



The Scope of Differentiated Instruction in the Secondary ESL Classrooms

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Abstract

In many countries, the secondary classrooms are so heterogeneous that the teacher often fails to maintain the balance. Differentiation approach can improve the situation as it is backed by educationists and psychologists. This approach has enormous scope in the diverse Indian classrooms. This short paper attempts a brief explanation of the theoretical background of Differentiated Instruction and the description of a sample lesson.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, ESL classrooms

Introduction

A major hindrance in making our classrooms student-centred is their heterogeneity. Since universal promotion is the norm in lower classes, the secondary classes are so heterogeneous. Students differ not only in their intelligence, but they are different socially and culturally. Each learner comes to school with different personal and cultural contexts and with varying degrees of academic skill development. Is not it the right of each pupil to be taught in a way that meets his/her individual learning needs? If the answer is in the affirmative, Differentiated Instruction is a solution.

What is Differentiation?

Differentiation means providing students with different ways to acquiring content or making sense of ideas, and to developing teaching materials so that all the students within a classroom can learn effectively regardless of differences in ability. Differentiation is a proactive approach to instruction. It requires the teacher to have "sufficient knowledge of the pupils, plus the ability to plan and deliver suitable lessons effectively, so as to help all pupils individually to maximise their learning, whatever their individual situation." (Bigio 2010). At the same time differentiated instruction is not teaching at slow pace so that everyone can keep up, nor is it humiliating the slow learners by drawing attention to their limitations.

The supporters of differentiated teaching compare the traditional classroom to an ice cream parlour having only one flavour to choose, or a textile shop with only one set of clothes, no matter what customer comes in. Often the teacher presents one lesson format to a class of forty or fifty students, expecting each individual to benefit from the experience. In a



differentiated classroom, various instructional methods are used to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. This ensures an equal educational opportunity for all students.

Theoretical Background

The three key elements of differentiated instruction are *readiness*, *interest* and *learning profile*. These three elements are propounded by three renowned modern psychologist. Lev Vygotsky, the well-known Russian psychologist has provided evidences that individuals learn best in accordance with their *readiness* to do so. The readiness of the student should match with what a student learns, how he/she learns it and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned. The influential American cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner has proved that when *interest* is tapped, learning is more likely to be rewarding and students become more autonomous learners.

But it is on Multiple Intelligences theory of Howard Gardner that differentiated instruction has been founded. Through a series of experiments, Gardner has established that people have different intelligences and learn in many different ways. Schools should offer individual-centred education, having the curriculum tailored to a child's intelligence preference. His theory focuses on eight intelligences. It is a departure from the view that intelligence is a single, measurable unit. "An instructional technique or programme that is heavily reliant on one of the intelligences minimises opportunities for students who many not possess a propensity to learn in this way." (Gardner 1999). These students who many not achieve in the traditional way become lost to both the school and the community at large.

Engaging Students

A fundamental tenet of the new differentiated model is that the teacher must engage students. The curriculum should be designed to engage students, it should have the ability to connect to their lives and positively influence their levels of motivation. For this, the teachers are required to know their students, their background and their cultural links. Knowing students well allows teachers to figure out their strengths, thereby helping them to move forward.

The Indian Scenario

Differentiated Instructions has not yet been discussed much in India. As an educational approach, it started gaining ground in America and some European countries in the first decade of the present century. Educationists and psychologists like Carol Ann Tomlinson, K.M. Anderson, S.D Allan, Kathy Bigio Rick Wormelli and K. Nunley have made remarkable studies and have published scores of books on it.

The typical Indian classroom is characterised by students sitting through hour-long teacher monologues. Of course, technology has started making life easier for both students



and educators. But catering to the taste of the pupil is still a remote dream. The National Policy on Education (1992) has recognised that “teacher should have the freedom to innovate, to devise methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and capabilities of the students and the concerns of the community.” No doubt, differentiated instruction has enormous scope in Indian classrooms where student diversity and ability differences are more prevalent than in many other countries.

Sample Differentiated Lesson :

Method used : TIERING

Here, decision on how to differentiate is based on language proficiency. This level of proficiency might be determined through class tests or one-on-one conferencing. From there, the teachers can review the material and the task required for their 'high proficiency' students and **tier** the activity to meet the 'low proficiency' students at the appropriate level.

What is Tiering?

Tiering of lessons/activities is an important way to allow students to work with the same concept and essential ideas but at different levels of complexity, number of steps and levels of independence. By developing activities along a continuum of complexity or abstractness, the teacher is allowing students to work on similar concepts, but in such a way as to be accessible to low performing students and more challenging for high ability students.

Base Activity

Students will read the unannotated and complete Robert Frost poem "*Mending Wall*" and then write a paragraph on the use of symbols in the poem.

Differentiated Activity Designed for 'Low Proficiency' Students :

Content : The teacher distributes an annotated version of the poem. Unfamiliar words/phrases are glossed. The students often do not have enough language or context understanding to select the correct definition from a dictionary.

Process : The video presentation of the poem is projected in the class by the teacher. The students get multi-level opportunity to comprehend the poem. They will then work on the writing with a partner or in a small group of 3/4 students.

Product : The students will concentrate on the meaning of symbol in the poem by writing several sentences which will be supported through the use of sentence starters.



Appendix A

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, * vibration that shakes the wall
And spills the upper boulders in the sun; * lets fall
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast. * side by side
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean, * barking
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each. * massive rocks
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls * stones that look like loaves
of bread
We have to use a spell to make them balance: * a magic influence
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:



He is all pine and I am apple-orchard.

* a garden of fruit trees

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

If I could put a notion in his head:

"Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it

Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offence.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That wants it down!" I could say "Elves" to him,

* spirits, supernatural beings

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather

He said it for himself. I see him there,

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top

* gripped, taken hold of

In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.

* the neighbour looked like a
barbarian armed with stone

He moves in darkness as it seems to me,

Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

He will not go behind his father's saying,

And he likes having thought of it so well

He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."



The poem is about two neighbours who disagree over.....

..... Not only does the wall act as a divider in separating properties, but also acts as

..... In the narrator's view, barriers lead to

Thus, the wall in this poem is symbol of
.....
based on discrimination of race, gender and religion.

Referenes

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