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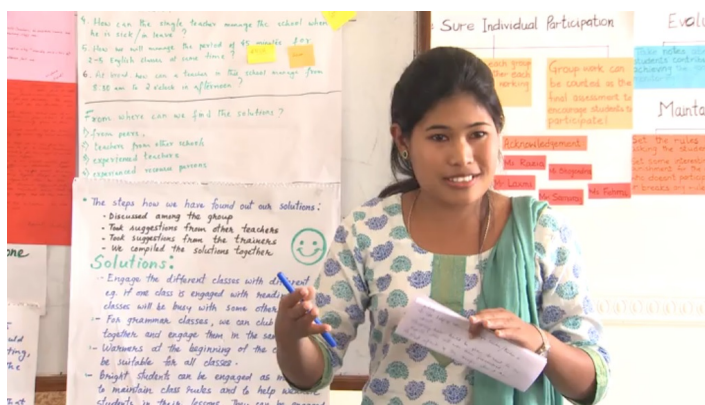
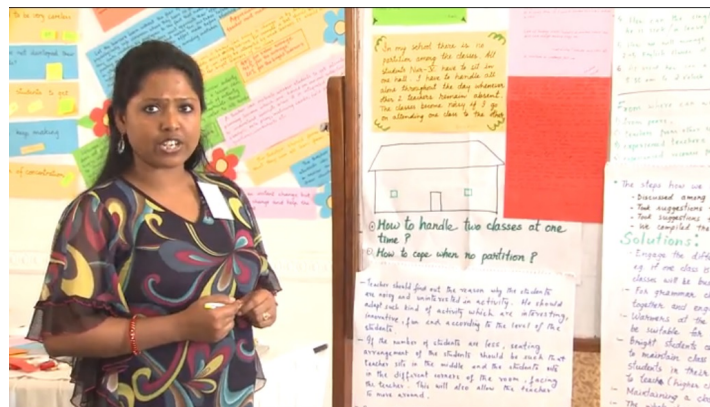
Managing multiple classes in one room without partitions

Joya Senchowa - India

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Our teaching context

My name is Joya Senchowa and I am an Elementary teacher for the government of Assam in India.



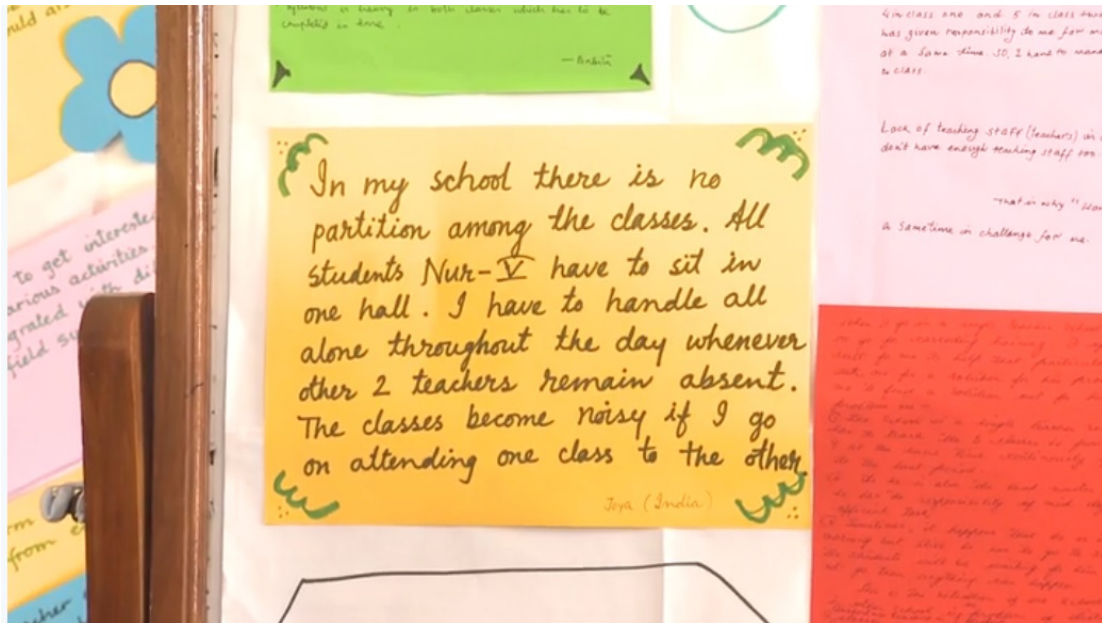
My name is Bornali Gogoi and I am an Elementary teacher for the government of Assam in India.

My name is Babita Hapila and I am an Elementary teacher for the government of Assam in India.

My name is Krishna Deuba and I am an Elementary teacher in Nepal.

The problem we face

As a result of teacher shortages in our countries, we four all face the same problem – how to handle multiple classes together in one room with no partition. Additional problems arise when there is only one teacher in the school or when other teachers are absent, leaving only one teacher to manage all the classes. One of the main difficulties we share is maintaining a manageable noise level. With so many learners in one space it is difficult not to disturb other classes. And even though we try to occupy our other class(es) with activities while we are teaching another one, those learners become distracted, especially when we do interactive activities such as role plays, games or rhymes. Another issue is managing to give equal time and attention to each class, an issue which is compounded by the need to complete a heavy syllabus. We always feel that we cannot monitor the learning and progress of individual learners effectively.



What we did

We formulated questions

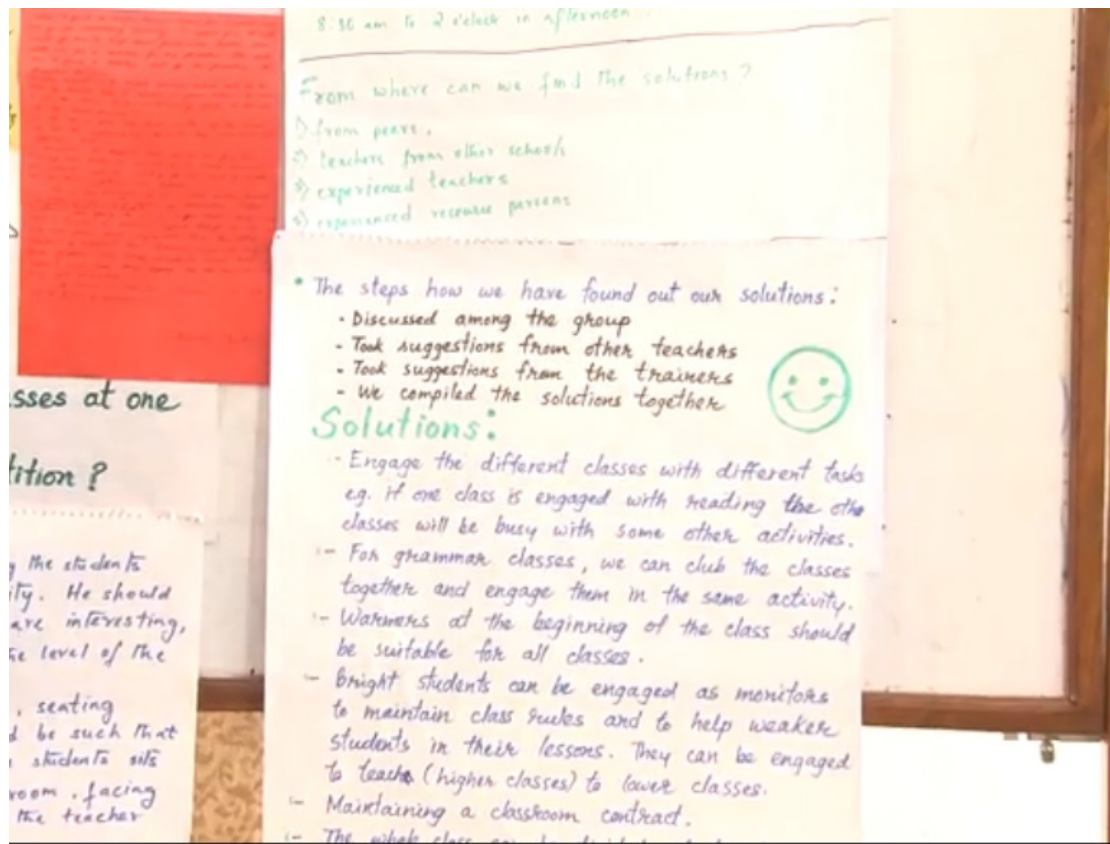
We discussed our situations together as a group and then came up with some questions which we could ask our colleagues:

- What should our lesson plans look like?
- How should we deal with multiple classes at the same time, especially in a single-teacher school?
- How can we divide time fairly between classes which take place at the same time?
- In a single-teacher school, how can the school operate when the teacher is sick or on leave?
- How can we manage a 45-minute period when teaching two to five English classes at the same time?
- How can we manage behaviour?

We discussed our problems and consulted colleagues

We consulted colleagues and took their suggestions. We then compiled a list of possible solutions together.

What we learned



Use a mix of teacher-led and self-directed activities

We can set different classes different tasks. For example, while one class is engaged in a reading task which requires teacher presence, the other class(es) can be given a writing and drawing task or storybooks to read in groups. The important thing is that these self-directed activities are interesting and pitched at the level of the students; if not, they become bored and restless and noisy.

Use multi-class or whole-school activities

We can intersperse class activities with activities for all. For example, when we focus on grammar we can club the classes together and engage them all in the same activity. We can also bring all the classes together for warmer activities. With remedial teaching, we can form *Onion rings** of mixed-level learners to encourage peer teaching.

Manage behaviour

We can share the responsibility for managing behaviour with the learners by introducing classroom contracts.

Use classroom layout

If space allows, the classes can sit in the four corners of the room and we can stand or sit in the middle. This gives us a central position from which to monitor all the students. This is especially important when giving instructions. Ideally, we need to use a separate board with each class too.

Use monitors and mentors

In cases where a teacher is sick, especially in a single-teacher school, it is useful to have a back-up plan in place. We could organise for School Management Committee members or mother group / volunteer service members from the local area to help out. We can also appoint monitors and mentors from among our responsible and high-level students. They can help by making sure everyone follows the rules and supporting learners with difficulties. These students can even be asked to teach the younger learners and lower levels.

**Onion rings:* organise the students in two concentric circles facing each other; the outside ring is facing inwards and the inside ring is facing outwards. There should be an equal number of participants in each circle. With a large group, you can make more circles. The students interact with the first partner, and then change partners by the outside circle moving one person to the right and the inside circle staying in the same place.

What we tried

When we returned to our separate teaching contexts, we also came up with other ideas to try in our classrooms. So, in addition to the above suggestions from our colleagues, we also focused on materials development and more specific classroom management strategies.

Joya

I focused mainly on planning and materials development in my context as a way of managing multiple classes. When I conducted practice sessions in different schools I took three different classes at the same time in the same room. What I did was to prepare a lot of materials and detailed lesson plans for those classes and this really helped me with the smooth management of each class. The learning outcomes were met and the children enjoyed the tasks and activities I had prepared.

In my school I found a lot of unused materials which I have now sorted out and renovated with the help of the students and I am using them on a regular basis in my lessons. These include flash cards, pictures, picture stories, word meanings, names of vegetables, fruits, flowers etc., picture puzzles, jumbled up words, building blocks, community helper pictures etc. and I use those mostly for vocabulary and grammar development. These materials are especially useful when I teach two or three classes at the same time as I get the lower levels on task with these materials while I teach the higher levels. The children really like them and enjoy using them.

I have also started devoting my break times to developing materials and classroom renovation. Along with that I try to engage the children in non-scholastic activities like dance, music, sports, games, drama, art and creativity and I also take remedial classes. This way, the children are more involved with me and more motivated and many of the struggling students have improved in their studies as a result.

Bornali

These are the ideas I have tried out in different schools in my cluster and which were also tried out by the teachers in my cluster.

I tried using multi-class activities on subjects and topics which two or three classes need to learn such as grammar (nouns etc.) or maths (addition etc.). I also introduced project work bringing three different classes together to form mixed groups. This was very successful as there was a lot of peer teaching going on. It was also a very effective way of building rapport among the students.

I also used the idea of engaging two or three classes at the same time in completing different tasks. For example, I asked class V to explore the school campus to find leaves and find out the names of the different plants (science) while class IV were busy with free writing in their own language. While both these classes were engaged in their group tasks under the supervision of group leaders, I was teaching class III. I found I was still able to monitor classes IV and V and I found this arrangement very productive as all the classes were on task.

I also used *Onion Rings* for remedial work getting strong learners to teach those with difficulties in the same class. I even got a higher level class to teach a lower class this way while I was busy teaching a third class and found it very effective in terms of student interaction.

Finally, I got my learners to sit in the four corners of the room and my presence in the middle of the room kept them much more focused.

Krishna

The first thing I did was to organise for a plywood partition to be constructed in the big room to separate the two classes.

I then focused on developing classroom management materials. These consisted of:

Job chart: A job chart can be easily made from chart paper and used to assign different jobs to the students e.g. attendance checker, class monitor, water monitor etc.

Behaviour chart: A behaviour chart or rules poster displays what is and what is not allowed in the classroom. It can be negotiated with the students and even signed by everyone as an agreement between teacher and students. The teacher can simply point to it if a student is breaking the agreement.

Attendance chart: This can be used to track attendance and lateness. Each day the attendance monitor can fill in the chart using e.g. different colours for absence and presence.

Appreciation box: This can be made using a recycled cardboard box. The teacher writes the names of students who have behaved well, been helpful, done their duties, made an effort etc., and monitors behaviour, helpfulness, duties, effort, participation etc. on slips of paper and puts these into the box. At the end of the month, the teacher opens the box and counts the names. Those students whose names appear the most can be rewarded with e.g. a note book or pen.

These are some of the ideas I have tried out and which were also tried out by the teachers in my cluster.

Reflections

Joya

I would like to say that my multi-grade lessons are getting better and better. I've started to enjoy setting up the classes and I don't worry any more when I have to take two, three or even four classes at the same time. I've become a relaxed teacher and the children are having fun.

Krishna

It became easy for teachers to handle their large, classes after starting to use the classroom management materials. All the materials have been hung on the wall and the classrooms seem well-decorated and attractive. And, importantly, students themselves are taking care of these materials and they are making new materials along with teachers.

Reflection questions

Q1: How did Joya, Bornali, Babita and Krishna go about finding possible solutions to their problems? What problems do you face in your teaching context? Could you discuss these with your colleagues? Maybe they face similar difficulties and you can work together to find solutions. Or maybe they can suggest some tips which you can try out.

Q2: Do you work with multiple classes at the same time? How do you manage to maximise learning while maintaining discipline? Many of the suggestions above could be applied in a variety of teaching situations, not just multi-class contexts. Which could you use in your teaching context?

Q3: The difficulties of a multi-class context for teachers are clear but what about the students? Do you think there are any benefits from learning in a multi-class or mixed group environment?

See Joya and Babita reporting on the initial stage of their research on video:

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/how-handle-multiple-classes-one-room>