

# Methodology module: Differentiated Instruction



## Hans Mol

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*No two children are alike. No two children learn in an identical way. An enriched environment for one student is not necessarily enriched for another. In the classroom we should teach children to think for themselves.*

## What is Differentiated Instruction?

Differentiated Instruction (DI), also referred to as Differentiation, is practised by teachers all over the world every day but often in an unplanned or uninformed way.

Differentiated Instruction is a teaching approach based on the idea that children learn in different ways, and that it is the teacher's job to optimise their learning environment so that they learn to the best of their ability. Supporting the practice of DI are the theories of *Multiple Intelligences* and *Learner Styles*. Carol Tomlinson describes DI as:

*... providing students with different avenues to acquiring content; to processing, constructing, or making sense of ideas; and [providing teachers with the means of] developing teaching materials so that all students in a classroom can learn effectively, regardless of differences in ability.*

(Tomlinson, 2000)

There are four main aspects of Differentiated Instruction that underlie classroom practice:

What a pupil  
learns

How a pupil  
learns it

How a pupil  
**demonstrates**  
what he/she has  
learnt

Whether an  
activity matches  
a pupil's  
**readiness**  
level or preferred  
style of learning

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Through DI, pupils become more willing participants in the learning process because they are able to explore and use language in a way and at a level of instruction that best suits them. DI techniques attempt to match pupils' abilities with appropriate material qualitatively, as opposed to quantitatively. In doing so, we:

deliberately  
blend whole-  
class, group and  
individual  
instruction;

use a wide range  
of approaches to  
facilitate input,  
processing and  
output;

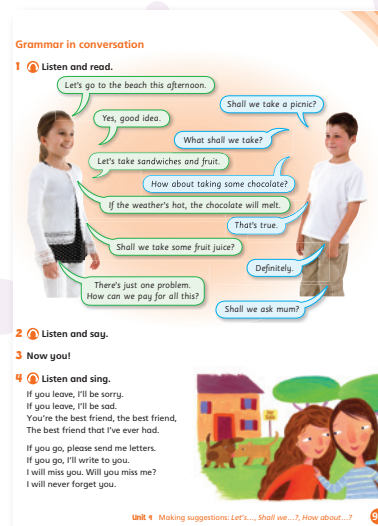
adapt  
to pupils' needs  
through constant  
observation and  
assessment  
(rather than  
testing).

The keys to DI are flexibility and an awareness of how your pupils learn and exhibit their learning, so that as a teacher you can better meet their individual needs and appeal to their strengths. This doesn't mean that you have to meet each and every child's individual needs at all times. With large classes and full schedules, this is an impossible task. However, consciously thinking about how activities can be done differently does offer the possibility of improving your pupils' performance, motivation and satisfaction with their learning.

## Differentiated Instruction in *English World*

Allow pupils time to think about tasks. Pupils work at different speeds and energy levels. Differentiated Instruction can be applied to a wide variety of activities.

- You can set up pupil-centred activities where pupils work in small groups. This means they are not all competing to respond to your questions.
- You can set them a writing task in response to a reading or listening text and they work together, helping each other in a less stressful manner. For example, after the Level 4 Unit 9 song about friends saying goodbye, ask pupils to write a letter from the girl's new home.
- If groups are mixed (less and more able pupils together), then peer teaching can take place, with pupils helping each other by explaining language points in their mother tongue and explaining vocabulary. You may be surprised at who helps whom.



Pupil's Book 4, Unit 9

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Providing an appropriate level of challenge for all pupils can be assisted by using differentiation techniques.

- Give different comprehension questions according to ability.
- Use the phrase 'at least' – asking all students to do at least five questions.
- Set differentiated homework tasks. Set pupils who need more support homework to help them prepare for the next day's activities.
- Try nominating pupils to answer differentiated questions, rather than asking open questions to the whole class.

Here is an example of a writing task that is graded:

A. Write a postcard to a friend, telling them about your holiday.


B. Fill in the gaps or circle the word you want to use.

Dear _____,	
I am having a <i>great</i> / <i>OK</i> / <i>terrible</i> time	
here in _____. The weather is <i>sunny</i> /	
<i>rainy</i> / <i>snowy</i> . I go <i>swimming</i> / <i>jogging</i> /	
<i>skiing</i> every day. The food is <i>terrible</i> /	
<i>OK</i> / <i>great</i> . Yesterday I went to a <i>circus</i> /	
<i>museum</i> / <i>zoo</i> . It was _____.	
Best wishes,	

Differentiated Instruction offers:

- activities that provide either a *lower* or *higher* challenge level than the activity presented in the course materials;
- activities that appeal to a *different learner style*: specifically visual, auditory and kinaesthetic styles.

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## Learner styles

*English World* offers many activities where you can choose the learner-style activity that suits your pupils best.

### Visual

Learners benefit from creating a word web with categories on the board. They can copy the words they like into their notebooks, placing pictures around them that they associate with these words and comparing with a friend in class. *English World* makes constant use of posters, diagrams, maps and pictures to encourage learners to use visuals to support meaning.

### Auditory

Learners benefit from calling out words and hearing them being called out and, subsequently, seeing them written on the board, copied, erased and recalled from memory. Use the DVD-ROM with an interactive whiteboard to access the activities that work well for these pupils.

### Kinaesthetic

Many children are kinaesthetic learners who want and need to move around for active learning. *English World* integrates a variety of techniques and activities such as drama activities and role-plays that involve movement.

Children need variety to hold their attention. If we only teach in one way, many pupils will be disadvantaged. They will find it difficult to engage in the lesson and may switch off. They are not less able than others; they just need a different kind of stimulation. Consider different approaches to use in your teaching to appeal to all the learning styles in your class.

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## Teacher development task

Think about your own classroom practice.

In the table, analyse your daily teaching practice.  
Add comments to provide examples or further information.  
Share your notes with a colleague and be prepared to explain your conclusions.



How often do you ...	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
... stop to think whether your pupils have enough support to do an activity or task before you teach a lesson?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... analyse your lessons to see what learner style(s) are favoured in it?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... think about how certain pupils would learn better, and how you could support them?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... create a variety of individual, pair, small-group, large-group and whole-class activities within a lesson?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... deviate from the activities presented in the Pupil's Book in order to provide more or better support?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... talk with your pupils about how and why you offer different tasks for different learners?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... organise activities to benefit auditory learners (e.g. songs, dictations and choral activities)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... organise activities to benefit kinaesthetic learners (e.g. games, puzzles and drawing activities)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... organise activities to benefit visual learners (e.g. drawings and photos, graphs and maps)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

On a scale from 1–10, using the information from the table, how well do you think you score on Differentiated Instruction in general?

1

2

3

4

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6

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8

9

10



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## Classroom-based task

Think about an activity you taught recently.

☐ Before starting out, did you think about how your pupils would respond to the activity?

☐ What learner style would you say the activity favoured?

☐ Are there ways in which the activity could have been carried out differently?

☐ How could you have paid more attention to learner styles?

☐ Write down the names of three actual pupils who might have benefitted from the activity having been carried out differently:

☐ Think of a way you can get yourself to consider learner styles actively and on a regular basis.

On a scale from 1–10, using the information from the table, how well do you think you scored on Differentiated Instruction for that activity?

1

2

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## Teacher observation and reflection notes

After teaching the lesson, reflect on the following questions:

- Which of the actions from the table on page 5 did you take before teaching the lesson?
- What aspects of DI did you use in your lesson?
- How did this approach work with your pupils? Did it work with all or only some of the pupils?
- Were your pupils aware that DI was happening?
- What will you need to consider to ensure the approach works in the future?
- Is there anything else you can do to make sure you offer effective DI?
- What aspects of DI will you introduce into your classroom in the near future?

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## References

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