moscow State Linguistic University and the representatives of the 'foreign' University on the following issue:

Choosing course books and compiling teaching (supplementary) materials for mixed-ability classes

On the agenda are the following questions:

- What factors should be taken into account in order to choose a course book for mixed-ability students?
- If a textbook does not suit every student, how can educators deal with the problem?
- Is it a good idea to use different textbooks for one group of students? Does such practice broaden students' horizons or does it cause chaos?

The speakers need to discuss the main problems of choosing course books for multi-level students. The speakers are to express their opinion on the role of a course-book in the learning/teaching process, as the course book can pursue a variety of goals.

The speakers need to interact with each other answering questions and providing their own recommendations which can help future foreign language teachers choose adequate course books for their mixed-ability groups.

Role-play 4

Act out a seminar of professors of Moscow State Linguistic University and professors of a foreign University (can be negotiated and agreed on with the teacher-trainees). They are to take part in a discussion devoted to the challenges of using innovative technology in teaching foreign languages to multi-level classes.

The purpose of the seminar is to have a look at different points of view of the representatives of Moscow State Linguistic University and the professors of the 'foreign' University on the following issue:

Using innovative technologies working with a multi-level audience

On the agenda are the following questions:

- How often do you use modern technology during a lesson?
- Do you find it useful to use online games and activities, use electronic devices and digital presentations in the foreign language classroom?
- Would you agree that listening to recordings and watching videos have many advantages for students?
- Should students see the script of a video or an audio text?
- Is it necessary to support every video with a pre-viewing task and a list of vocabulary used in the video?

The participants of this role-play need to answer the questions, explaining why modern technology

can have a positive or a negative impact on foreign language acquisition.

The speakers are to discuss the materials and activities based on modern technology that are used in Moscow State Linguistic University or in foreign universities where the students have been on an exchange programme for teaching foreign languages. They need to analyze positive and negative effects of modern technology.

At the end of the discussion, the speakers are to draw a conclusion about the main benefits and drawbacks of using innovative technologies.

Role-play 5

Act out a conference of professors of Moscow State Linguistic University and professors of a foreign University (can be negotiated and agreed on with the teacher-trainees). They are to take part in a discussion devoted to the challenges of dividing multi-level students into various groups or pairs.

The main goal of the conference is to compare different ideas and suggestions of the representatives of Moscow State Linguistic University and the professors of the 'foreign' University on the following issue:

Dividing multi-level students into various groups / pairs

The participants are to answer the following questions:

- Do you believe educators should always try to group or stream mixed-ability students according to their level of language proficiency?
- Why is it useful for students to have an opportunity to work in small groups? What skills can be improved by working in a pair or a small group?
- How can discipline in a mixed-ability class be improved if a problem occurs? What skills should professors have?

The participants of this role-play need to answer the questions, giving their own reasons for grouping or streaming multi-level students. The participants are to explain why dividing multi-level students into various groups is important or why it may cause problems, and what skills such practice can improve.

The participants need to discuss the main problems that may occur in dividing multi-level students into various pairs or groups, and suggest in what way they can solve the problem and which skills are needed for this.

The questions raised during role-playing sessions can be discussed in more depth together with the teacher-trainer during seminars organized in the format of feedback stages of role-playing.

QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER-TRAINING SEMINARS

Here is a list of questions that can be discussed by future teachers. These questions can also be useful for educators who want to improve their teaching techniques in teaching foreign languages in a mixed-ability class:

1. Do you agree that planning a lesson for a mixed-ability group of students requires an extra effort and is different from planning a class for students of relatively same level of language proficiency?
2. What is the teaching value of analyzing lessons?
3. What would you pay attention to first thing observing a multi-level class if you were a teacher-trainer?
4. How would you go about correcting students' homework in a mixed-ability class?
5. Do you think it is a good idea to give students keys to homework exercises?
6. How often do you use modern technology during a lesson?
7. Do you find it useful to use online games and activities, use electronic devices and digital presentations in the foreign language classroom?
8. Would you agree that staging a variety of activities can help meet every student's needs? What techniques can help the teacher achieve this goal?
9. What resources and techniques do you find useful in order to monitor your students' progress?
10. Try to prove that it is crucial to have extra tasks (or a contingency plan) for every foreign language lesson working with a multi-level audience?
11. What differentiation strategies are important for multi-level audiences?
12. Do you believe in grouping or streaming mixed-ability students according to their level of language proficiency?
13. Do you find it useful for students to have an opportunity to work in pairs or small groups? What skills can be improved by working in a pair or a small group?
14. Prove that foreign language teachers should pay attention to a motivating environment in the classroom. What are the advantages of this sort of environment? Do you believe in having fun in class?
15. In what way is it possible to establish a good motivating environment for students of different backgrounds and goals?

SUMMARY

Role-playing can be very useful for teachers who work with multi-level students. Role-playing while being vocationally trained, future teachers learn how to stage this or that classroom activity, how to group or pair off students, how to analyze the lessons they observe. They become aware of the key benefits of role-plays for multi-level students. Role-playing is an efficient classroom technique because it

- develops communication and language skills;
- allows students to act out and make sense of real-life situations;
- develops social skills as students interact and collaborate with each other;

- peers learn to empathize, to look at things from different perspectives;
- helps students learn about different cultures;
- encourages students to express their ideas and feelings in a relaxed environment;
- sparks creativity and imagination;
- improves motivation.

Role-playing is indeed a good classroom activity for mixed-ability students, as the roles can be as different as students in a group. It gives students an opportunity to feel free and confident, as the strongest and the most capable student can have the most complicated role, while a student who is shy and less competent can get an easy role.

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ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРЕ

Фролова Галина Михайловна

кандидат педагогических наук, профессор
заведующая кафедрой лингводидактики
Института иностранных языков имени М. Тореза
Московского государственного лингвистического университета

INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frolova Galina Mihailovna

PhD (Pedagogy), Professor
Head of the Foreign Language Teaching Department
The Maurice Thorez Institute of Foreign Languages
Moscow State Linguistic University

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