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DIFFERENTIATION - PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Problem definition. Many important issues and themes emerged from the presentations and discussions. It is clear that differentiation is not about providing colour coded worksheets and nor is the differentiation "problem" solved by grouping students by ability. Differentiation touches on fundamental issues and principles, such as equity and the need to be concerned about the development of the "whole person" (both emotional and cognitive needs) to enable the person to reach his or her full potential [1, p.43]. How teachers can take account of individual learning needs when planning and delivering the curriculum raises many complex issues. There are however many teachers who have developed in their own practices a congruent set of principles and strategies to enable them to address the individual learning needs of their students effectively.

Bibliography analysis. The findings of a research project directed by Professor Mary Simpson and founded by the Scottish Office Education Department into differentiation in Scottish secondary schools provide teachers and educational researchers with a very useful basis for further reflection and investigation. Their research sought to identify the general principles which underlay differentiation practices in mathematics, science, English and modern languages [8, p.90]. Not only were the approaches to differentiation in English and modern languages ("pick and mix" is the term used by the researchers to describe them) very different from those in mathematics ("measure and match"), but they were also underpinned by two very different sets of assumptions (a "learning centred" vs. "subject oriented" curriculum). The highly interactive teaching observed in English and modern language classrooms seemed to deliver better differentiation according to students' perceptions.

R. Billmayer defines such approaches that are used in order to achieve differentiation:

• Individualised/resource-based learning.

• Setting within the class taking account of aptitude, experience and instruments professed.

• Whole-class teaching based upon one stimulus but in which differentiated materials to guide the response are provided.

• Whole-class teaching based upon one stimulus in which the individual responses of the learners in themselves give a differentiated outcome [2, p. 20].

The aim of this research is to present one of effective ways of classroom management – differentiation.

The plot. There is an on-going programme of evaluation which encompasses all aspects of the department's work, which takes account of staff views through discussion at departmental meetings and students views through questionnaires followed up by discussion. As a department, we formally monitor each other's teaching by devising and using a checklist of good practice and we then use the information

obtained to help shape future developments. We issue very detailed reports to all certificate students and these reports form the basis of an informal discussion with each student at which concerns (on both sides) can be aired and resolved. We monitor performance in external examinations .

What is the rationale behind our approaches?

J. Harmer considers that differentiation is about meeting the individual needs of learners through adopting a variety of approaches in a flexible manner [4, p. 5].

It is about having high, yet realistic, expectations of what individual learners are able to achieve and creating the right conditions for that learning to take place.

It is about having a range of support mechanisms which can be brought into place when required to support learners.

It is about encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning and to become involved in decision making relating to it.

 It is about recognising that differentiation is only one aspect of effective teaching and learning and that it should not be considered in isolation from other aspects. The learning environment needs to be viewed holistically, taking account of all of the factors which impinge upon the learning process.

The authors of Common European Framework of Reference for languages emphasize that learning climate is extremely important. Teachers have to create a climate in which students can be proud of achieving success at any level, in which students can feel comfortable working at the level which is appropriate to them and in which differences in ability and achievement are handled sensitively by the class teacher.[3,45]. They have to draw attention to/ rewarding favourable outcomes and creating a climate in which students collaborate with each other and work co-operatively with the class teacher to achieve the highest possible standards for all, targeting student work effectively [3, 34].

• Drawing upon information relating to previous learning to guide decisions about appropriate work for each student.

• Maintaining accurate learners profiles and developing ways of charting students progress on an on-going basis.

• Creating support mechanisms for learners with learning and/or behavioural difficulties which could include: specially adapted materials; assistance from senior students, voluntary helpers or co-operative teachers; paired-activities within the class; individual target-setting; and the use of student support cards.

• Ensuring that path-ways are open to enable the more-able learners to proceed further and in greater depth.

• Ensuring that students are sufficiently informed about their learning to make meaningful choices and to develop a depth of understanding about what is required of them in order to produce work of the highest standards.

• Developing learning skills in learners in order that they can exercise control over their own learning (e.g. the ability to plan and evaluate).

• Involving learners in choices about the nature, difficulty and pacing of their work and guiding them towards assessments set at the correct level for them as individuals.

• Providing high-quality feedback on progress in which criticism is constructive and praise is given when appropriate.

• Target-setting on an individual or group basis as a negotiated process between teacher and learners.

• Introducing a voluntary, differentiated homework scheme which enables students to exercise choice and develop learning skills [5, p.46].

Many factors need to be taken into account when considering the qualities of good learners. What are their backgrounds, their past learning experiences? Why are they in the classroom? Why is one study method appropriate for student A but not for student B?

Teachers have some commonly-held views about good learners. They say that the students who do best are the ones why always do their homework. We might be able to say that doing homework is the trademark of a good learner. But again we are left with question. Why do some people do homework while others do not?

What we need to find out is whether there are any generalizations which help to encourage habits in students which will help them.

The first very important step is the students' motivation.

One of the most successful language learning experiences took place towards the end of the Second World War when the American military needed to train their personnel in the languages of the countries they would have to administer and deal with. In short intensive courses, the students learnt fantastically fast.

Whatever we think of the teaching methods used – or the reasons for language learning – the teacher and students in these cases had a number of things on their side, they were highly motivated, they really wanted to learn and they had powerful reasons for doing so.

Famous research carried out in the second half of the twentieth century by Gardner and Lambert suggested that students who felt most warmly about the language and who wanted to integrate into the culture of its speakers were more highly motivated than those who were only learning language as a means to an end (e.g. getting a better job). So Integrative motivation was more powerful than Instrumental motivation.

One of the main tasks for teachers is to provoke interest and involvement in the subject even when students are not initially interested in it. Teachers are not, however, ultimately responsible for their students' motivation. They can only encourage by word and deed [9, p.100]. Real motivation comes from within each individual. Teacher of English generally make three basic level distinctions: beginner, intermediate and advanced. Between these levels, other descriptive terms are used too. A distinction is made between beginners and false beginners to reflect the fact that some adults start a beginners' course having heard virtually no English, whereas many others can't really use any English but actually know quite a lot which can be quickly activated; they are not real beginners. Elementary students are not longer beginners and are able to communicate in a basic way. They can string some sentences together, construct a simple story or take part in predictable spoken interaction. However, they have not yet achieved intermediate competence which involves greater fluency and general comprehension of some general authentic English: there

are still areas of knowledge – tense structures, noun phrase construction, vocabulary use, which elementary students have not come across [10, p. 25]. Upper-intermediate students, on the other hand, have the competence of intermediate students plus an extended knowledge of grammatical construction and skill use. However, they may not have achieved the accuracy or depth of knowledge which their advanced colleagues have acquired. Advanced students already know a lot of English. At the advanced level, teachers need to provide good clear evidence of progress. We can do this through a concentration not so much on grammatical accuracy, but on style and perceptions of appropriacy, connotation and inference, helping students to use language with more subtlety.

Although many activities can clearly be used at more than one level, there are some which are obviously more appropriate for beginners, for example, pronunciation practice of / /, simple introduction dialogues, while there are others which are more appropriate for advanced students, such as discursive essay writing or formal debating [9, p. 101].

Beginners need to be exposed to fairly simple language which they can understand. In their language work, they may get pleasure from concentrating on straightforward questions like 'What's your name?' Intermediate students know all this language already and we will not ask them to concentrate on it.

The level of language also affects the teacher's behavior. At beginner levels, the need for us to rough-tune our speech is very great: we can exaggerate our voice tone and gesture to help us to get our meaning across. But at higher levels, such extreme behavior is not so important. The activities student are offered often depend on their language level too [9, p. 114]. For beginners abstract discussions are not suggested. For advanced students a drill (with repetition in chorus) focusing on simple past tense will almost certainly be inappropriate. Teachers react subconsciously to different levels.

Establishing effective learning groups and making decisions about how when and why to have students work in pairs, groups, or individually are central decisions that need to be made in order to manage the learning process effectively.

The roles which teachers and learners choose to adopt, or have forced upon them by institutional constrains, or classroom materials and tasks, will have a critical bearing on classroom atmosphere, patterns of interaction, and ultimately students learning. It is unlikely that the teacher and learners will always adopt the same role relationships when-ever they step into the classroom. Wright identifies two groups of factors that likely to affect roles.

The appropriate support is offered in the form of help sheets or immediate responses from the teacher, commenting on progress, adjusting the tasks, the support or the target for the student as their problems or needs emerge. The factors which affected the learning were understood to extend far beyond the simple ability of the individual as evidenced in a scheme test [6, p. 18]. They included who the students sat with, the interest value of the lesson, the personal input from parents, their individual need for attention, for encouragement or for chivvying; their ability to attend, and to work independently, their level of motivation and so on. No simple sorting of

students on the basis of a test could achieve homogeneity in the students across all these characteristics [7, p.231].

Now while all this may sound pretty obvious, it should also be clear that these conditions are very seldom met in secondary classrooms where learning is expected to take place.

There is another source of information on the identification of conditions which optimise learning, and that is the students themselves. In our research project on differentiation in the secondary classrooms, we asked students what made most difference to how well they did in school and they itemised a number of experiences from which emerged factors remarkably similar to those identified by research.

Conclusion. According to the aim of the research we may define two models of differentiation:

1. 'Measure and Match' (as in individualised schemes).

• assumes that a stable, underlying characteristic of students is the key determinant of students' competencies.

• assumes that this key feature can be reliably measured at a point in time.

• assumes that a match can then be made between the competency of the student and the level of difficulty of curricular material or course.

• assumes matching can subsequently be fine-tuned by summative assessment

2. 'Pick and Mix'

• assumes that competencies of students are determined by a complex range of factors (motivation, classroom relationships, past learning experiences etc.)

• assumes competencies will continue to be influenced by these factors and that measures at any one point in time are useful, but not critical .

• assumes that a range of different student needs has to be taken account of in allocating work or responding to learning outcomes.

• assumes that differentiated material should cater for a range of different needs and be accessed as and when appropriate for individuals or groups Here are some of the ways teachers are exemplifying these principles in their practice.

They identify, prioritise and share with all learners challenging and achievable goals (using curriculum guidelines, prioritising goals, using progress sheets). Teachers also find manageable ways of getting and using reliable information about their students and those factors which will affect their learning, using a variety of sources of information, sharing information and establishing easy communications.

They share the management of learning with learners in order to encourage the development of autonomous learning skills and create quality time, jointing target setting and sharing professional knowledge.

Teachers use dialogue and other strategies to support students in becoming active in their own learning and involve colleagues in promoting this process, encouraging learners to share their ideas, creating opportunities for talk and discussion, offering tasks which encourage active learning. They employ assessment strategies which guide, encourage, promote and recognise progress and achievement for all learners. Teachers create a supportive and stimulating learning environment for all students in the classroom and in the schools, using a variety of teaching contexts and strategies. They create a supportive con-

text which will encourage and sustain a whole school commitment to effective differentiation practices.

In order to develop practices which are set well within these principles of practice for differentiation, teachers need to organise flexible learning contexts and to use a range of appropriate teaching approaches, find ways of obtaining and acting on information about prior learning and development and ways of agreeing and sharing learning goals and strategies with learners. They also have to find practical strategies for sharing assessment and progress with learners.

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The article deals with the problem of differentiation and individual learning needs. Approaches to learning strategies are also investigated. Supportive mechanisms of differentiation are described.

І.Ю. Архіпова
ПРИНЦИПИ ТА ПІДХОДИ ДИФЕРЕНЦІАЦІЇ
Стаття стосується теоретичних та практичних підходів диференційованого навчання. Описуються механізми застосування диференціації у навчанні.

И.Ю. Архипова
ПРИНЦИПЫ И ПОДХОДЫ ДИФФЕРЕНЦИАЦИИ
В статье рассматриваются теоретические и практические подходы к дифференцированному обучению. Описываются механизмы применения дифференциации в обучении.