

## DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTIONS – A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING ENGLISH

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**Rezumat:** *În condițiile predării centrate pe student, instruirea diferențiată devine o strategie tot mai des utilizată în predarea limbii engleze, din motivul că majoritatea grupelor de studenți sunt formate dintr-o varietate de studenți, diferiți din punct de vedere al nivelului de cunoștințe, al stilurilor de învățare, al intereselor, precum și al caracteristicilor psihologice. Pentru a spori eficiența asimilării materialului și formării competențelor în aceste condiții, profesorul este invitat să utilizeze o varietate de metode, care vor corespunde cu interesele și stilurile de învățare ale fiecărui student. Acest articol face o tentativă de a explica cum e posibil de realizat acest obiectiv actual.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *instruire diferențiată, strategii de învățare, nivelurile de pregătire, stiluri de învățare, conținut, proces, produs și mediul de învățare.*

Nowadays in the conditions of student centered teaching differentiated instruction is becoming a most favored method in TEFL. Differentiated instruction is based on matching learning styles of students with their abilities. Often the teachers face the situation when in one class there are students of different levels of language acquisition, ranging between beginners and advanced students. Some students struggle with learning, others perform well, and the rest fit somewhere in between. Besides, different individuals learn in a variety of ways, having different interests. To meet the needs of a diversity of students TEFL methodologists, like Tomlinson C., Danielson came up with the notion of differentiated instruction. "Differentiation is the process whereby teachers meet the need for progress through the curriculum by selecting appropriate teaching methods to match the individual student's learning strategies, within a group situation." (Adey P. and Shayer M. (1994). "There is ample evidence that students are more successful in studies if they are taught in ways that are responsive to their readiness levels (Vygotsky, 1986), their interests and learning profiles (Sternberg, Torff, & Grigorenko, 1998), and their learning styles." (Danielson, 1996).

Differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to the needs of students. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group varying his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction. Differentiated instruction requires careful planning. For it to be effective, a teacher must know, first of all, how his students learn - kinetically, aesthetically, or visually.

Geoff Petty says about differentiated instructions; "There are a number of common misconceptions about differentiation. Some believe that it is something „added on” to normal teaching and that it just requires a few discrete extra activities in the lesson. In fact, differentiation permeates everything a good teacher does and it is often impossible to „point” to a discrete event that achieves it. It is not what is done often, but the way it is done that achieves differentiation” (Geoff Petty, 2002).

Based on students' readiness, interest, or learning style, while planning a lesson the teachers can start by determining "what must all...?", "What may some...?", "What might a few...?" Planning a lesson we can do differentiation of at least four classroom elements: content, process, products and learning environment. Content is what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information. For this the teacher can use reading materials for different levels of language acquisition; use vocabulary lists of different levels; different sets of grammar exercises, etc. By process we mean the activities in which the student engages in order to master the content. Here can be mentioned the following procedures: applying some tiered activities through which all learners develop the same skills, but use different levels of support, challenge, or complexity; providing interest groups that encourage students to study subtopics of particular interest to them; developing personal agendas (task lists written by the teacher for the whole class and activities that answers the individual needs of learners); varying the length of time a student may use to complete a task for providing additional support for a struggling learner for encouraging an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth. Products include projects, which can reflect what they have learned in a unit. As examples of differentiating products can serve: giving students models of how to express the learned material, for example write a letter, or develop a project, etc., using rubrics that match and extend students' different skills levels, etc. Learning environment is the way the class works and makes progress. The learning environment is a thing of serious consideration. In this regard the teacher should set out clear guidelines for independent work which will match the individual needs of

the learners, for example by organizing group work or pair work, which will help the students who need to move while learning, or activities that will suit others who better acquire knowledge sitting quietly (Tomlinson, 1999).

Differentiated instruction does not happen by accident. It requires commitment, and acknowledgment of the fact that diverse abilities, experiences, and interests have a great impact on student learning. So how should a teacher start differentiating instructions?

The first thing in the morning the teacher should get to know his(her) students learning characteristics by identifying the level of language acquisition and the topics of students' interests. This can be determined with the help of tests and other learning styles inventory.

Secondly, the teacher should identify areas of the curriculum that could be adapted to differentiated instruction, by studying the instructional goals and objectives for the subject, identifying the major concepts, principles, and skills, students should learn. It is desirable for the teacher to brainstorm ideas for activities, tasks, and assessments, which should cover a range of learning preferences, abilities, and interests. .

Thirdly the teacher must examine his (her) role as teacher in the differentiated classroom. On this purpose the teacher should develop a general plan for facilitating time, space, and materials in the classroom. For instance, on any given day, not all students will be working on the same assignment at the same time. The teacher must have a plan for student access to necessary materials, where individuals or groups will work in the time allotted to specific tasks. No doubt, that the teacher should be prepared with alternative methods of assessing student performance and understanding. Assessment results should increase teacher' s understanding of students' abilities, interests, and needs, and should be used in future planning.

“The most important factor in differentiation that helps students achieve more and feel more engaged in learning is being sure that what teachers differentiate is high-quality curriculum and instruction. For example, teachers should make sure that: (1) the curriculum is clearly focused on the information and understandings accessible to all students; (2) lessons, activities, and products are designed to ensure that students grapple with, use, and come to understand the material; (3) materials and tasks are interesting to students and seem relevant to them; (4) learning is active; and (5) there is joy and satisfaction in learning for each student” (Tomlinson, C. (1999).

There is no recipe for differentiation. Rather, it is a way of thinking about teaching and learning which values the individual and can be translated into classroom practice in many ways. Judie Haynes in her article *Teach to Students' Learning Styles* gives an account of the specific characteristics of learning styles and the types of classroom performances which match each of these learning styles. They are worth while being taken into consideration while planning. For example the auditory learners prefer listening activities. These students enjoy talking and interviewing. They are phonetic readers who enjoy oral reading, choral reading, and listening to recorded books. They learn best by participating in interviews, debating, participating in oral discussions of written material, giving oral reports. Visual learners prefer written instructions. These students are sight readers who enjoy reading silently. They like the information to be presented to them visually. They will learn by observing and enjoy working with computer graphics, cartoons, maps, graphs, charts, posters, diagrams, graphic organizers, texts with a lot of pictures. Since the tactile learners learn best by touching, they understand directions which they write and will learn best through manipulatives. The Language Experience Approach (LEA) which will include drawing, playing board games, making dioramas, making models, following instructions will be beneficial for these learners. Kinesthetic learners learn by manipulating objects. They need to involve their whole body in learning. The Total Physical Response is an effective method for them. They remember material best if they act it out. These students learn best by playing games that involve their whole body, movement activities, setting up experiments, making models, following instructions, etc. Analytic learners plan and organize their work, focusing on details, making logical associations for learning the material. They are phonetic readers and prefer to work individually on activity sheets. They learn best when information is presented in sequential steps, goals are clear, lessons are structured and teacher-directed, and requirements are spelled out.

Differentiating instruction invites educators to rethink traditional educational practices that were based upon a time when students were more similar in background and readiness. Teachers can change the learning environment so that they can see students' readiness levels, interests,

learning profiles and needs more clearly. Through differentiated instruction, teachers can make teaching more motivating and effective by taking into consideration the complexity of instruction, so that all the students experience success in learning.

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