

Differentiation in the YL classroom

Differentiating your instruction is modifying a lesson or a part to better meet your learners' needs. As you will have heard in the podcast, any classroom will have learners with a wide range of abilities, interests and learning preferences. But differentiation does not mean creating twenty different worksheets for twenty different learners! No, it can simply be making tweaks to your teaching so you are enabling all learners to progress. Below are some activities you can experiment. They are empowering for all learners and shouldn't take too much planning time. Happy differentiating!

Guided Visualisation

This is an empowering strategy for all learners as it gives learners time to find words to express themselves and children are naturally imaginative! You have to give clear guided questions learners can follow and 'see' what you want them to experience. The 'story frames' in their head precede language production, which often enhances fluency and generate more output. Just be aware that visualisation strategies are harder for very young learners as they often have limited life experience and concentration. It's also a great tool for comprehension and memory as images are the vehicle of memorization. And if you just had a hectic, energetic activity this can quite nicely calm them down as well! Look at the example below and see how it can be used to recall part of a story.

Okay let's think about to the story of 'The three bears'... show the book's cover page

Now, close your eyes and imagine you are baby bear...

- *Can you see your house?*
- *Can you see your bed?*
- *Now, look at your bed, what colour is it?*
- *There's a girl in your bed... !*
- *What does she look like? What is she doing?*
- *What does she sound like?*
- *How do you feel about her sleeping in your bed?*

Get students to share their ideas.

Buddy Talk Times Two (Btx2)

To give all learners opportunities to share ideas Btx2 is often used in class. Now, it is very similar to Think-Pair-Share which you probably already use but with one more opportunity

for learners to talk. Students that need more time to express their ideas can listen to their partner in the first 'Pair' stage' before being given a turn to give it a go themselves. It provides a set time and structure for thinking on a given topic so learners can formulate their ideas individually without feeling rushed into sharing. It promotes participation by allowing all learners to respond, even though it might be a little later in the sharing process. This means we avoid the dominate, strong student talking only rather than using '*teacher asks and one student answers.*'

It can be used effectively in many different stages for the lesson, for example for predicting the content of a text.

- *Show students five objects or images that relate to a story.*
- *Get them on their own to think what they think will happen in the story.*
- *Get them to turn to their elbow buddy and decide who starts sharing what they think.*
- *Then get them to turn to their back-buddies and get them to share what each team talked about.*

Graphic Organisers

Graphic Organisers are a great tool for all learners, there's a wide variety of them available so check out what suits your lesson. They provide excellent support for thinking before expressing their ideas in spoken or written form. A lovely one for YLs is a Y-chart which you can use with learners to describe what certain fruits look, feel and taste like. Here they can draw, colour or write a word in each bit of the chart, depending on their ability.

But they can also be used after the text or the teaching of a concept to check if students understand it. In this case they are even made 'real' and used with moving around.

- *Give learners two hula hoops and let them make a Venn diagram on the floor, so ensure there's some overlap!*
- *Make sure each learner has at least one flash card in front of them on the floor, in this case with different clothing items.*
- *Label the hula hoops, one is for winter clothes and the other one for summer clothes.*
- *Say one of the items, students need to listen and recognise it have the flashcard with the item.*
- *If so, they stand up and move to the hula hoops and decide where it goes, for winter, summer or maybe both?*

Using Images

As you know, an image is worth a thousand words and nothing is so engaging for young learners than colourful images they can relate to! Images are very powerful for learning, they engage students and can be useful prompts for speaking and excellent memory aids. Our brain thinks in pictures so when you see a picture and relate words to it, there's much more chance that you remember it! National Geographic Learning books have beautiful images so select one that is rich and that you think your learners can say something about. This task is a challenging one but the first step most learners can complete in one way or another:

- *Get learner to describe what they can see in the image- they can tell their elbow buddy and/or write words on a sheet of paper. For example, use a picture (or still image from a video) of children in a classroom.*
- *Now get learners to explain why they think things are the way they see them in the image. Some learners might not get to this stage as labelling what they see and/or recording this might take time. If you want everyone to get here, prepare a word list of things they can and can't see in the image to tick off.*
- *If you want to challenge some learners more, get them to think about what might be outside of the picture frame. This question is more abstract so might not be suitable for very young learners.*

Developing writing

This is where most of our learners seem to vary hugely in ability. So often when working on writing I often work at three or more different levels with my learners, who might all work on the same task but just in different, more scaffolded ways.

- *Provide a 'film roll' worksheet in which learners can draw four scenes and write something underneath.*
- *Depending on the topics they select, (for example the 4 main stages of becoming a butterfly) most learners will draw to their hearts' content.*
- *Underneath, learners can write one or more words themselves, or you can give them the words to glue on, or words to copy or even draw pencil lines for them to trace!*
- *If your learners are ready to work at sentence level, they can write themselves, or they can complete sentence starters you give them (first the egg.....etc.), or you can give them a short sentence cut up in pieces for them to order and glue on their poster.*

Now remember, all learners and in particular young learners develop in different ways at

different speeds, they are unique learners! A positive learning environment is key for helping them progress to their next level. Ensure you provide age-appropriate tasks and encouragement. Give them thinking time, grouping flexibility and break tasks into manageable chunks. Get to know your learners, so you can start where they are and take them on their *amazing* journey in learning English! Remember we differentiate to enable, not to label!

Let us know! Which of these activities have worked in your classroom?