

# **Soup or salad?**

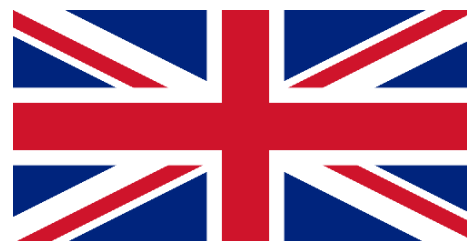
Informed eclecticism in the mixed-ability classroom

Edmund Dudley

CEN, Guayaquil

24 September 2016





# Then and now



# In this talk

- Methodology and the role of the teacher
- Mixed-ability classes and the needs of the learner
- Soup or salad?
- Combining tradition and innovation
- Towards an informed and flexible approach
- Classroom activities



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# ELT Methods – a selection



Audiolingual method



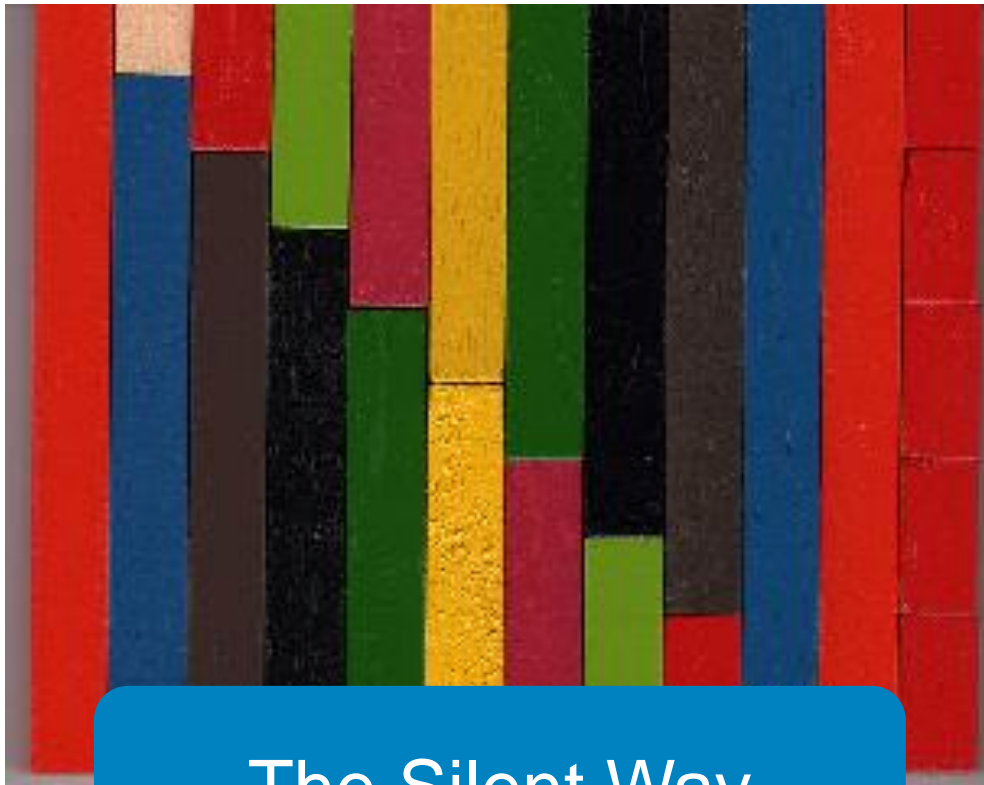
# ELT Methods – a selection



Total Physical  
Response

# ELT Methods – a selection

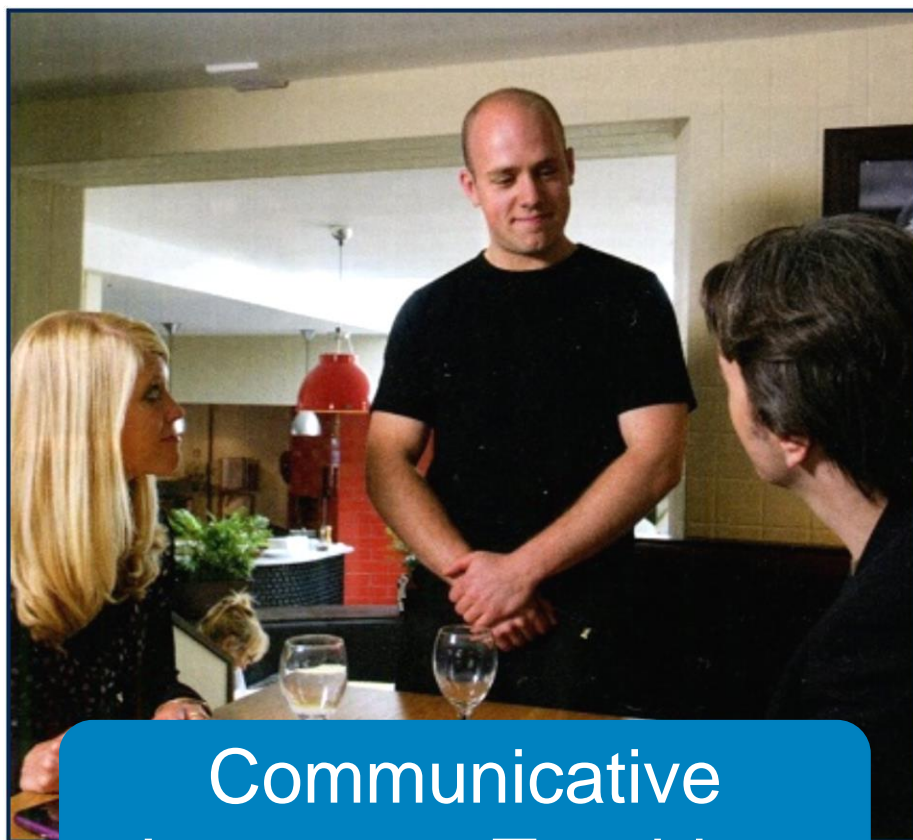
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## The Silent Way



# ELT Methods – a selection



Communicative  
Language Teaching

# ELT Methods – a selection



# ELT Methods – a selection



Blended learning

# The role of the teacher



The teacher is responsible for modelling, controlling, monitoring and correcting.

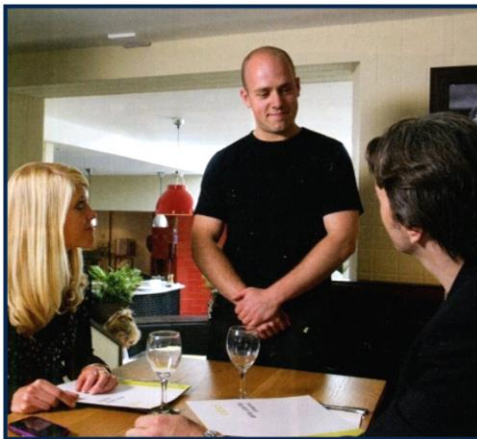


“The instructor is the director of a stage play in which the students are the actors.”  
(Asher)

# The role of the teacher



The teacher is a neutral observer.  
“Teach, test, and get out of the way”.  
(Stevick)



The teacher is a facilitator of communication  
processes – and an active participant.

# The role of the teacher



The teacher initiates conversation and optimises the “language learning affordances” of emergent language - without using textbooks.

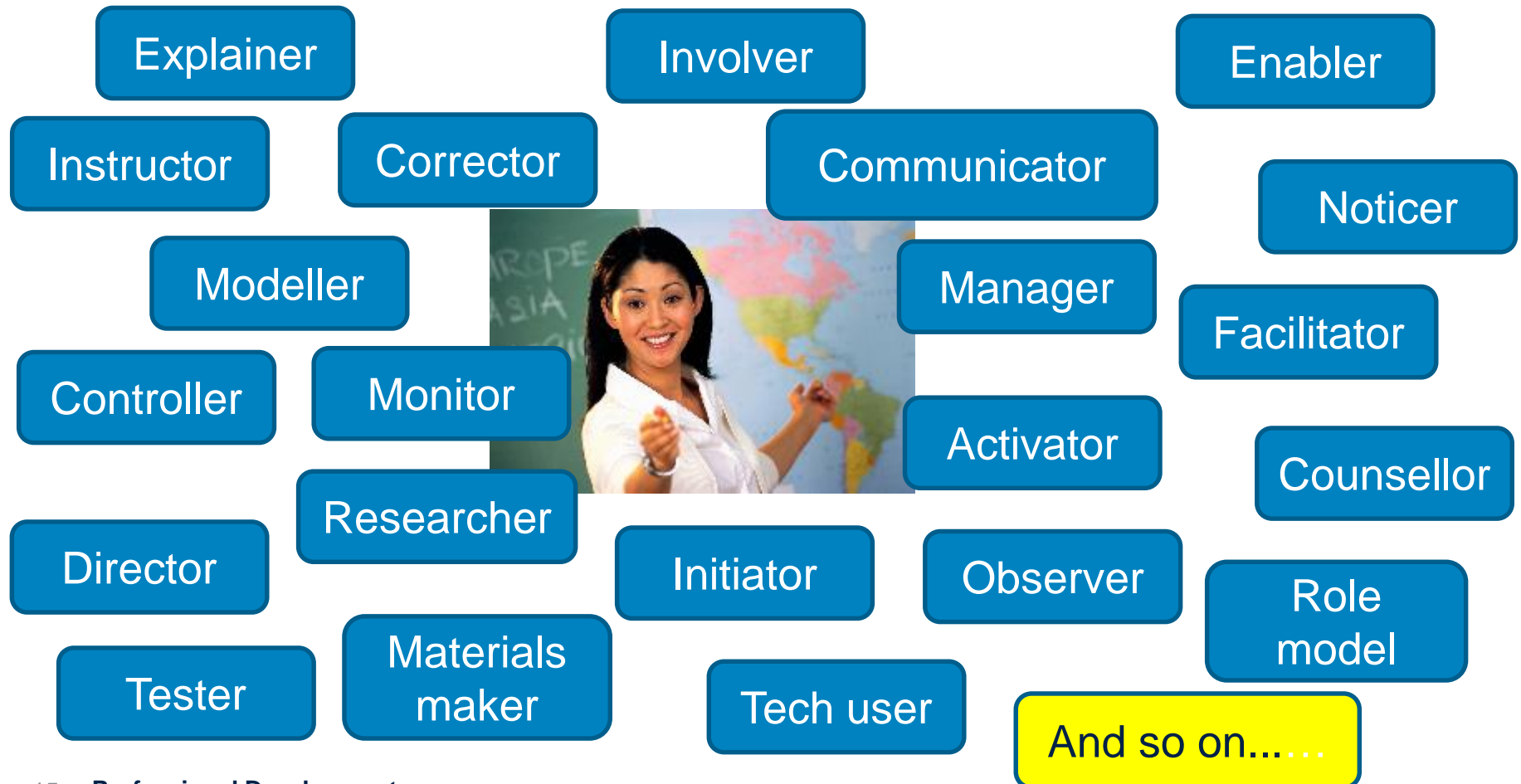


The teacher combines face-to-face and technological input to facilitate learning in dynamic groupings – both inside and outside the classroom.



# Teacher roles

Where does that leave me?



# Everyone happy?



?

The needs and preferences of the *learners* should inform decisions we take about appropriate methods to use in the classroom.

This is not possible if we select our preferred methods before we have met our students.



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# What do we mean by *mixed ability*?

## Differences between learners

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Here are four ways that learners in the same class can differ:

- language-learning ability
- language knowledge
- learning style
- attitude to the language

Is that all?

Can you think of any others?

# What do we mean by *mixed ability*?

## Differences between learners

### SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LEARNERS IN HETEROGENEOUS CLASSES

language-learning ability	age or maturity
language knowledge	gender
cultural background	personality
learning style	confidence
attitude to the language	motivation
mother tongue	interests
intelligence	independence
world knowledge	self-discipline
learning experience	educational level
knowledge of other languages	

Penny Ur (1996) *A Course in Language Teaching* CUP



# Mixed-ability classes and the needs of the learner

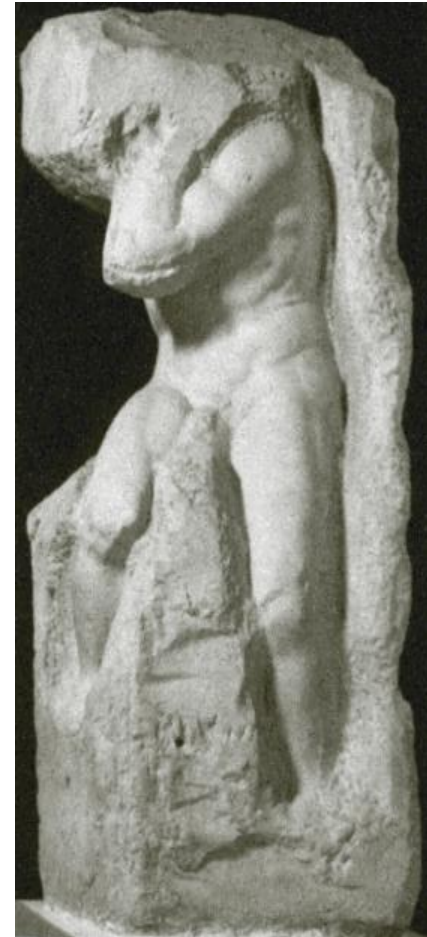


Rigid adherence to any one method is likely to be problematic if the learners in the room have different needs, strengths and preferences.

# What do we mean by *mixed ability*?

“Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.”

- Michelangelo



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# Soup or salad?

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The chef = the teacher

The ingredients = the students

# Soup or salad?



## Soup

- all ingredients are blended together
- individual flavours merge and cannot easily be separated

# Soup or salad?



## Salad

- different ingredients stand out
- interesting contrast and complement of separate tastes



# Soup or salad?



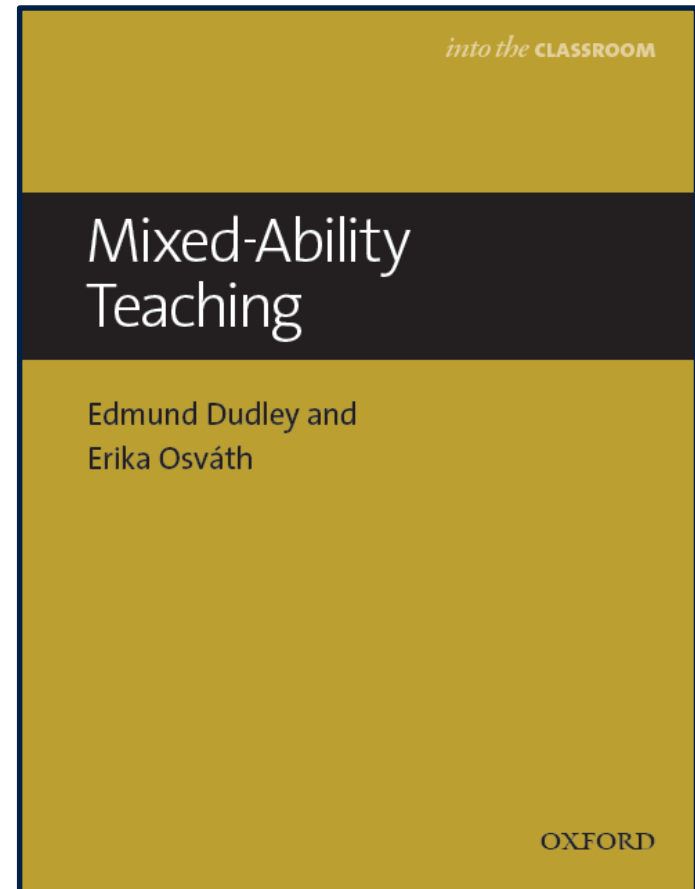
The 'ingredients' of the mixed-ability setting can be the basis for great 'salads'...

...or viche de pescado



# Discovering and realising potential

“As teachers, our job is to familiarize ourselves with the ‘raw materials’ with which we are working. It is only by becoming aware of students’ needs, strengths and capabilities that we can identify the right tools with which to work.”



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# Combining tradition and innovation



**informed**



**eclectic**

- Familiarity with a variety of different ELT methods
- Commitment to investigating and discovering the needs, strengths and preferences of our learners
- Combining strands and elements from whichever methods best suit ***the given situation***
- A willingness to tailor or adapt our approach over time as these needs emerge and become clear – or change

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# Towards an informed and flexible approach

## What we can do: a checklist

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- Find out about ELT methods
- Find out about our learners (e.g. informal needs analysis and action research)
- Experiment flexibly with a variety of activity types and modes of interaction
- Get feedback from our students
- Reflect on our experiences and get support where possible (PD, PLNs, peer collaboration)

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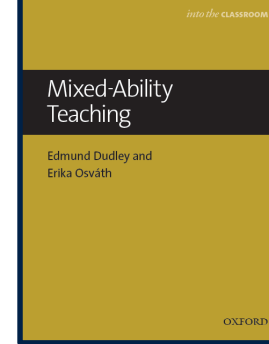
# Classroom activities

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- Finding out about learners
- Differentiating materials and activities
- Using group-work and pair-work
- Focusing on non-linguistic skills
- Promoting group harmony and a positive learning environment

# Finding out about learners

## Predict and observe



### Try this **Teacher predictions**

Invite a colleague to observe one or more of your classes. Choose two students that you would like to focus on. Write some notes about each student.

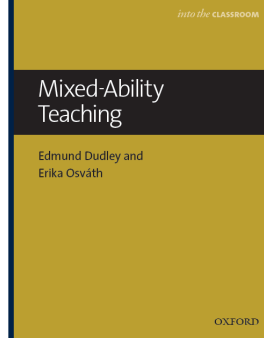
Think about:

- attitude towards learning
- personal traits and characteristics.

Make predictions about how you think each student will respond to the activities you have planned. Write simple sentences, as in Table 1.1.

# Finding out about learners

## Predict and observe



### Maria

- 1 I think she'll talk in L1 to her neighbours during the first activity.

Observer's comments:

- 2 I think she'll be cheerful and enthusiastic about volunteering for the speaking task.

Observer's comments:

### Daniel

- 1 I think he'll copy the answers to the first activity from Luis.

Observer's comments:

- 2 I think he'll be shy and will not volunteer for the speaking task.

Observer's comments:

# Finding out about learners

## Benefits of *predict and observe*

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Trying not to *pigeonhole*



Promoting peer collaboration

# Differentiating materials and activities

You have 30 seconds.

→ Write as many different fruits as you can!

What are the strengths of this activity?

- Everyone gets a chance to contribute
- Stronger students do not dominate
- Students need to listen to one other
- Students can learn from one other





# Differentiating materials and activities

## Providing options

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- **Go to the fruits and vegetables section of a market or supermarket near your home. Choose one of the following tasks:**
  - a.) Write down as many of the fruits and vegetables as you can in English. You can use your phone to take photographs of the display and finish the task at home.

# Differentiating materials and activities

## Providing options

- **Go to the fruits and vegetables section of a market or supermarket near your home. Choose one of the following tasks:**

b.) Which fruit/vegetable is

- the most expensive
- the cheapest
- the most delicious
- the most beautiful
- the heaviest
- the longest
- the ugliest
- not from your country

# Differentiating materials and activities

## Providing options

- **Go to the fruits and vegetables section of a market or supermarket near your home. Choose one of the following tasks:**
  - c.) Interview the person selling the fruit and vegetables. Perhaps use your phone to record the interview. Translate the questions and answers into English and write them down.

# Using group-work and pair-work

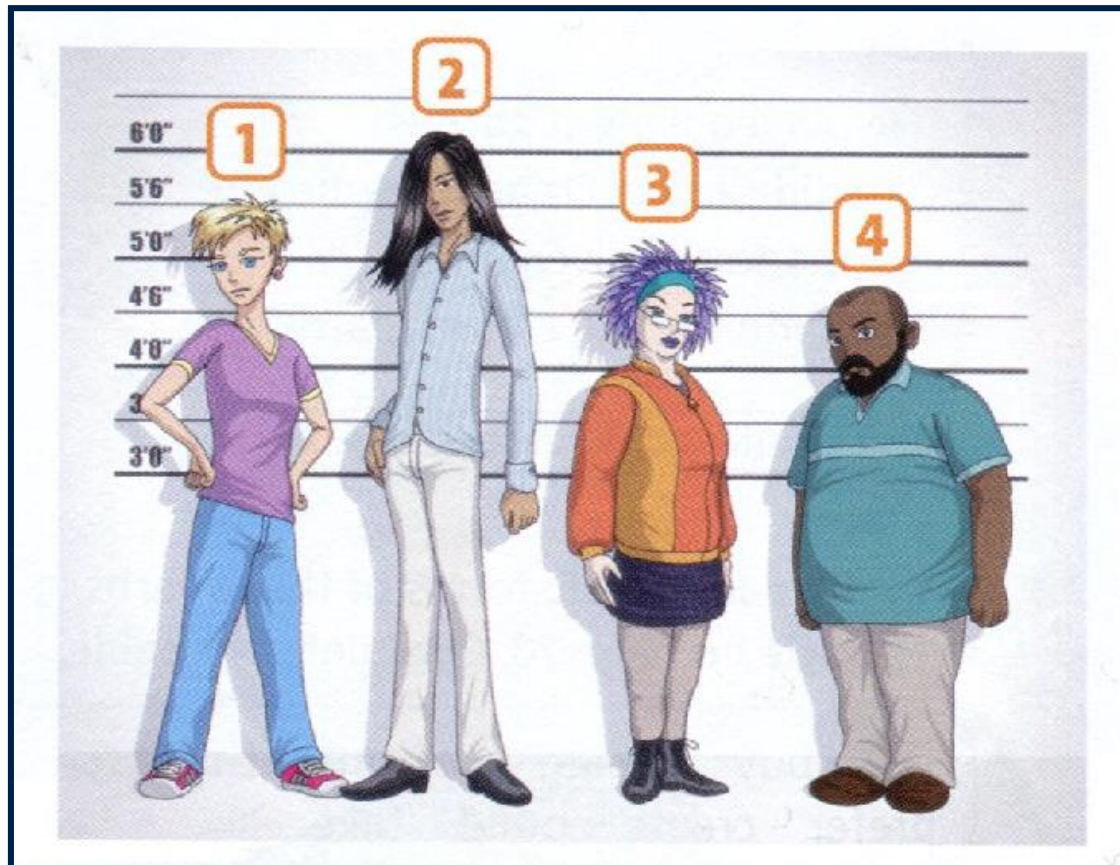
## Mediation task

### Reading & Grammar *was and were*

- 1 Work in small groups. Make a list of things a person needs to be successful in life. Do you all agree?  
*a good education, ...*

- Student A - Interviewer: asks questions in **English**
- Student B - Speaker: gives answers in **L1**
- Student C - Mediator: translates between **English and L1**

# Focusing on non-linguistic skills



# Promoting group harmony and a positive learning environment

## Leaving the classroom



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