

## A Typical Multilevel Class

The learners in your picture are students in a Customer Service ESOL course held four afternoons per week. The course is the product of a partnership between a local community college and a workforce development agency. It is the first time the course has been held, so enrollment was open to all who were interested. One of the few requirements was that students be unemployed or underemployed and express an interest in customer service.

While not the most extreme example of a multilevel group, the students are quite diverse. Mustapha, a former pilot from Congo, and Iris, an Argentine school teacher, are the most talkative members of the class and often dominate the conversation with a high level of accuracy and fluency. Tatiana, a Jewish refugee who only recently arrived in the U.S., was a chemist in Russia and speaks several languages, though her newly acquired spoken English is very hard to understand. In her late 50's, she is taking the course with the hope that it will help her get a badly-needed job. It's clear her classmates don't like to be her partner in group activities because she has a tendency to speak harshly and easily becomes upset.

Rosa, a newly divorced mother of three in her late thirties, has low literacy skills. Never having taken an English class nor had a job (here or in her native Mexico), she is very self-conscious in class and rarely speaks, though when she does, she speaks very well. She has been in the U.S. for 20 years. Carlos, also from Mexico, has been in the U.S. nearly as long. In his early 70's, he has a low level of education, but can read. He makes little progress in class, but he says he wants to continue learning English and this was the only class that was open. Quiet and dignified, he dislikes role plays and learning games.

Bolívar is highly motivated to improve his writing so that he can get a management position in a travel agency, like he had in Nicaragua, instead of the construction job he works now with his cousins. However, his English is still at a low level. He asks grammar questions frequently and often compliments the teacher's appearance during class. His motivation is matched by that of Alemnesh, a 23-year old Ethiopian woman, well-educated and studious. She is a high beginning but is making progress rapidly. She already works part time as a stocker in a grocery store, but her goal is to be a cashier.

Finally, Marta from El Salvador is friendly and talkative, but not particularly well-motivated. Usually home all day with her children, she sees the course as a chance to get out of the house and socialize, as well as learn a bit of English.

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**Activity:** These learners have a range of ability levels in English. In what other important ways do they differ from one another? In other words, what are the several ways in which this group is “multilevel”? With your partner, make a list of the ways below.

