

Celebrating our differences

A guide to differentiated
lesson planning

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Introduction

- › Have the buzz-words “differentiated instruction” and “multi-level teaching” raised many questions in your mind?
- › Are you anxious about what they mean for your day to day practice?
- › Are you looking for ways to support all your learners?

If so, this booklet could help you.

It accompanies the DVD **Celebrating our differences: an introduction to differentiated lesson planning**. Another useful resource is the manual **Education for all: a guide to building schools as inclusive centres of learning, care and support**.

As you work through this booklet you will be referred to both the DVD and some Handouts from the manual. (These Handouts have been included in the Appendix at the back of this booklet. They are referred to as “HO” with their number and title. For example, Handout 57 is referred to as: **“HO 57: What is an ISP?”**)

In the booklet we assume that you are already some idea about the following: inclusive education (IE); barriers to learning and development; the policy mandate *Education White Paper 6* (2001); the KwaZulu-Natal implementation strategy for IE; the role of teachers as set out in the *Norms and Standards for Educators* (2000); and the SIAS (screening, identification, assessment and support) process. (If you need more information, do consult the IE manual, where all these aspects are comprehensively addressed.)

The DVD and this booklet help you *planning and presenting* differentiated lessons. We hope that *Celebrating our differences* (both the DVD and this booklet) will help you to support your learners.

So – let’s go!

SECTION 1: Understanding differentiation





One size doesn't fit all!

Before you watch the DVD, let's consider the question: **What does differentiated instruction mean?**

Differentiation means acknowledging that in teaching and learning, "one size does not fit all". So you take differences into account when you *plan*, *teach* and *assess*. These differences can be of ability, learning style, language, gender, culture, socio-economic level, and so on.

When differentiating lessons, you *adapt* any of the following:

- **CONTENT** (what you want learners to know and be able to do)
For example, you could adapt the level of difficulty, or the background information you provide, to help more learners understand the information.
- **PROCESS** (how learners are going to learn the content)
For example, you could adapt the types of activity, resources, grouping or pace of the work you are doing, to suit different needs.
- **ASSESSMENT** (how learners show their understanding of the content)
For example, you could adapt the assessment task so learners are able to show their understanding in different ways, according to their learning style or ability. Or you could even allow some more time to do the task.

Adapting the work might mean providing support to some learners, or giving others something more challenging. You allow each learner to participate and experience the right degree of challenge, so that all can learn.

Are you thinking -

- > that this means more work for me;
- > I'll need to do extra planning now;
- > I'll have to teach individual lessons for many of the learners my class?

Don't worry! This booklet and the IE manual gives you strategies to cut down on extra "prep" time and still achieve better learning for **all** your learners.

Watch the DVD now.

As you watch, tick off all the features of differentiated lesson planning on the list below, that you see mentioned in the DVD.

1. The teacher knows her learners and knows that they are all different.	☒
2. Her aim is to help all learners reach the correct level for their grade.	☐
3. All learners work towards the same Learning Outcomes (LOs) and are assessed against the same Assessment Standards (ASs).	☐
4. A variety of activities are used to address different learners' needs. The teacher gives different tasks to different groups so that learners of different abilities and learning styles can all participate, and have opportunities to succeed.	☐
5. Grouping changes, depending on your objectives. For example, you might use: • same ability groups • learning styles groups • friendship groups • interest groups (topic).	☐
6. Resources are graded to meet the needs of different learners.	☐
7. The content of the lesson includes both concrete examples, and more and abstract concepts.	☐
8. Questions range from easy (low order) to harder (high order), so that all learners can answer at least some questions.	☐
9. More advanced learners are extended in interesting ways.	☐
10. Assessment activities are differentiated.	☐

In the following sections, we will look at the above aspects in more depth. The DVD may have raised some questions in your mind. For example:

Are multi-level teaching and differentiated teaching one and the same?

No. Multi-level teaching is **one** of the strategies a teacher might use in planning a differentiated lesson or activity. In most classes, there are three broad ability bands: slower learners, average learners and advanced learners. Yet lessons are often taught as if learners are all on the same level. By providing for the needs of the different levels, you can respond better to the diverse needs in the class. This is *multi-level* teaching. In the DVD Teacher Monica uses this strategy in her Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) lesson.

But a teacher can differentiate in many other ways. For example, to provide for the different learning styles of your learners, instead of only giving them pen and paper tasks, they could:

- do role-play;
- work with visuals (like charts, pictures and maps);
- hold debates;
- write reflections;
- do field observations.

Or you could differentiate by managing the classroom space – for example, seat learners with hearing difficulties where they can hear you, or seat learners with low concentration away from the window and far from talkative, distracting learners.

Look at **HO107: What is differentiated instruction?** for more ideas.



Reflection 1

To understand differentiated instruction better, do the task on page 2 of **HO 107: What is differentiated instruction?**

(Answers for 2: a - No; b - Yes; c - No; d - Yes; e - Yes; f - No; g - No; h - Yes; i - Yes; j - Yes)

Does your own teaching include any of the practices described? Have you changed your ideas since reading this section and doing the task?

Some things to remember: differentiation shouldn't cause stigma (make a learner feel bad); it must be structured and enabling; and each learner must be suitably challenged.



Knowing your learners as individuals

To differentiate effectively in your lessons, you need to know your learners. What are their particular difficulties, strengths and learning styles? The key questions here are:

- how does a particular learner learn most effectively;
- what type of barrier could he be facing;
- in the Learning Area, at what actual level of competence is he operating?

How can you determine learners' needs effectively?



Reflection 2

Read through the list of tools below.

- Which do you consider most important, and why?
- Which are already used by you or others at your school?
- Do your routine class assessment practices give you adequate information about learners' needs?

TOOLS:

- **The Learner Profile:** a mandatory ongoing record of each learner's progress and performance from Grade R to 12. It must be kept on file at school, and must be updated by each teacher from grade to grade.
- **Observation:** it can be formal or informal, planned or unplanned. Observe patiently; look for strengths as well as difficulties, and don't jump to conclusions or stereotype learners. Keep an observation book.
- **Talking to parents:** make sure that you do this as an equal partnership, in privacy and in a constructive spirit.
- **Portfolios** of learners' work.

- **Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards:** the ASs show in detail what your learners should know and be able to do from grade to grade. Ask yourself:
 - Which learners are achieving a particular AS *at their grade level*?
 - Are there learners who are achieving the AS at the level of the previous grade?
 - Are there some learners who are capable of achieving that AS at the next grade level?

For more information look at the Learning Area document.

Responding to learning styles

In the DVD, Teacher Monica mentions being aware of learners' *learning styles* and sometimes using this as the basis for grouping learners, choosing activities, and identifying or developing suitable resources.

Use **HO 90** to find out about learning styles.



Reflection 3

What sort of learner are you in terms of the styles mentioned in **HO 90**? What is your combination of strengths?

How has this affected your speed and ease of learning in different situations through your life? At school, was your style well catered for, or neglected?

Can you **confidently** identify the strongest learning style for each learner in your class?

When you teach, which learning styles do you favour and which do you neglect? (This may be reflected in the types of activities and resources you use most often.)

Learning styles are a key area in which teachers unknowingly favour some learners and disadvantage others. It is therefore important to deal with them.

Learners who require an Individual Support Plan

Remember that you will need especially detailed and accurate information about any learners who have marked difficulties. For each one, you will need to develop an Individual Support Plan. See **HO 57** that explains what an ISP is.

An ISP helps the teacher to answer to the specific needs of the learner and provides carefully focused differentiation.



Reflection is
important in
differentiation!

Differentiating in learning and teaching is an ongoing process of development. You will sometimes misunderstand learners' needs, or you may experience problems using a differentiation strategy. But if you keep trying strategies and evaluating the results, your understanding and your interventions will improve steadily. Self-reflection is therefore all-important. Regularly ask yourself questions.



Reflection 4

These are some of the questions you might ask.

- Which aspects of my activity worked? And which didn't?
- Which learners benefited the most? Which learners benefited the least?
- Were there problems? What were the reasons for the problems?
- Do I really understand what is behind the problems of Learner A, or Group X? What other aspects could I have looked at?
- How could I improve the "problem" strategy next time? What should I change?

As teachers we often assume that learners fail to achieve because they don't listen, don't work hard enough or are "slow learners". But, for example, a learner who is "powerfully visual" could struggle to make meaning of lessons based mainly on notes that have hardly any pictures, diagrams or maps. Or other things – like pain, low vision or grief – might be blocking a child's ability to learn.

So, rather observe the learner closely for a while, and then re-consider why she isn't learning. And re-examine your own teaching.

This approach helps you to differentiate your teaching in a positive way and so achieve more successful learning for your learners. Which is what you want, isn't it?

SECTION 2: Differentiating content – *what* you teach



The teacher comments below set standards you need to follow from the start:

You *must* know the content yourself. If you don't, your activity won't be focused and clear, even if it is provided in the textbook.

Work through the task yourself. Try to understand where it's difficult, and what makes it difficult.

If you don't do these two things, your support strategies - like grouping learners by ability, or letting them work at their own pace - won't do much good.

So, what makes content difficult - or easy?

- **The context that is used:** what is being taught might be very familiar and relevant to the life experience or culture of the learner; or it might be completely new, with little background information provided.
- **How abstract the information is:** there might be lots of concrete and practical examples, or mostly abstract ideas and principles.
- **The level of thinking demanded:** questions and tasks might range from those that simply require the learner to recall facts, right through to those that ask learners to make value judgments and be able to explain them.
- **How much detail the learner needs to master:** learners might only need to learn certain key points, or they might need to master complex, detailed and in-depth ideas, or it could be something in between.
- **The amount of knowledge or skills packaged into the AS:** some learners can master larger "chunks" of abilities at one time than others do.

In a lesson all these things come together and affect each other. We will look at each one in turn.



Context is the setting, or background, that the topic fits in. Learners might have difficulty or problems with context when:

- the context of the lesson (often reflected in the texts used) is far outside their own experience, whether geographically, historically, culturally etc.
- as girls they are alienated by a context that refers only to the experience of boys, or suggests boys are more important (or vice versa).
- the context is so familiar, or the level of the activity so low, that there are no challenges for the learners.

Be very alert for contextual difficulties. It's easy to incorrectly assume that a learner knows the context, or that he can make connections. Remember that other difficulties like language might be barring understanding too.

Problems with context strongly affect motivation. If the learner can't relate to the context, she will be bored, as well as mystified, and you will "lose" her.

Here are some strategies to help you differentiate with regard to context.

Strategy	Explanation and advice	Example
Use familiar contexts as much as possible	These can help learners understand concepts that might be challenging for them.	Watch the DVD. To develop the concept "lifestyles", Teacher Monica lets some of her learners role-play activities that are practised in their own community.

Strategy	Explanation and advice	Example
Start with something familiar, then move on to something new	This will help learners to connect more easily later with related topics that are unfamiliar to their socio-economic background / culture / etc.	HO 118: The experience of school lunch and peanut butter sandwiches helps to ground the understanding of some of the Foundation Phase learners before they work on recipes (literacy), geometrical shapes (numeracy), healthy food choices (life skills), all of which could be unfamiliar to these learners.
Change the context	This could apply when the textbook uses an unfamiliar context to teach new ideas and information. The teacher needs to identify and use a familiar context which deals with the same or similar concepts.	Mrs Guma teaches Grade 9 Life Orientation in a rural school. The textbook uses examples from city life for the topic of “unemployment”. So she develops her own examples from the local situation. She also collects relevant newspaper and magazine articles and exposes groups to other contexts, according to their levels of confidence.
Provide background information	When a text assumes context that learners don't have, give them background to help bridge the gaps.	Teacher Adelaide wants to use an interesting story about a circus in her Language class, but some of her learners have never seen a circus. She plans a pre-reading session in which she talks about circuses and shows pictures.
Let advanced learners help you to familiarize their peers with the context	Learners who have wider experience can share it with the class. This extends them, and helps the others.	Teacher Adelaide uses the learners who have been to a circus to tell about what they saw. (She divides up different parts of the information among them in advance.)

Here are some guidelines for differentiating activities for context.

› **Extending learning involves extending the range of contexts that learners can grasp**

Don't leave your learners locked in familiar contexts for ever! As they progress, introduce texts and tasks containing *some* less familiar contexts.

› **Encourage and support more and wider reading by learners**

This is the best way to develop wider contextual understanding. Find relevant passages, articles and books for learners at all levels (not only the advanced) to enjoy.



Working from concrete to abstract

Many learners understand best when they experience concrete examples directly, through touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell, in familiar settings. So, try to start from concrete examples and move towards the abstract concepts. This aspect is often related to learning style and age level. Comment 1 below sums up a widespread problem and Comment 2 indicates how the concrete-abstract range links to context.

1

Some teachers on our staff have Honours or B.Ed. degrees but in the classroom they teach far above their learners and never offer concrete, practical examples.

2

As a Foundation teacher I always “look for the concrete”. Young children especially need to work with the familiar and the concrete to ground their learning.

Here are some strategies to help you differentiate when working with “concrete to abstract”.

Strategy	Explanation and advice	Example
Grade activities from concrete, to semi-abstract, to abstract	Set tasks at each level and take learners to the next level when they are ready. Use groups or let individuals work at their level.	See the three levels of Mathematics activities in the <i>Peanut butter sandwich</i> theme in HO 118 .