

Teaching Multilevel Adult ESL Classes

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*****Partners A and B should read the first paragraph*****

In multilevel adult English as a second language (ESL) classes, teachers are challenged to use a variety of materials, activities, and techniques to engage the interest of the learners and assist them in their educational goals. This digest recommends ways to choose and organize content for multilevel classes; it explains grouping strategies; it discusses a self-access component, independent work for individual learners; and it offers suggestions for managing the classes.

*****Partner A begins reading here*****

The Multilevel Class

Teachers use the term *multilevel* to identify any group of learners who differ from one another in one or more significant ways. Arguably, every class is multilevel because learners begin with varying degrees of competence and then progress at different rates in each of the language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Bell & Burnaby, 1984; Santopietro, 1991; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). However, in many adult ESL classes, there are even more variables that affect the levels within the class. Some programs (generally because of funding constraints, learner scheduling difficulties, number of learners, and program logistics) place learners of all levels, from beginning to advanced, in a single class. Often such classes include speakers of many native languages, some that use the roman alphabet, some that do not. Learners may have varying degrees of literacy in their first language as well as in English (Bell, 1991; Santopietro, 1991; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Other factors that add to diversity in the classroom and to rate of progress in learning English are the type and amount of a learner's previous education; the learning style preference; learner expectations of appropriate classroom activities; and the culture, religion, sex, and age of each learner (Guglielmino & Burrichter, 1987).

Needs Assessment

To ensure some success for all learners in the multilevel classroom, teachers must determine what each learner needs and wants to learn. This is accomplished through ongoing needs assessment that includes both standardized tests and alternative assessment, one-on-one interviews with learners, group discussions, and learner observation (Alexander, 1993; Holt, 1995; Isserlis, 1992; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Throughout the needs

assessment process, it is important that adult learners are actively involved in choosing the direction and content of their learning (Auerbach, 1992; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Techniques for selecting the content or themes of class activities might include whole or small group brainstorming and prioritizing activities, and documentation and prioritization of individual learner goals ("I need English for..."). (See Auerbach, 1992 for additional suggestions on using learner themes.)

Planning for the Multilevel Class

Planning for multilevel classes requires the ability to juggle many different elements as teachers must provide activities that address the learning styles, skill levels, and specific learning objectives of each individual (Bell & Burnaby, 1984; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). Teachers can use a variety of techniques and grouping strategies and a selection of self-access materials to help all learners be successful, comfortable, and productive for at least a portion of each class time. The planning is time-consuming and the classroom management is exhausting. However, the alternative to this effort, planning and using activities that meet the needs of only those learners whose skills fall somewhere in the middle, will frustrate those with lower skills, and bore the more advanced learners (Boyd & Boyd, 1989; Wrigley & Guth, 1992). When planning and teaching the multilevel ESL class, as with any adult ESL class, the teacher must remember that learner perceptions of what constitutes sound language learning may not match those of the teacher. The teacher's enthusiasm and goodwill can usually encourage learners who resist unfamiliar and non-traditional classroom activities to participate fully in the class. However, where there is a mismatch between learner and teacher perceptions of useful activities, teachers should be prepared to include activities that meet learner expectations (Wrigley & Guth, 1992). For example, a story developed from a language experience approach (LEA) activity (Taylor, 1992) could be a source for grammatical drills or for pronunciation exercises.

Managing the Multilevel Classroom

Planning for the multilevel class must also include strategies for managing the group, pair, and individual activities. The teacher may work with one small group at a time while the other learners or groups of learners are engaged in independent work (Berry & Williams, 1992). Some teachers manage the various groupings by enlisting a volunteer to work with one group while the teacher works with others (Santopietro, 1991). Learners can also act as peer tutors or peer group leaders (Bell, 1991). Again as was true with grouping and pairing strategies in choosing peer group tutors and leaders, teacher sensitivity to learner expectations, to learning styles, and to personal and cultural issues is paramount.

***** Partner A stops reading here.*****
*****Partner B starts reading here.*****

Grouping Strategies

The use of grouping strategies can form the basis for the multilevel class as teachers mix and match groups, pair learners, and allow time for individual or solo activities during each class period (Bell, 1991; Berry & Williams, 1992).

Certain factors should also be considered in setting up group and pair activities, including differences in age, social background, country of origin, and educational background, as well as English ability. Some learners might not be comfortable in groups with other learners they consider to be more prominent or of higher status. And some men may resist being in groups where women are the leaders. Although the teacher can often encourage reluctant learners to try new activities, sensitivity to potential difficulties arising from group and pair work is necessary. Class discussions of cultural and personal differences in learning styles and interaction patterns may help overcome initial resistance (Wrigley & Guth, 1992).

- *Whole Group* activities are appropriate initially for beginning a new class and regularly for daily warm-up time. They can focus the entire group on a theme that later involves various individual and small group tasks. The whole group can participate in a class project to create a finished product (such as a book, bulletin board, or video), where each learner completes a part of the task based on individual abilities and interests (Bell, 1991). Other initial whole group activities that lend themselves to follow-up activities at various difficulty levels include reading comic strips or photo stories; listening to audiotapes or viewing videotapes; taking field trips; learning songs; and brainstorming on topics of interest.
- *Small Group* work provides opportunities for learners to use their language skills and is often less intimidating than whole group work. Small groups can be set up according to interest or ability, and need not be equal in size or permanent (Bell & Burnaby, 1984).

Heterogeneous groups are made up of learners who have disparate skills. Cross-ability grouping allows stronger learners to help others and maximizes complementary learner strengths (Bell, 1991). Activities suitable for cross-ability groups are jigsaw activities; board games; and creating posters, lists, art, and multimedia projects.

Homogeneous groups are made up of learners who have roughly equal skills (for example, all are literate or are orally fluent). Activities often suitable for like-ability groups are problem-solving, sequencing, and process writing.

- *Pairs of learners* working together have the greatest opportunity to use communicative skills. Like-ability pairs succeed when partners' roles are interchangeable or equally difficult (Bell, 1991). Activities for homogeneous pairs include information gap (where the assignment can only be completed through sharing of the different information given each learner), dialogues, role plays, and pair interviews.

Cross-ability pairs work best when partners are given different roles and heavier demands are placed on the more proficient learner (Bell, 1991). Some examples are LEA stories where one dictates and one transcribes, interviews where one questions and one answers, and role plays where one learner has a larger role than the other.

Using Self-Access Materials

When learners are doing independent or solo activities in the multilevel classroom, using self-access materials can enable them to take responsibility for choosing work appropriate to their individual levels and interests (Bell, 1991; Berry & Williams, 1992). A self-access component includes activities from all skill areas as well as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation exercises. With self-access materials, each task is set up so that learners need minimal, if any, assistance from the teacher to accomplish the activity. Directions are clear and answers (when applicable) are provided on the back of the activity allowing learners to informally evaluate their own work without teacher intervention (Bell, 1991). When used regularly in the classroom, self-access time can foster a relaxed environment where learners decide how and when to interact with one another, with their teacher, and with English. Teachers need not have their own rooms to set up self-access corners; a box of materials can travel with the teacher to workplace sites, community centers, or church basements. The following are some materials to include in the self-access collection: art supplies such as scissors, markers, crayons, pens, pencils, paints, paper in various sizes, types, and colors, glue, tape, stapler, stencils, stamps, and magazines for collages, *and* directions for projects (e.g., draw pictures of the native country, draw a calendar and put in holidays, draw the U.S. map); crossword puzzles; articles and books for a range of reading levels; partner dialogues, in envelopes, with directions; information gaps; scrambled sentences; interview questions (with tape recorder and blank tape); writing tasks for individuals, pairs, or groups; board games and puzzles; review materials from topics, structures, and functions covered in class; contact assignments such as drawing a map of the neighborhood or telephoning for information; high interest videos and taped radio segments with teacher-made activities; and computer software programs to choose from.

Conclusion

Teaching multilevel adult ESL learners is a challenge that requires great skill and sensitivity. Teachers whose planning reflects knowledge of their learners' different language abilities, culture, educational background, classroom expectations, and preferred learning styles can help adults learning English as a second language to be partners in their own education. Through use of versatile grouping strategies and self-access materials, teachers can manage a multilevel adult ESL class where all learners will experience success.

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Language Levels

Domain: L S R W

Above Level

On Level

Below Level

Two Group Lesson Plan

Topic: _____

Objective: _____ Day _____ of _____

Individual Work

Whole Group Activity

Group 1 works with teacher

Group 2 works individually, in pairs or in groups

Group 1 works individually, in pairs or in groups

Group 2 works with teacher

Whole Group Activity

Two Group Lesson Plan

Topic: _____

Objective: _____ Day _____ of _____

Individual Work

Whole Group Activity

Group 1 works with teacher

Group 2 works with teacher

Group 1 works individually, in pairs
or in groups

Group 2 works individually, in pairs
or in groups

Whole Group Activity

Structure	Team	Class	L	S	R	W
Find Someone Who						
Carousel						
Frames						
Inside Outside Circle						
Analysis Pizza						
Think Pair Share						
Value Lines						
Mix Freeze Match						
Four Corners						
Jigsaw						
Numbered Heads Together						
People Graphing						

Multiple Intelligences

<p>I like to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. observe my surroundings 2. walk in the woods 3. look at trees and nature 4. work in the garden 5. classify 6. notice similarities and differences 7. care for pets and animals 8. read field guides <p>Score: _____</p>	<p>I like to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. make things 2. dance 3. exercise 4. play sports 5. experience through touch 6. move rather than sit still 7. gesticulate when I talk 8. tap my fingers, legs, or pen/pencil <p>Score: _____</p>
<p>I like to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. have independent time to work or think 2. relate new information to my own experiences 3. analyze my thoughts and dreams 4. keep a diary 5. explore my own feelings 6. have awareness of the mood and feelings of others 7. express my opinions and beliefs when I write 8. be aware of my own strengths <p>Score: _____</p>	<p>I like to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. join clubs and organizations 2. work in groups 3. discuss and debate 4. have lots of friends 5. go to social events 6. lead a group of people 7. learn by having someone tell me how to do something 8. help others learn <p>Score: _____</p>

Multiple Intelligences

<p>I like to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. use maps2. draw and create3. use graphic organizers4. take photos5. do jigsaw puzzles or play games like Tetris6. doodle7. play with geometric shapes8. look at the pictures before I read the text <p>Score: _____</p>	<p>I like to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. work with numbers and symbols2. play chess or checkers3. do math problems or brain teasers4. list or organize facts5. analyze data6. make predictions7. use outlines8. take measurements <p>Score: _____</p>
<p>I like to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. sing2. play an instrument3. read music4. snap my fingers, hum or clap5. listen to music on my ipod/stereo or in the car6. guess the composer, melody, and instruments in a song/piece7. listen to background music while I work8. attend concerts <p>Score: _____</p>	<p>I like to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. read2. do crosswords3. write4. play with language5. learn by reading directions6. expand my vocabulary7. tell stories8. speak in public <p>Score: _____</p>

Bingo

		FREE		

Bingo

		FREE		

Find Someone Who

can name the eight multiple intelligences	has used human graphing	likes to use cooperative learning	has taught adults for more than a decade
has taught outside the United States	has used a multilevel textbook series	likes to design their own teaching materials	uses FSW in the classroom
uses Think Pair Share in the classroom	teaches GED classes	likes to teach pronunciation	teaches/taught in a room that doesn't look like anything like a classroom
has taught students from at least 10 different countries	can name the four language domains	uses the Inside Outside Circle Strategy	likes to teach civics

**Find someone who can name
the superlative or comparative forms of these adjectives:**

comparative form of short	comparative form of good	superlative form of intelligent	comparative form of happy
superlative form of pretty	superlative form of big	comparative form of new	superlative form of hot
superlative form of bad	comparative form of tight	superlative form of good	comparative form of beautiful
comparative form of hot	superlative form of old	comparative form of loose	superlative form of short

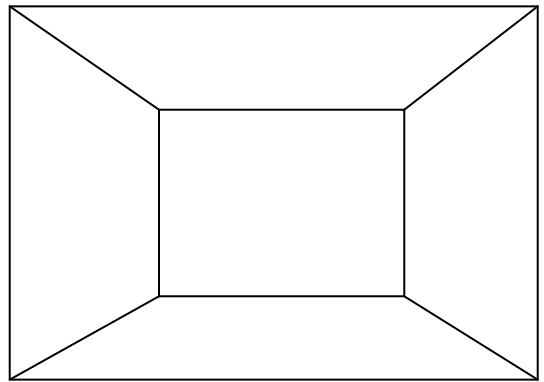
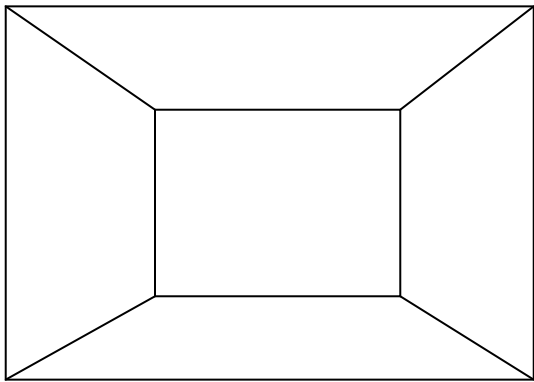
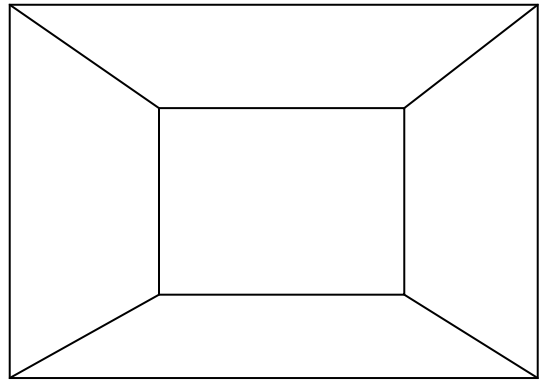
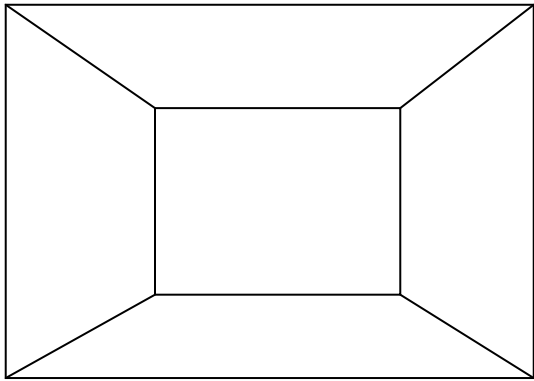
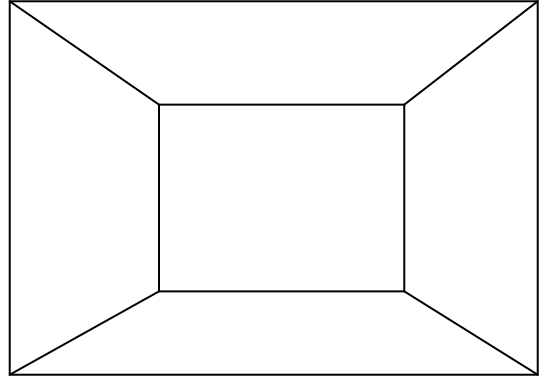
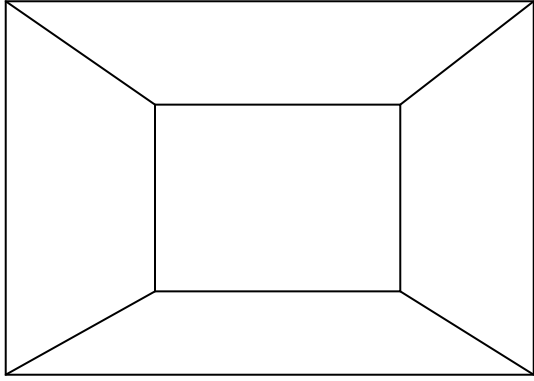
Find someone who can name the health care provider described below:

A doctor who treats common problems and refers you to a specialist when necessary.	A doctor who treats skin problems and diseases.	A trained professional who helps patients use a body part that has been injured.
A doctor who treats eye problems and diseases.	A doctor who specializes in diseases of the heart.	A doctor who takes care of children.
A doctor who specializes in women's health, pregnancy and childbirth.	A doctor who treats tooth problems and diseases.	A doctor who helps people with emotional problems.

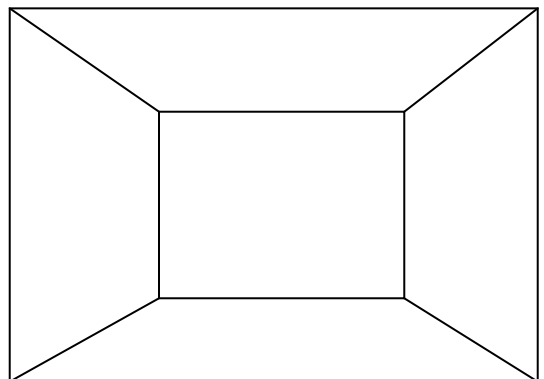
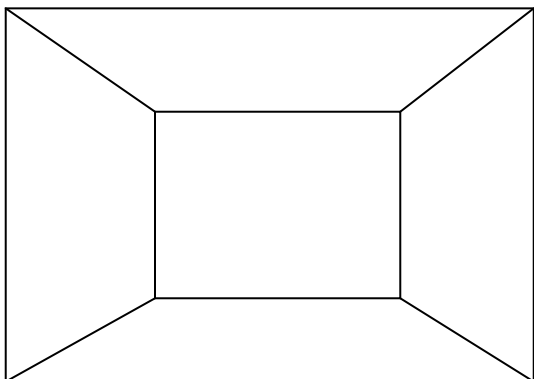
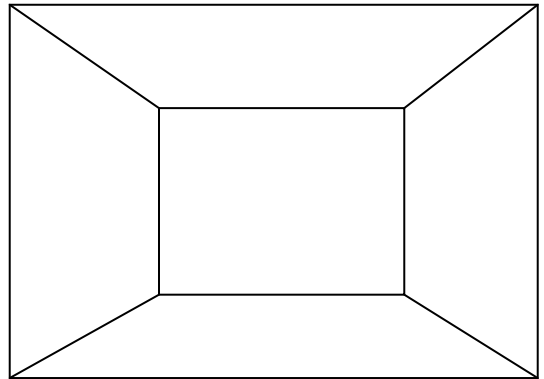
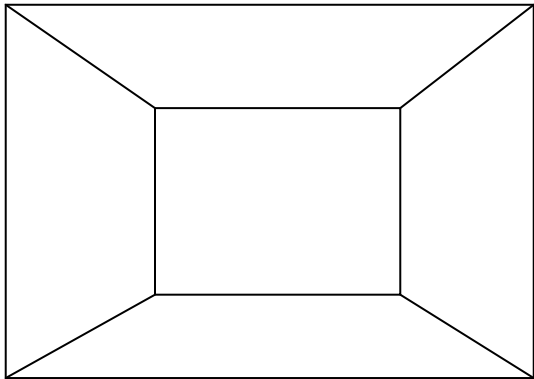
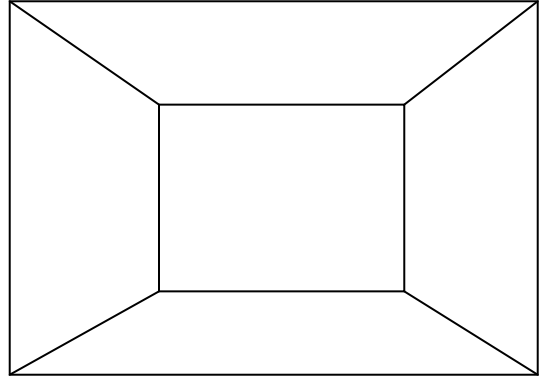
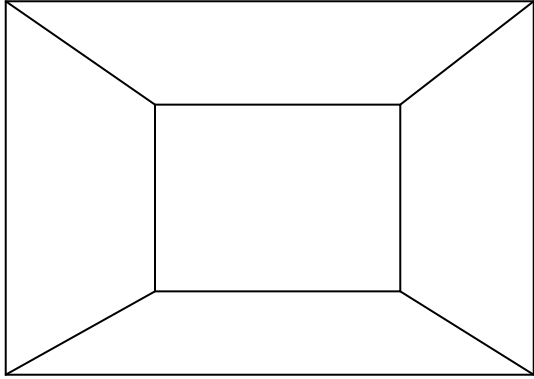
Find Someone Who

Find Someone Who

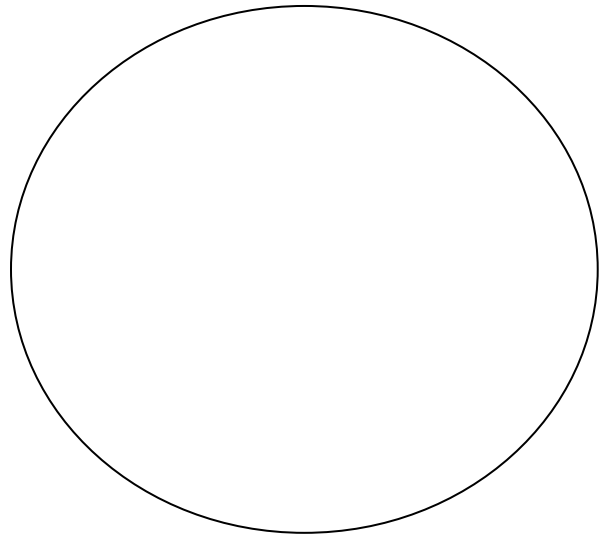
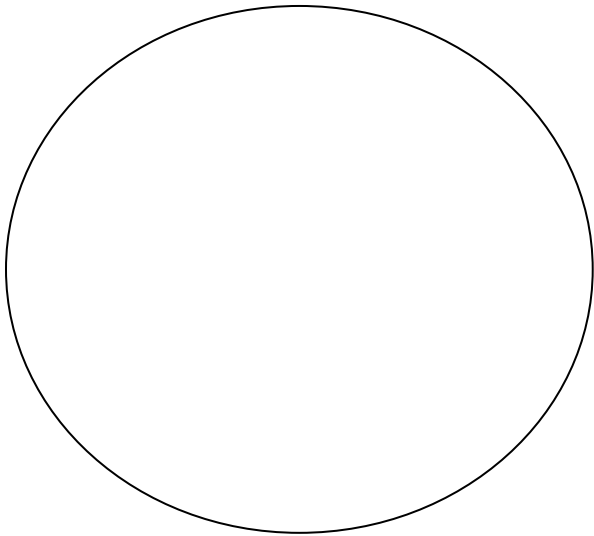
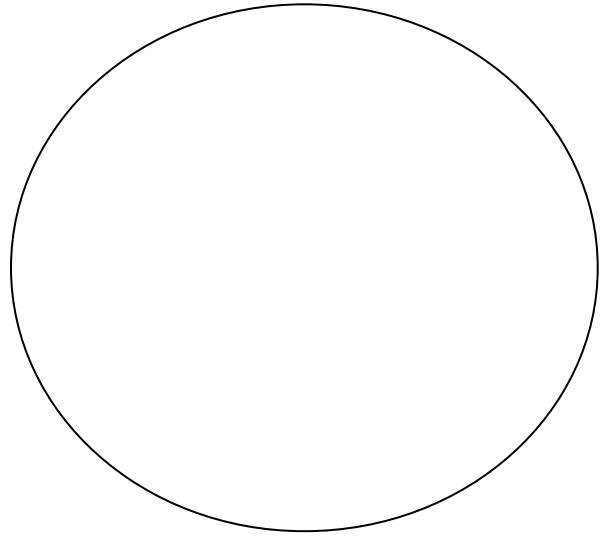
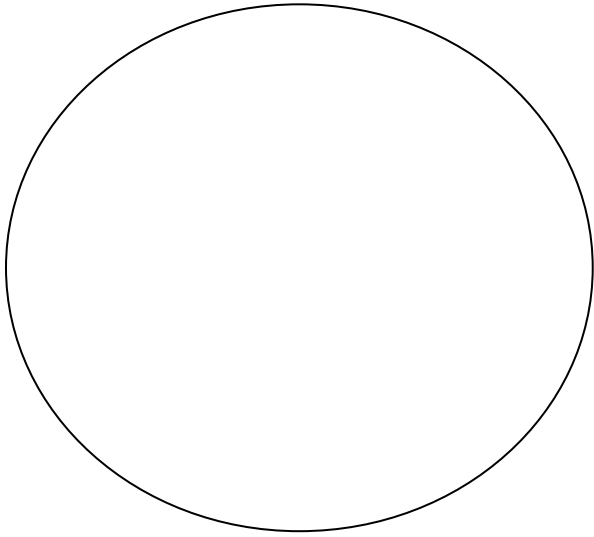
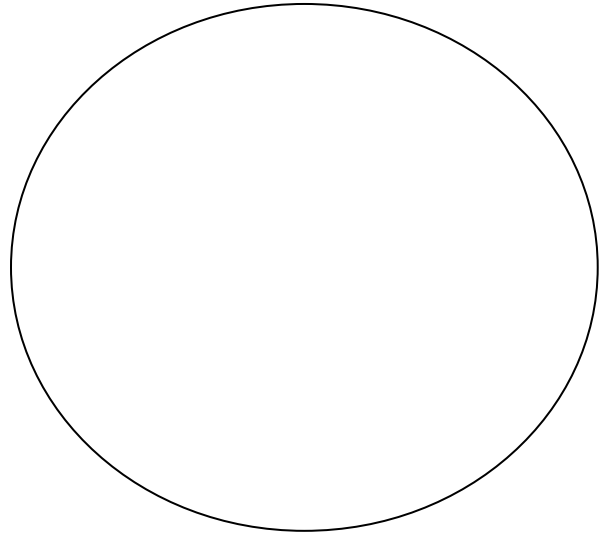
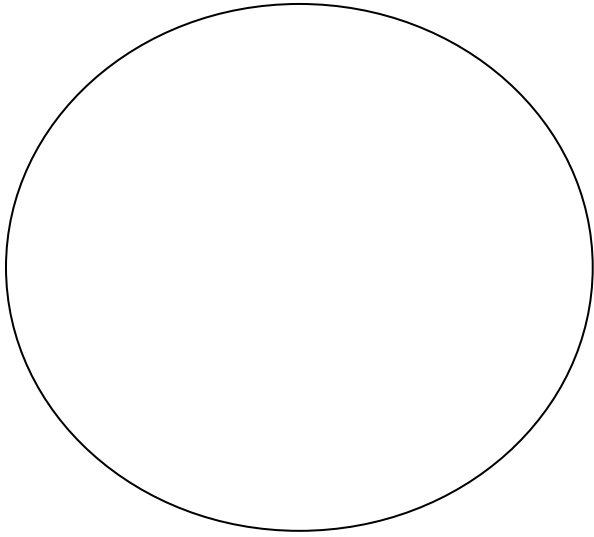
Cooperative Frames



Cooperative Frames



Analysis Pizza



Analysis Pizza

