Differentiated Instruction

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The lesson plan chosen for the differentiated instruction is” Working Collaboratively in the College EFL Classroom”. The goal is to teach team work while learning new words and concepts in English. The theme for the lesson is about a car accidents and possible causes for faults and responsibility for the fault. While this might be a good theme for the American culture it could have its problems with students who come from a culture where public transportation is prominent. Not knowing about cars would put them at a disadvantage in trying to research the other issues of the assignment. Maybe with a theme of riding the bus or taking a taxi would be more appropriate being something they are more familiar with. The second differentiation of content would be to change the content completely but still with the goal in mind of teaching teamwork. You could change it to a subject that is open-ended or maybe controversial. The theme could be how does their native country handle the problems effecting the environment or how does their society feel about inter-racial relationships. Adults are very keen on talking about themselves and sharing the differences they have observed since coming into the new culture.

Keeping in mind that the goal is to establish cooperative learning there are many ways to alter or vary the instructional strategies. Depending on the number of students in the class you have pairs, threes, small groups, men and women, panel discussions or debates and any combination where the student has to cooperate with others to fulfill the assignment. In ESL there are also reasons on how to choose the makeup of the groups. Putting those with stronger skills working with those of weak skills benefits both students and keeps all the groups competitive. Also dividing up one type of culture into the different groups helps to promote class cohesion over cultural cohesion. This doesn’t help if the students are all from the same culture. The results can be from the viewpoint of the group or from the viewpoint of the individuals of the group in that each person of the group is an expert in his part of the group assignment and the group presenting it in the whole. The experience of working with others may or may not be new depending on the cultures. Most cultures usually promote team unlike the American culture that promotes individuality. These differences in culture will have a pronounced affect in the success of the groups.

In this lesson plan the students are assessed on how well they participate collaboratively in each step. The idea behind everything is collaborating with others and can be measured in more than one way. There are many ways to vary the end product to evaluate the success of the student. There is the opportunity for each individual student to write a small essay on what they have learned about team effort and express themselves personally. You can have members of the teams critique their other teammates as long as they tell their true feeling. Content retelling is another way of assessing the ESL student to verify understanding. A one on one interview is also an excellent way to determine mastery of the lesson content and become more familiar on a individual basis with each student. The information gained might be used in more than one way is planning future lessons. By knowing and understanding your students well you can determine what the best method is for each student when it comes to determining understanding of the subject matter. Understanding becomes less and less as the complexity of the subject matter increases.

Because different ethnic or cultural groups have different histories, adaptive approaches to reality, and socialization practices, they are likely to differ in their characteristic ways of approaching learning (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). There are many ways to alter the environment to accommodate the different learning styles. One way would be to match the type of assignment with the learning style. For the visual learner the assignment could be to develop a PowerPoint presentation or maybe a chart or graph.   
For the tactile the assignment could be a puzzle or poster that takes a hands-on approach. By knowing the learning style of the students you could also determine the makeup of the groups and put those of the same style in groups with the corresponding assignment. The basic information for the classes can also be presented in different ways to cover the different styles. By presenting the same information only in different ways may make it easier for the class to understand. Field trips, role playing and games are very popular with ESL teaching and can be altered to fit the style that is determined best by the instructor. Games are very adaptable to visual, auditory and tactile learners and have proved very successful.

When we talk about adults and class content then we do have a few rules to follow if we want to make the event successful. We cannot have the pedagogical student teacher relationship. Adults have to have respect for what they already know and their experience in life. It is necessary to address and validate their concerns concerning the class and what it will teach them. They feel that their knowledge and experience is as important or more than the class content. Adults have many different learning styles and each one needs to be addressed for each student. They must feel that the content meets their needs and they will benefit from knowing it. We have to teach skills that are practical and will benefit them immediately. Adult learning is increased when the lesson builds upon ideas or information that the adult already know. This way they are able to draw on this information along with the class content to make new decisions founded in real life. Most adults feel comfortable when they have some kind of basis to work with using the new material. Adults build their confidence and competence in using the information by practicing in class. Practicing with different scenarios or situations increases the likelihood of them using this in real life. Humans are social and enjoy working together most of the time. Using groups or pairs to increase collaborative skills are very productive. Most adult learners work at a job all day and go to class in their spare time. Using games, puzzles, role playing and other methods help to break up any boredom or constant repetition. Selling the adult learner on the value of a class is necessary since they want to make sure that their money is well spent.

The andragogical model of Knowles lists the attributes of the adult learner. Adults need to know why they need to learn something. Adults need self-direction. Adults are ready to learn in order to cope with life better. Adults have a motivation from external sources for better jobs or lifestyle (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005). To be able to address all these attributes it is necessary to make changes to the lesson plans to accommodate the learners, their different styles and their desires for education.

References

Ginsberg, M. B., & Wlodkowski, R. J. (2009). Diversity and Motivation (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2005). The Adult Learner . 6th Edition, Burkington, Mass.: Elsevier.