

THE MULTILEVEL CLASSROOM

Definition of a Multilevel Classroom
Integration of the Multilevel Classroom Philosophy
Goal of Teaching Basic French
Advantages
Overcoming the Challenges
Group Work



Definition of a Multilevel Classroom

The term “multilevel classroom” refers to a student-centred classroom in which students learn across two or more grades and have the same teacher for two or more years.

Research shows that students in multilevel classrooms “can learn together, help one another and be responsible for a significant part of their own learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, March 2001, p. 5, loose translation).

The multilevel classroom is made up of students of mixed ages with a range of skills and talents who study together. As a result, they help one another and come to appreciate their differences.

The multilevel classroom teacher understands that differentiation plays an important role in planning. It is important that the teacher meets the needs of all his students using a variety of learning strategies and taking into account that each student learns in a different way. In a multilevel classroom, the teacher creates a menu from which the students make their selections.

Choice is a powerful motivator for learners.
(Politano and Davies, 1994, p. 7)

The “multiple intelligences” that can be used to develop successful multilevel teaching strategies are detailed on the following pages, and activities based on these intelligences are found in the unit on food, pages 60 and 61.

Seven Ways to Learn Anything






(Adapted from Howard Gardner. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York, Basic Books, 1983.)




When students are learning a new concept, skill, or task, try linking what they are learning to as many different intelligences as possible. As a general rule of thumb, take the information to be learned and:

1. Talk, read, or write about it (linguistic approach);
2. Draw, sketch, or visualize it (spatial approach);
3. Dance it, build a model of it, or find some other hands-on activity related to it (bodily-kinesthetic approach);
4. Sing it, chant it, find music that illustrates it, or put on background music while learning it (musical approach);
5. Relate it to a personal feeling or inner experience (intrapersonal approach);
6. Conceptualize it, quantify it, or think critically about it (logical-mathematical approach);
7. Work on it with another person or group of people (interpersonal approach).

(Horsman, 1997, p. 18)
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Multiple Intelligences Chart

Symbol/Intelligence	Characteristics	Activities/Materials
<p>1. Verbal/Linguistic</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sensitivity to words and word order - debating with, persuading and entertaining others - giving instructions - word and sound games 	<p>books, cassettes, speeches, magazines, dialogues, discussions, debates, stories, poetry, jokes, crosswords, word searches, research, interviews</p>
<p>2. Logical/Mathematical</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sensitivity to numbers and logic - scientific reasoning - establishing order and sequences - perception of causal relationships - making hypotheses - identifying number sequence - induction, deduction - looking for relationships, categories 	<p>ideas for exploration, manipulatives, scientific documents, puzzles, games, scientific experiments, flow charts, calculations, computers, mathematical problems, abstract patterns, relationships among ideas</p>
<p>3. Visual/Spatial</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sensitivity to images and pictures - acute perception of visual details - identification of spatial relationships between objects - spatial orientation - forming mental images - fertile imagination - manipulation of images 	<p>crafts, models, building games, videos, slides, mazes, illustrated books, imagination games, exhibitions, photographs, pictures, posters, illustrations, sketches, paintings, overheads, colours, shapes, lines, spaces</p>
<p>4. Bodily/Kinesthetic</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sensitivity to bodily or somatic sensations - mimetic abilities - physical-mental connection - coordinated bodily movements 	<p>sports, physical activities, handling/manipulating objects, role-play, dramatic expression, mime, building games, touching and tactile experiences, free play, gymnastics, dance</p>
<p>5. Musical/Rhythmic</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ability to perceive, differentiate and produce musical forms - interpreting melodies - keeping time - music appreciation 	<p>musical instruments, songs, recordings, participation in music groups, concerts, rhythmic exercises, rap music, songs, poems, dance, creating melody or rhythm, musical structure</p>

<p>6. Interpersonal</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ability to understand others – sensitivity to others' moods, personalities, intentions and desires – directing, organizing, negotiating – problem-solving – group leadership – ability to celebrate – creating and maintaining synergies – verbal and nonverbal communication 	<p>friends, group games and activities, teamwork, community events, clubs, gatherings, dialogues, cooperative work, collage, murals, team sports, observation charts, arguments, Internet, human graphs, group surveys</p>
<p>7. Intrapersonal</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – introspective intelligence – solitude, meditation – spiritual reflection, contemplation – awareness and expression of feelings – concentration – metacognition – transpersonal self-perception – highly abstract level of reasoning 	<p>diaries, journals, conflict resolution, reflection, self-assessment, planning, learning centres, independent study, research, choice of activities, time alone, personal questionnaires, creative activities, poems, peace and quiet</p>
<p>8. Naturalist</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – sensitivity to the environment and nature – sensitivity to surrounding sounds and landscapes – perception of changes in the environment – ability for lengthy observation 	<p>log book, gathering information, educational field trips, scientific observations</p>
<p>(Nova Scotia Education and Culture, 1998, p. 169-171, loose translation) Reproduced with permission of the Nova Scotia Department of Education. All rights reserved.</p>		

Further Reading

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Campbell, Linda, Bruce Campbell and Dee Dickinson. *Les intelligences multiples au cœur de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage*, Montréal, Les Éditions de la Chenelière, 2006.

Chapman, Carolyn and Lynn Freeman. *Multiple Intelligences Centers and Projects*, Arlinton Heights, Illinois, IRI Skylight Training and Publishing, Inc., 1996, p. 7.

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Manitoba Education and Youth. "Chapter 4: Differentiation in the Multilevel Classroom", *Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community*, Winnipeg, Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003. Available online at: www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/multilevel/index.html.



Integration of the Multilevel Classroom Philosophy

The Basic French teacher is encouraged to integrate the multilevel classroom philosophy, which involves understanding students from a holistic standpoint and considering every aspect of their personality, such as emotional, social and cognitive. The teacher accepts that his role changes as the student moves towards independence.

As a facilitator of a Basic French student-centered classroom, the teacher offers a variety of choices for everyone. It is the teacher's role to support the active participation of each student and to encourage him to think for himself. If the Basic French teacher is a specialist rather than the classroom teacher, it is suggested that he discusses themes with the classroom teacher so that he can link his French teaching to the other subject areas. The teacher also calls on the community, family and school to further enrich his Basic French course.

Can the teacher accept that students are not always at their desks and that they work in flexible groups? There will always be movement in the classroom. Can the teacher also accept that students participate in classroom decisions? The students are responsible for their learning and for the classroom structure. Their learning environment becomes more authentic and meaningful, encouraging them to excel. In addition, even the teacher will develop professionally in this setting.

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Tomlinson, Carol Ann. *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mix-Ability Classrooms, 2nd Edition*, Alexandria, Virginia, ASCD Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001.



Goal of Teaching Basic French

The goal of teaching Basic French is to stimulate authentic communication using the communicative/experiential approach. The best way to learn a language is to use it. The student-centered multilevel classroom gives teachers the opportunity to create meaningful situations where the students are involved in activities that promote communication. They can do skits, watch French-language television, play, read authentic texts, talk to Francophones in the community, etc. Such activities give students the opportunity to ask questions, work on their own or in a group, and have discussions with their peers and with the teacher. (For examples of activities using the experiential/communicative approach, see the outline of activities on p. 61.)

By adhering to the multilevel classroom teaching philosophy, the teacher will be more successful and will also come to understand how students learn a second language.

A teacher must constantly deliver information to students, but more as a facilitator of learning whose job it is to set the stage for learning, to start the wheels turning inside the heads of students, to turn them on to their own abilities and to help channel those abilities in fruitful directions.

(Brown, 2001, p. 81)

Further Reading

Anderson, Bev, et al. *Effective Literacy Practices in FSL - Making Connections*, Toronto, Ontario, Pearson Education Canada, 2008.

Cogswell, Fiona Stewart, and Paula Lee Kristmanson. *French is a Life Skill: A Summary of Research, Theories and Practices*, Scarborough, Ontario, Nelson Education Ltd., 2007.



Advantages

Multilevel classrooms offer a number of advantages. For instance, diversity adds a new dimension that is conducive to learning. To benefit from such advantages, it is advisable that the teacher stay with a multilevel classroom for at least two years. There are additional benefits, such as being able to integrate other subjects into the Basic French curriculum and the fact that the teaching centres on students as learners. According to the research, “[l]earners in multi-age classrooms find themselves reaching out to make their learning more meaningful.” (Politano and Davies, 1994, p. 6) In other words, students often push themselves beyond grade level expectations.


The teacher can...

1. keep several of the same students each year. In September only a third of the class is new; this component is made up of the youngest additions. The older students advance to another level or they leave once they have completed their studies at that school.
2. better understand the students from one year to the next in terms of their strengths, weaknesses, social and emotional well-being, learning styles and family life. Parents often decide to volunteer in the classroom.
3. recognize that the students are at different levels in their learning and that they each progress at their own pace. This ensures continuity.
4. see each student as an individual in his own right and therefore foster individual teaching and flexible grouping;
5. be aware of exactly what themes are covered each year. This helps the teacher to get the new school year off the ground more quickly.
6. be more flexible with the curriculum, have more time to integrate the subject areas and the students’ interests, especially in cases where the classroom teacher teaches Basic French;
7. have three years to achieve the target learning outcomes (continuum). Students can extend their development beyond normal grade expectations.
8. develop a fuller awareness of the Department of Education’s curriculum expectations and integrate them into a two- or three-year cycle (see p. A8, *Annexe 1.3*);
9. use a variety of resources that target experiential communication to adjust and improve Basic French planning;

In the multilevel classroom, text sets are essential because they support a wide range of reading abilities and serve as instructional resources for reading, writing, and inquiry.

(Manitoba Education and Youth, *Independent Together*, 2003, p. 4.6)

10. determine learning objectives with each student;
11. let go of the idea of traditional teaching in favour of becoming a facilitator of learning in the classroom. The teacher can also involve students in theme planning. Students will be more actively engaged in a theme that they themselves have chosen.

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Annexe 1.3

Grille de planification 8 :
Les champs d'expérience en Français de base
dans la classe à niveaux multiples

Tout les exemples d'un grille de planification des thèmes qui seront utilisés pendant les trois années.

Séquence	Thème 1	Thème 2	Thème 3	Thème 4
Année 1	Le monde de la maison - la famille - les animaux - les vêtements	Le monde de la ville - les transports - les commerces - les services	Le monde de la nature - les saisons - les animaux - les plantes	Le monde de la culture - les fêtes - les traditions - les arts
Année 2	Le monde de la ville - les transports - les commerces - les services	Le monde de la nature - les saisons - les animaux - les plantes	Le monde de la culture - les fêtes - les traditions - les arts	Le monde de la maison - la famille - les animaux - les vêtements
Année 3	Le monde de la culture - les fêtes - les traditions - les arts	Le monde de la maison - la famille - les animaux - les vêtements	Le monde de la ville - les transports - les commerces - les services	Le monde de la nature - les saisons - les animaux - les plantes



Further Reading

Lodish, Richard. "The Pros and Cons of Mixed-Age Grouping", *The Multiage Classroom: A Collection*, Palatine, IL, IRI/Skylight Publishing, Inc., 1993, p. 35-41.

Manitoba Education and Youth. *Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community*, Winnipeg, Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003, p. 4.6. Available online at: www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/multilevel/index.html.

The students can...

1. become independent and responsible by focusing on their personal development;
2. build a sharing community where they can feel safe and secure. Younger students often have a brother, sister or even a neighbour in their class, which contributes significantly to making them feel more at ease.
3. gain from the older students who have the opportunity to assist their younger classmates. Research shows that both the younger student and the student-tutor benefit academically from this type of relationship.

When older children "teach" newly learned skills to younger classmates they strengthen their own understanding of these skills

(Lodish, May 1992, p. 37)

Moreover, the students in such multilevel classrooms are just as effective and positive in their social interactions and attitude toward school as their peers in single-year classes.

4. participate more because multilevel classrooms bring stability and establish an ongoing relationship with the teacher. Students are not as worried about the beginning of each school year.
5. have many opportunities to wear the teacher "hat", although they need to be taught how to monitor group work. (See "Group Work", p. 22.) They also need to be given answer keys so that they can correct their own work or that of the group. Students become independent and get used to doing their own assessments. As a result, they are engaged in their own learning.
6. be comfortable with having a low **affective filter*** that does not block their learning ability. Some students do not participate in whole-class activities, but feel more at ease in a small group and are willing to take risks. The teacher creates a non-threatening environment, that is, an atmosphere in which the students can be relaxed. This is why the cooperative learning or learning centre strategies are so crucial in the multilevel classroom. (See "Encouraging Independence", p. 35.) The students support each other and the teacher creates opportunities for them to practise the language. As a result, the students speak French more often because they have developed more positive self-esteem.

* An **affective filter** is a learning blockage due to a negative emotional ("affective") attitude. It is a hypothesis of second language acquisition, a field of interest of educational psychology. Although the term was made popular by linguist Stephen Krashen in his Monitor Theory, he himself stated it was invented by someone else. Experiments demonstrated that learners do not learn well when they are affected by negative feelings such as boredom, anxiety or low self-esteem. According to this hypothesis, these negative emotions activate a filter that prevents efficient processing of the learning input. Experiments also demonstrated that the blockage can be reduced by dampening the negative feelings. This can be achieved by sparking interest, providing low anxiety environments or bolstering the learner's self-esteem.

(Wikipédia contributors, "Affective filter", *Wikipédia, The Free Encyclopedia*, www.en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Affective_filter&oldid=168326581, (accessed November 9, 2007).)

Overcoming the Challenges of Teaching Basic French in the Multilevel Classroom

There is always a range of language abilities within a multilevel classroom. It is essential that the students' ages, prior knowledge, and awareness of the target language are consistently taken into consideration. The teacher creates a relaxed atmosphere that reflects the students' diversity and allows them to maximize their learning potential according to their learning style.

The more advanced students may have the impression that they are wasting their time while the teacher is working with the beginners. On the other hand, the beginners may worry that the more advanced students are dominating the classroom. The multilevel classroom teacher therefore uses the mixed group advantages by getting the older children to help the younger ones, and the more gifted students to help classmates who are having trouble.

The groups change constantly based on the students' needs and the choice/level of activity. For the best results, it is preferable to begin a lesson with the whole group and later divide the class into small groups where the students can continue working independently in the learning centres.

Some students will not have much experience working in groups. If the teacher gradually introduces the group work concept with very clear explanations, the students will eventually get used to this way of working. Group work offers learners the possibility to talk more since their participation is simultaneous, without them having to wait their turn.

Multiple Groups

The compromise position is to have a number of different group combinations with which the students are familiar, so that they regard themselves as belonging to one of three or four different combinations. The absolute minimum arrangement is to have equal-ability and cross-ability groups organized. (You may want to set these up on both oral and literate parameters, according to the activity). The quickest way to plan these groups is to rank the students roughly in order of ability and lay the numbers out in a matrix like this one, where 1 represents the lowest-ability student and 16 the highest.

	red	yellow	green	blue
A	1	2	3	4
B	5	6	7	8
C	9	10	11	12
D	13	14	15	16

A layout like this allows the teacher to ask quickly for the students to assemble by letter for groups of approximately equal ability or to assemble by colour for cross-ability groupings. It also provides a perfect matrix for jigsaw activities, in which individual group members share information they gathered in another group.

The teacher might also draw up bigger groups based on literacy skills, or special groups for discussion, in which personality is likely to play an important role. A flexible arrangement of groups also allows a student to split off and work on his own.

From **Teaching Multilevel Classes in ESL** by Jill Sinclair Bell, p. 97–98.
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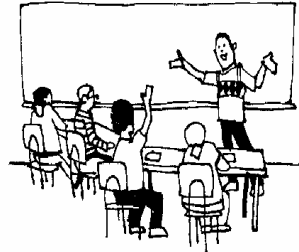
Jill Bell, in her article entitled “The Challenge of Multilevel Classes”, suggests three ways to organize group work:

1. Start-up activities suitable for everyone;
2. Whole group activities where students perform the task at different levels;
3. Whole group activities which incorporate a variety of tasks.

(Bell, *Mosaïc*, Fall 1994)

Whole-class Activities

The Basic French teaching methodology always begins with a warm-up activity. According to Jill Bell, the warm-up includes a visual element appropriate to the students’ level. For teaching Basic French vocabulary, flashcards or real objects can be used to activate prior knowledge. The teacher can then move on to reading a story from a big book. The use of big books filled with pictures and photographs reinforces vocabulary learning.



Whole-group Activities Incorporating Tasks from Different Levels

Everyone begins together with the aim of completing a final project aligned to the students’ needs, which means that the teacher has to adjust the project to suit each level. For example, the teacher reads a story (big book) to the entire class, following which everyone writes and draws their own story. Beginner students draw their stories and fill in the blanks of specific structures using a word bank. Intermediate students write and draw the story using simple sentences. The teacher suggests simple structures and the children can substitute their own words. Advanced students can write their stories using their own simple sentences. (See p. A52, *Annexe 4.1.2 “Un litre de crème glacée”*.)

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A Whole-group Activity Including Multiple Tasks

A major class project can provide the opportunity for the class to work together toward the same goal. The teacher plans a final project, including a variety of tasks to reflect multiple intelligences and differentiated instruction. This makes each of the students feel valued, because they know they are an integral part of the class and that everyone has something to offer. (See “L’art progressif”, p. 77.) The teacher can divide the class into small groups and meet with them from time to time until everyone has completed the project.



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Strategies for forming and managing groups

There are many ways to organize the class into groups, depending on the goal of the activity. Groups may be determined based on ability, behaviour, or simply at random. Each group should have a maximum of **four** and a minimum of **three** students.

The teacher can number the students by giving them a card with a number. All the number “1s” form a group, the “2s” another, and so forth. To make the forming of groups more fun, the teacher can orally divide the class into groups of four. Next, each group member chooses a number between 1 and 4 and writes it on a small piece of paper. When the teacher plays some music, the students move around the classroom, exchanging their papers. When the music stops, the students find their partners. The “1s” go with the “2s”, and the “3s” go with the “4s”. Finally, a 1 and 2 pair look for a 3 and 4 pair to make a group of four students.

The teacher can also pass out coloured popsicle sticks and all the students with the same colour form a group. Or the students’ names can be written on the popsicle sticks and the teacher can randomly call out the names of the members of each group.

To facilitate second language teaching and in keeping with the principle of the communicative/experiential approach, the teacher can also use cooperative learning strategies. Cooperative learning activities require students to work in groups of at least two using simultaneous interaction. The main focus shifts to everyone speaking French rather than having to wait their turn as in a traditional classroom. In other words, for a 30-minute French class, the strategy of working in pairs or groups allows students to actively participate in oral communication for 15 minutes instead of only one minute. The teacher should make sure that the students can integrate the vocabulary and grammar they have learned in meaningful contexts. (See activities on food, p. 61-78.)

In a multilevel Basic French classroom where there is a choice of activities, the teacher should ensure that the students select activities that are appropriate to their individual level, that they move forward and do not simply try to do the easiest activity.

Multiage grouping is a key strategy for ensuring that children receive a full range of social and cognitive experience.

(Chase & Doan, 1994, p. 160)

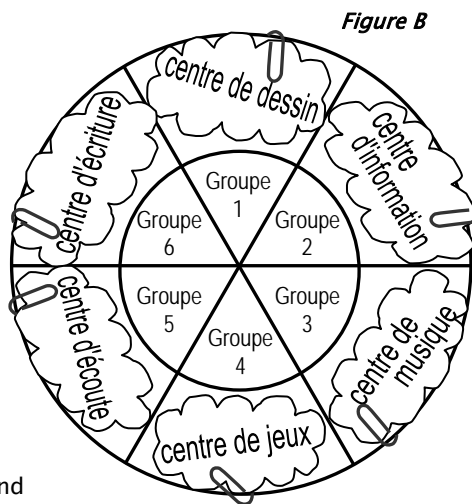
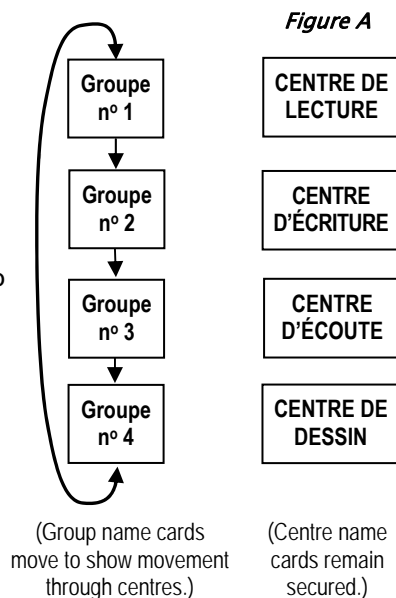
Rotation System

Use a rotation system whereby students move systematically through centres in set groups. This system allows teachers to better manage *when* and *where* students will work. A group rotation method ensures participation by all students in all centres over a specified period of time. It also allows the teacher and the students to become accustomed to many things occurring simultaneously in the room.

a) Write group names on cards and post on a chart or board using tape, pins or magnets. (Magnets may be taped to the back of cards for easy movement on a magnetic board.) Prepare centre name cards and attach them to the board or chart. As the groups rotate through the centres, move all the name cards forward so that the chart reflects the rotation cycle. (See Figure A.)

b) The rotation wheel contains group names on the inner circle and centre names on the outer circle. These centre names can be written on cards and attached to the wheel by paper clips or clothespins to facilitate frequent and easy changes. The two circles are attached in the centre by a paper fastener. For each rotation, the inside circle is turned once so that students can see in which centre they are to participate in next. (See Figure B.)

Source: Adapted from Schwartz, Susan, and Mindy Pollishuke. *Creating a Dynamic Classroom*, Toronto, Ontario, Pearson Education Canada, Inc., 2005, p. 78-79. Copyright © 2005 by Pearson Education Canada, Inc. All rights reserved.



Further Reading

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Howden, Jim, and Huguette Martin. *La coopération au fil des jours : Des outils pour apprendre à coopérer*, Montréal, Les Éditions de la Chenelière, 1997, p. 29, 245-253.



Group Work: Suggested Steps

1. Organize the activities and the materials needed for each task drawn from real-life experiences.
2. Clearly explain the task to the whole class.
3. Answer any questions.
4. Encourage the students to set the criteria for the process and final project.
5. Add the teacher's criteria.
6. Encourage the use of French by modeling and repeating simple structures with the class.
7. Establish the specific rules for group work in addition to the rules of conduct.
8. Post the rules so that the entire class can refer to them.
9. Identify the work areas for each group.
10. Determine the timetable for each activity.
11. Pass out a checklist where students can tick off the selected activity or a self-assessment.
12. Walk around while all the groups are working and observe their progress. The anecdotal notes can be recorded in an observation grid. (See sample observation grids, p. A26-A30, *Annexes 3.1-3.5*.)

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Further Reading

High, Julie. *Second Language Learning through Cooperative Learning*, San Clemente, California, Kagan Cooperative Learning, 1993.

Miguel, Laurie, and Spencer Kagan. *Cooperative Learning Structures for Classbuilding*, San Clemente, California, Kagan Cooperative Learning, 1995.

Miguel, Laurie, and Spencer Kagan. *Cooperative Learning Structures for Teambuilding*, San Clemente, California, Kagan Cooperative Learning, 1997.



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The image shows five overlapping observation grids for different grade levels (Année 3.1 to 3.5). Each grid is titled 'Grille d'observation' and includes sections for 'L'objet d'évaluation', 'Stratégies d'apprentissage', and 'Noms des élèves observés'. The grids are designed to be used for recording student behavior and learning progress during group work.