

Differentiation ... a Teachit guide

It's just a word, don't be afraid...it's not as scary as you think!

For those of us who teach mixed ability groups, differentiation is an essential part of lesson planning. I remember sitting at my desk in the early hours as a student teacher, my pen, hovering over a much amended lesson plan, as I tried to show evidence of differentiation. I didn't realise that simply by grouping pupils differently or by asking directed questions of varying difficulty, I was already differentiating my lesson.

I was anxious not to fall into the trap of 'differentiation by outcome' where one task is set and the teacher's expectations are the differentiating factor; yet I have come to use this more and more in a school where mixed ability classes are taught at key stages 3 and 4.

Thanks for all of your e-mails on this subject, and here are some of your best ideas...

Oral questioning

- * Repeat and simplify initially difficult questions
- * Give an either / or option
- * Vary difficulty of question for ability of pupil
- * Pupils to write questions (and answers) to be swapped by teacher with pupil of similar ability

Written questions

- * Start with easier ones and get progressively harder, with the intention that only the more able will finish / setting different targets
- * Colour code questions seemingly randomly, and giving pupils of different abilities a certain colour to follow; or saying, tackle red first, then green...
- * Cloze exercises with options to circle for some, whereas others must write out whole sheet*

Written work / group work

- * Putting vocab lists on desks
- * Use of writing frames* - (write frames as class and choose best?)
- * Pair work
- * Working on different materials in similar ability groups or
- * Same materials in small mixed ability groups
- * Use of very structured worksheets*
- * Assigning responsibility for group feedback, taking ability into account
- * Arranging ability groups for guided reading / writing
- * Visual prompting - e.g. use of pictures, labelling
- * Linking idea with relevant quotation on a jumbled up worksheet
- * Use of video / tape to help understanding

Differentiation by task

- * Giving some pupils crosswords or word searches linked to topic - they could devise these themselves and swap
- * Use of pictures to aid understanding
- * Give some students storyboard with cloze activity captions when others have to devise captions themselves*

Drama

- * Drama can be used in many ways to aid understanding of a text - the roles assigned can be differentiated by the teacher according to ability

* differentiated materials can be found on the site
Nic Harvey, December 2002