

Some effective teaching strategies¹

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What is curricular differentiation?

It is a philosophy based on the following set of beliefs:

- Pupils who are the same age differ in their readiness to learn, their interests, their styles of learning, their experiences, and their life circumstances.
- The differences in pupils are significant enough to make a major impact on what pupils need to learn, the pace at which they need to learn it, and the support they need from teachers and others to learn it well.
- Pupils will learn best when supportive adults push them slightly beyond where they can work without assistance.
- Pupils will learn best when they can make a connection between the curriculum and their interests and life experiences.
- Pupil will learn best when learning opportunities are natural.

Differentiation can occur based on pupil's readiness, interest, and learning profile. This must be reconciled with what the pupil needs to learn and how that learning will take place (i.e. Group work, project work, paired work, individual work). There is no need to feel confined by curriculum based courses as such courses tell us *what* to teach, differentiation on the other hand guides us on *how* to teach. Differentiation simply suggests ways in which we can make that Curriculum work best for varied learners, by providing materials and tasks at varied level of difficulty, with varying degrees of scaffolding/pupil support and with time variations, which tap into pupils' varying interests. Teachers can encourage pupil success by varying ways in which pupils work (e.g. individually, in pairs, in groups). There is also a greater chance of pupil success if all learning styles are incorporated into the class plan (e.g. auditory, visual and kinaesthetic modes). Learning is more effective when two modes are activated while learning. (See below for a quick note on learning styles)

It is also important that a teacher balances his or her own needs with those of the pupils. It is important that the pace of change suits you and that you give yourself enough time to plan for change. You might begin with just one subject, just one time of the day, or just one curricular element. Think carefully about management routines – for example, giving directions, making sure pupils know how to move about the room, and making sure pupils know where to put work when they finish it. It is important that the teacher has the room organised so that books/copies are always stored in the same place. Colour coding is very useful to help guide pupils to particular areas in the class so that pupils will know where to find them. A useful way to help pupils understand class routine is to follow a particular schedule/routine during class (e.g. first ten minutes of class every Monday is spent on vocabulary building, followed by comprehension exercises etc). It is also useful to discuss and share differentiated materials with interested colleagues.

Learning Styles

Although figures may vary, approximately 20-30% of pupils are auditory learners, they learn by listening. This does not mean merely listening to the teacher rather they learn best when using the auditory channel. While this may involve listening to others such as the teacher, it may also involve discussion, self talk strategies, recording what is learned on tape, recording lectures, using tape recordings of books even if they are good readers.

Strategies that work with auditory learners include

- Explaining
- Repeating
- Discussing/debating
- Using tape recordings
- Story telling
- Using poetry
- Drama/role play
- Reading aloud

30-40% of pupils are thought to be kinaesthetic learners, which means that they learn best by doing. Such pupils like to use their hands and/or bodies to learn. This may involve a physical activity, making something or touching something. Strategies that work with kinaesthetic learners include

- Moving in the classroom
- Writing
- Making things
- Using three dimensional models
- Acting out (e.g. role play/drama)
- Using taste, touch or movement

Visual learners represent about 40% of the pupil population. Such children learn best seeing. Visual cues, colour coding and watching a demonstration work well for visual learners. Useful strategies include

- ❖ Using highlighters, on handouts
- ❖ Embolden or italics on key words on handouts
- ❖ Visual symbols such as those on clip art to summarise the main point of a text
- ❖ Teacher demonstration while students watch
- ❖ Videos/DVD
- ❖ Posters
- ❖ Diagrams, charts etc to summarise text
- ❖ Use of colour (colour coding)
- ❖ Pictures in handouts and use the pictures in texts to explain a concept don't just read the text.
- ❖ Mind mapping
- ❖ Use of visual input in homework (e.g. drawing, diagram, mind map)

Benjamin Bloom identified six levels in the cognitive domain which may be useful when attempting to apply differentiation. The idea is to vary questions used in the classroom so that all levels are incorporated. A knowledge of these levels means that the same topic can be taught to different ability pupils by merely adjusting the questions to the different level of the pupils. Tapping into all levels makes the class more interesting. The six levels are:

- ❖ **Knowledge.** This is the start point and is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to recall it. It involves remembering, memorising, recognising, and identification of information. The type of questions associated with this level are who, what, when, where, how? Questions concerned with descriptions are included in this level also.
- ❖ **Comprehension.** This level is concerned with the basic level of understanding so that pupils can use the information they have acquired. It involves interpreting, describing in one's own words, identifying relevant facts and ideas, organising these facts and ideas. The type of assignments associated with level are, summarise, name the key points, give advantages of, and identify links between previous learned information.
- ❖ **Application.** This level is concerned with the ability to use acquired skill/knowledge in a new situation. It involves problem solving, applying information to produce an answer, using facts, skills, and concepts. The type of question associated with this level are 'how is ... an example of/related to ...? Why is ... significant?
- ❖ **Analysis.** This level is concerned with the ability to breakdown information into meaningful parts to understand the relationship between the parts and understand underlying structure. It involves separating the whole into parts, subdividing to show how something is put together, understanding and motives. Assignments associated with level are classify, compare and contrast, outline, draw diagram, identify features/parts, what evidence exists ...?
- ❖ **Synthesis.** This level is concerned with the ability to combine information/ideas to form a new whole. It involves identifying a relationship between parts and anticipating an outcome. Assignments associated with this level include: What might happen if ...? How could you design/create ...? What can you add to ...? What can you infer from ...? What might be a solution to ...?
- ❖ **Evaluation.** This level is concerned with the ability to make a judgement about the value of something. It involves making decisions, resolving difference of opinion, prioritising, debating, forming and developing opinions. Questions associated with this level include: do you agree with ...? What, in order of priority ...? What is the most important ...? What criteria would you use to ...?

Be mindful of pupils with behavioural, global and/or specific learning difficulties, as they may need more time at various levels, use the psycho-educational reports to inform you on the specific nature of a pupil's difficulties and strengths.

Such students may need strategies to help cope with the demands of some levels, information and recommendations from psycho-educational reports will be useful to guide the teacher into how best that student may access the curriculum. Pupils may also need study techniques (e.g. mind mapping, SQ3R) to help commit information to long term memory.

The above levels may be used

- When designing a tiered assignment approach. This means that the teacher designs a variety of assignments around the same key concept. The teacher may direct pupils to the appropriate assignments for them, although some choice is allowed. This technique also allows students to work at their own pace.
- Alternatively the teacher may design different graded assignments around the key concept and allocate the assignment to pupils according to the pupil's readiness for that level of assignment. For example for a written assignment pupils may be asked to write a letter, email, or postcard relating to the same key concept depending on their ability.
- Project work may also be designed around the above levels with more cognitively complex tasks being assigned to the more able pupil. Project work also provides good opportunities for individual, paired group and whole class work.
- The above levels may also be incorporated into homework and exam formats as well as class work format.
- Remember also to prepare pupils in exam question format well in advance of the exam. Be sure to sort the exam questions according to the above levels and give pupils plenty of practice. Track pupils progress so that pupils can move up to more cognitively challenging level with scaffolding and eventually to independent work.

How to start

- 1) Differentiation aims to overcome cognitive, social, emotional, behavioural and cultural barriers to learning. Because there are many ways to teach in a differentiated way the teacher may begin by identifying the learning strengths and needs of the target pupils. This can be done by gathering information from a variety of sources (e.g. teacher's own knowledge of or observation of pupils, records of pupils' progress/results, other teachers' comments, comments from the pupils themselves if appropriate, information from parents, guidance counsellor and psychologist). If there are pupils with identified learning or behavioural needs refer to the psychological report for specific guidance on how that child may access the curriculum.
- 2) Identify the pupils' interests, social and cultural influences and frame of reference. Has the pupil had uninterrupted schooling or are there gaps in his/her education. Gaps in education may mean that basic concepts may not have been learned in primary school. Teachers will have to go back to the drawing board, so to speak, and present the concept in an age appropriate way.
- 3) The teacher needs to decide on the essential skills, concepts and information needed in his/her subject area. The subject area will determine this to some degree (e.g. a pupil will need to understand addition before he/she can understand multiplication). The orientation of the exam can also be used to guide. If certain topics, concepts, skills or information is needed for state exams the teacher will need to focus on these also. Do not presume that pupils understand basic concepts ensure that they understand the meaning of the concept, information, skill that you are asking them to learn. Highlight or ask pupils the relevance of learning this concept. Show or ask pupils how this skill will might be applied in a real life situation if appropriate. Knowing why something has to be learned assists the learning process. Understanding the meaning is especially important for children with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Give a global view of the concept first then break the concept down into meaningful chunks give summary at the end of the session.
- 4) The teacher will then need to match what needs to be learned with how the learning should occur. Certain topics/concepts may be better suited to whole class, group, paired or individual instruction and or learning. Certain topics/concepts are better suited to visual, auditory or kinaesthetic modes of learning. Certain students respond differently to visual, auditory and kinaesthetic modes. Try to use all of these at some stage in the learning process. Use information gathered in 2) above to capture the pupils' interest when presenting a topic and designing class work.

- 5) Pitch the work to the level of the pupil. Under and over challenging pupils may lead to behaviour problems in the class as this may be the only way the pupil can communicate that he/she is having difficulties (over challenged) or is bored (under challenged). Differentiated assignments where the pupil selects his/her own level may overcome this problem. Pupils will only learn at their own emotional and intellectual level, the challenge for the teacher is to pitch the class at the right level while ensuring that this level is age appropriate. Pupils will not do work that they feel is 'babyish'.

Some general points on classroom teaching

- Establish routine
- Give clear instructions – written and oral
- Not open ended
- Get student to repeat instructions
- Give handouts/summarise notes
- Assess oral work
- Mark content not spelling
- Focus on a small number of spelling
- Write homework on board
- List key words and revise them
- Overlearning is essential
- Seating position
- Use simple language – concrete and specific
- Use short sequential steps
- Acknowledge effort and achievement
- Give praise

Summary of strategies that will benefit all learners, including those with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

- Try to keep lessons as structured as possible.
- Give instructions in the order that you want them to be carried out.
- Give short direct instructions using both visual and oral cues when possible.
- Follow up oral instructions with written reminders.
- Give assignments/homework in written form (blackboard) and orally – using 2 channels of presentation increases the chances of comprehension and compliance.
- Also give students adequate time to record homework/assignments.
- Presenting information, new skills and concepts using concrete, practical and visual materials work very well for all students.
- Use visual strategies – emphasising main points in a lesson using visual cues/prompts. This helps most students to transfer information from the short-term memory to long-term memory.
- The use of larger type, visual back-ups and concrete material work really well for the student with A Special Education Need but also for other students in your classroom.
- Use multi-sensory methods of teaching (Visual, oral and tactile)
- Help students to learn self-monitoring techniques.
- Plan for students to work at different levels – have extra questions or worksheets available for the more able students who have completed work early or for the student who is working at a slower pace.
- Give students time to process language and respond if you have asked them a question.
- Provide frequent and positive feedback. Direct assistance and frequent feedback are important.
- Praise and encouragement when the student experiences success.
- Remind student of their successes when they are not succeeding with a particular task.
- Acknowledge positive behaviours when possible.

Supporting learners with a specific learning difficulty (SLD) / dyslexia

These students tend to have

- Difficulties in areas such as reading, writing & maths
- Difficulty in copying i.e. from the board, pages etc
- Slow in completing work
- Easily confused by instructions
- Poor organisational skills
- Poor short term or long term memory
- Can be awkward, hyperactive & easily distracted
- Can be impulsive – fails to think before they act
- Can display inappropriate behaviour

Classroom tips for teaching a student with SLD (Dyslexia):

- Give direct & explicit instructions
- Give instruction & homework in written form i.e. on board or a page – 2 channels can increase the chances of comprehension and compliance
- Give individual help. This can be difficult but try to give a few minutes regularly throughout the week to ensure they are succeeding in some work
- Seat the student in the class where it is easy to give this help
- Provide longer time for oral responses
- Students with and SLD need to be taught efficient strategies for example, rehearsing to support memory – these can be taught in class

- Give a mark for content separately to presentation or spelling. Encourage self correction.
- Limit the number of corrections. Write the correct spelling on a separate page or card
- Modify homework expectations for a students with Dyslexia
- Provide frequent and positive feedback. Direct assistance and frequent feedback are important

Supporting learners with a general learning difficulty (GLD)

These learners tend

- to have a level of intelligence that is significantly below the average
- to learn at a slower pace

Classroom tips for teaching a learner with GLD:

- Over learning and revision is very important
- Give instructions one at a time
- Keep language clear and concise
 - Many are reading at the level of a 7 or 8 years old
- Apparently simple words may require an explanation
 - i.e. 'Minus' is used in maths and means 'take away'
- Encourage – Encourage – Encourage
- Use a variety of teaching methods where possible
 - These students have a limited attention span
- A student with a GLD can be very disorganised – try and help them to be organised
 - i.e. Write homework on the board and check that all student have taken it down
- Acknowledge good work

Strategies for teaching poor readers

Phonics

A person with reading difficulties has usually failed to notice the patterns and rules used in translating spoken English into its written form. A phonic programme, such as that contained in B. Hornsby and F. Shear Alpha to Omega (Heinemann, 1974), will allow the learner to fill the gaps in this phonic knowledge. Such a programme systematically moves from simple consonant and vowel sounds through consonant blends and digraphs and vowel digraphs; covers rules such as those regarding the effect of l, w and r on vowels, hard and soft c's and g's, the "magic" e, doubling of consonants before suffixes, etc.; teaches common letter strings such as -ight, -ought, -tion, etc.; includes silent letters and other irregular forms of spelling; and explains the principles of syllabication.

Morphemic analysis

As well as analyzing words according to their sounds, a person can be taught to recognise the morphemic features of words. These include prefixes (mis-, re-, sub-, etc.), suffixes (-ful, -able, -est, -er, etc.) and the word parts which indicate grammatical information (-ing, -ed, -ly, etc.). Compound words can be broken into their parts and words explored for their roots.

Sight Vocabulary

Although decoding skills, acquired through phonic and morphemic analysis, are necessary to "attack" new words a sight vocabulary is essential if reading is not to be too tedious. A learner with visual weaknesses will often have a very limited sight vocabulary and consequently has to work much harder when reading than a person who can recognise a large number of words immediately on sight. Since half of all written English comprises only about 100 words (see Dolch list) it is recommended that young people be helped acquire these 100 words as sight words. Games (such as Bingo, etc.) and giving the learner the words on lists to be ticked off as they become known, are some of the ways these words can be taught systematically.

Social sight vocabulary

For young people who are nearing the end of their education and who have particularly severe specific reading difficulties it may be necessary to accept that they will never learn to read competently. In order to help them to survive in a literate society it may be wise to focus on a social sight vocabulary, comprising words (e.g. name, exit, date of birth, telephone, etc.) commonly used on notices and in forms.

Spellings

As well as involving phonological segmentation, spelling is a visuo-motor task. The LOOK, COVER, WRITE, CHECK approach trains the eye to analyze the word and is therefore recommended. Also helpful is the development of a motor memory for

words and word parts (e.g. *ing, ght, ation*, etc.) by repeatedly tracing, writing or typing words being learned for spelling. If handwriting is well-formed and joined up it allows the letter strings to be memorised as units while typing allows the letter strings to be stored as a set of finger movements.

Paired reading

This is a method of supporting an immature reader in such a way that they have direct access to the content of the text they are reading. An adult or learner peer sits beside the reader who has chosen a text of interest to themselves. The reader reads until they encounter an unknown word. If they cannot decode it immediately the helper simply supplies the word and continues to read along with the reader until asked to stop. The reader makes a physical sign (e.g. a tap on the page) to indicate when they want the helper to stop. In this way the flow of the content is not broken and the reader is supported until they are ready to continue alone.

Language Experience Approach

This approach is suitable for young people who like drawing and who have difficulty responding to the content of textbooks. Here the reader generates the text themselves by drawing pictures and deciding the captions to go under them. The teacher writes the caption for the reader who then copies it. In time the captions become longer and stories are built up. Oral language, reading and writing are thus all integrated in a way that is meaningful for the young person.

Target-setting

Young people who have experienced considerable failure in school need to believe that they can make progress. Breaking down work into small steps or targets and then discussing each target with them and agreeing the time it is likely to take to achieve helps the reader experience success and see their progress.

Self esteem

No matter how good the teaching, a person with a poor view of their abilities and a sense of defeat will make no real progress. Young people with specific learning problems have very real perceptual deficits which make the acquisition of literacy skills very difficult. They will have to develop their own alternative strategies if they are going to get round these deficits. In order to discover and use these alternative strategies they will need to believe in their own intelligence and to have confidence in their ability to solve their problems. Discussing the nature of their problems with young people in an open manner is a good way of demonstrating that you are seeking to cooperate with them in finding solutions. The single most important thing a teacher can do is to develop that faith and confidence in the reader.