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## What Differentiated Instruction Is Not

Because graphics often help comprehension, see the compare-and-contrast table below.

### Defining Differentiated Instruction

<i>What Differentiated Instruction Is</i>	<i>What Differentiated Instruction Is Not</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student centred</li> <li>• For all students</li> <li>• For heterogeneous groups</li> <li>• A change in philosophy about how learning should take place</li> <li>• Multiple approaches or options for content, process and product</li> <li>• A mix of whole-class, group and independent learning</li> <li>• More about quality than quantity</li> <li>• Flexible and varied</li> <li>• Proactive in the planning stage</li> <li>• Rooted in assessment</li> <li>• Based on continual reflection and adjustment to help students learn well</li> <li>• A belief system that says all learners come to the classroom with potential ready to be accessed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class centred</li> <li>• Mainly for students with learning problems</li> <li>• A tracking system by abilities</li> <li>• A recipe for learning (it is how to teach, not what to teach)</li> <li>• A different lesson plan for every student (individualised instruction)</li> <li>• Whole-group drill and practice or any single structure or activity</li> <li>• Fact-based learning alone</li> <li>• Unmanageable or undisciplined</li> <li>• Modifying the instruction up or down in difficulty</li> <li>• A method that you will need all new materials for</li> <li>• Cost free</li> <li>• Just about learning styles</li> <li>• Just a set of strategies and activities</li> </ul>

## Some Research to Support Differentiation

Differentiation was first developed as a way of dealing with gifted students, and most of the research applies to gifted and talented programs. Unfortunately, little research has been completed on the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in a foreign-language setting specifically. So, what we need to consider is research that focuses on the various principles of differentiation and their effectiveness, and studies that support those findings. Look for studies that show the effectiveness of things such as instruction based on readiness (Vygotsky, 1986), interests (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), individualisation, zone of proximal development, learning profiles (Sternberg, Torff & Grigorenko, 1998), attention to students' varied learning needs (Danielson, 1996) and, especially, effective instruction.

Let's start with the last one on that list. I first became interested in differentiation when, teaching on a block schedule, I sought more effective methods of instruction and tried to implement a greater variety of teaching styles.

- Products assigned by ability level should not penalise the advanced students: There should be something in it for them to choose to participate in at the higher level, whether it is an extremely exciting activity, less homework (but more complex thought), or required fewer activities. Students should regard higher-level participation not as a punishment for being smart but as a reward.
- Finally, products should be viewed not just as a way to measure learning but also as a logical outcome or extension of that learning. Students and teachers both should be asking themselves questions before, during and after the creation of a product. Reflection is a vital component of the product process.

## Preparing Yourself Are You Ready for Differentiated Instruction?

*How many of the following statements are true for you?*

- I love learning in general.
- I believe in reading.
- I value diversity.
- I encourage student talk.
- I say, "This reminds me of," and think aloud.
- I revise and reflect on my lesson plans.
- I try to grow intellectually and professionally.
- I believe learning is a lifelong process.
- I look for opportunities to get to know my students better.
- I look for strengths instead of flaws and errors.

If you recognised yourself in three or more of these, either you are already using differentiated instruction in your classroom or you are mentally ready to begin doing so.

Let's see if you are *using* it now. The Self-Evaluation of Instructional Styles form on the next page is a basic self-evaluation instrument you can use to rate yourself.

To score your differentiation readiness: The right-hand side of the scale refers to teaching strategies used for differentiated instruction. The closer your responses are to the right side, the more likely it is that you are already differentiating.

Your responses that are closer to the left are those that you will need to consider modifying in order to differentiate.

At this point, you may be saying to yourself, "I've been differentiating instruction for a long time; I just didn't know it!" Differentiation, just like any other teaching method, is based on sound teaching principles and a high-quality curriculum. Every time you give a student extra help or more time to work on a project, or modify an assignment, you are differentiating.

## Decide on the Method of Presentation

### How to Differentiate

Just ask yourself these questions to help you decide what type of differentiation will be best in these circumstances:

Do some students need more time to work on this, while others are ready to go on?

- Differentiate by process
- Differentiate by compacting

Are the students at different reading levels?

- Differentiate by resources

Do I want all the students to use the same materials, but produce different products matched to abilities or interests?

- Differentiate by outcome

Do students have many different learning styles?

- Differentiate by process

Would you like to have students make choices based on things they are interested in?

- Differentiate by interests

You want to engage all learners, as well as motivate them. After your preassessment of student interests, learning styles and so on, use the criteria above to decide how you will differentiate this unit. I like to keep this saying in mind:

“What do you use to bait the hook? What you like, or what the fish likes?”

So, choose a hook (or hooks) for your fish. How will you introduce this topic to students? Determine what you will say to or show the class on the first day of this unit to introduce it. Here are some suggestions:

- At the front of the classroom, have a poster or an interesting object (African mask, drum, rain stick, jai alai or bullfight equipment, jewellery or pottery and so on), and ask students to write down – in their day’s journal or on a piece of scrap paper – a couple of questions about it or guess what the object is for or where they might find one.
- Tell students you’ve planned a guest speaker for the next day, and have them write questions for that person – and then you be the guest speaker (or have their partner, assigned by you, be the guest speaker: definitely good for a unit on the family!).
- Show them examples of a grammar point, and ask them to try to determine the rules for using it (concept-development or concept-induction method).
- Draw on students’ own experiences by asking each of them to contribute to a list on the board of things such as favourite (or least favourite) foods, movies, celebrities (for a unit on descriptions or professions), or other category you’re about to begin as a unit.

- Share a personal story or experience (travel, interest - I like to research the origins of people's last names and share that), collection, or hobby, and elicit input from students who do the same or similar things.
- Display both good and bad examples of a product and elicit input on what makes each good or bad.

Once your fish are hooked, you will also need to decide on your own presentation methods for the whole-class introduction of the concept, and for further practice as the class differentiates into different activities and smaller groups or individual work.

The following are some methods to consider:

- Hand signals, sign or gestures (TPRS method)
- Repeating information, or asking students to repeat
- Involving students in the initial presentation. Anyone familiar with TPRS knows that the *Personalise* step is key to learning vocabulary. More on this in Chapter 5.
- Modifying usual tone of voice
- Writing information on board, on overhead, on Post-its, on students (washable textas when doing body parts is lots of fun)
- Demonstrating and modelling instructions (e.g. showing how to use a website on screen)
- Thinking aloud
- Completing a first item with students
- Always putting instructions in the same place in the room – I have an assignment grid on my board that students can look at, and I have rubrics for common assignments (e.g. poster or story) posted on the wall so that students can check their work.
- Tape-recording instructions (good for oral learners)
- Using visuals: pictures, posters, art, video
- Using different colours of chalk or pens (e.g. one colour for verb stems and another for endings)
- Providing structure: activities such as fill-ins, graphic organisers or Cornell notes while listening to an initial whole-group lecture
- Insisting on wait time before answering
- Colour coding or highlighting key points (A recent study showed that when preterit verbs were written in bold, and imperfect in italics, students were more likely to use the verbs correctly.)
- Using team teaching – especially with a student teacher, a native speaker or a colleague for an interdisciplinary unit
- Climbing the Bloom's taxonomy ladder during questioning
- Scaffolding for student work (especially for slower learners)
- Breaking everything down into smaller steps for slower learners

## Vernacular

The first, vernacular vocabulary, consists of words that students may see only on a vocabulary list but never hear in a real context that would be of use to all students.

Choose a list of at least 25 words, preferably some the students will hear reinforced in other subject areas, post them in the classroom, and use them whenever possible. Encourage and reward students for using them, correctly and naturally, in speech and in writing. Make sure the list is realistic and practical.

Examples of some that would be on my list: perspective, pejorative, comportment, pilgrimage, colloquial.

How does this qualify as differentiated instruction, in light of the fact that all students get the same list?

- Students begin to use the words at their own pace.
- Students learn the words in various ways. They hear the teacher and their peers use them in context, they see them on the wall, they get social interaction when using them (encouragement, congratulations), and they write the words as well as say them.
- Advanced learners will begin to use them in expanded forms: variants, root words, related words, complex sentences.

## Academic

The second category, academic vocabulary, is made up of words that are probably already in students' vocabulary, that are used frequently in academic language, but that students need to be encouraged to use effectively.

I encourage my students to use what I call transition words. The following are for beginner classes:

<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>German</i>
first	<i>d'abord</i>	<i>primero</i>	<i>zuerst</i>
next	<i>puis</i>	<i>próximo</i>	<i>nächste</i>
then	<i>alors</i>	<i>entonces</i>	<i>dann</i>
finally	<i>enfin, finalement</i>	<i>finalmente</i>	<i>schließlich</i>
afterward	<i>après, ensuite</i>	<i>después</i>	<i>danach</i>
following, therefore, consequently	<i>ensuite par conséquent</i>	<i>por consiguiente</i>	<i>deshalb, infolgedessen</i>
but	<i>mais</i>	<i>pero</i>	<i>aber</i>
thus	<i>donc</i>	<i>así</i>	<i>so</i>
nevertheless	<i>néanmoins</i>	<i>no obstante</i>	<i>trotzdem</i>
every time	<i>chaque fois, toutefois</i>	<i>cada vez</i>	<i>jedes Mal</i>

In more advanced classes, we learn to use “argument words”, such as the following:

<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>German</i>
because	<i>parce que, à cause de, car</i>	<i>porque</i>	<i>weil</i>
except	<i>sauf, à part</i>	<i>excepto</i>	<i>außer</i>
although	<i>bien que</i>	<i>aunque</i>	<i>obwohl</i>
even if	<i>même si</i>	<i>cuando</i>	<i>auch wenn</i>
however	<i>cependant</i>	<i>sin embargo</i>	<i>aber</i>
according to	<i>selon</i>	<i>según</i>	<i>nach</i>

## Classroom

The third, and most common, category is classroom vocabulary, which falls into two subsets. One is subject-specific terminology, which students will probably use only in your classroom. Words such as “stem”, “root” (grammar), “conjugate”, “determiner”, “subjunctive”, “preterit”, or even “culture” or “stereotype” might fall into this category.

The second one that we all struggle with is the target language (TL) unit vocabulary.

## Teaching the Vocabulary in a Unit

Does this sound familiar? On Monday, or several days a week, students are presented with 10 or more new words and definitions whose pronunciations and definitions are given. Students copy the words down and then use them to do workbook exercises, make flash cards or write sentences, in class and as homework. Every Friday is a quiz covering the week’s words. Good students do well, and weak students don’t.

In a differentiated classroom, students begin to show an interest in words, use them in speech and writing and remember them; no more class time is used this way than with the other method. There are quite a few ways to achieve these results.

### Use Choice

In many chapters, there are a few nonnegotiable words, those that are essential and must be learned. For the rest of the vocabulary, you may have students choose only half the words to study, using the following criteria:

- Let students select words they have heard but have never used or aren’t sure how to use.
- Let them select words that seem interesting or useful to them.
- Let them decide both how to practise and how to be assessed. Let them decide what their vocabulary quiz will be: Hand out a piece of paper with 10 lines on it. Let each student select which 10 words he or she will be quizzed on. Several days later, let each take the quiz on the chosen words; the teacher supplies either the definition or a sentence, depending on the teacher’s teaching style, the students’ learning level, the teacher’s choice or the students’ choice (no matching allowed).