

Effective differentiation through cooperative learning

“Every individual must, in order to acquire the art of reading in the shortest possible time, be taught quite apart from any other, and therefore there must be a separate method for each.”
(Tolstoy, 1904)



“It is not the similarity or dissimilarity of individuals that constitutes a group, but interdependence of fate.”
(Lewin, 1939).

“Differentiated instruction is a way of living in the classroom.”
(Betts, 1946)

“If you want to increase student academic achievement, give each student a friend.”
(Roseth, Fang, Johnson and Johnson, 2006)

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**Group B:
Curious about
differentiation**

**Group C:
Curious about
cooperative learning**

**Group A:
Curious about
differentiation**

**Group D:
Curious about
cooperative learning**



Initial introductions

Ask each other:

1. What teaching context(s) do you work in?
2. Why did you come to this talk?

And if time...

3. What do you think is going to happen next?

**← Differentiation:
optional discussion
question**





Key questions we will explore

1. What is differentiation (differentiated instruction) and where does it come from?
2. What different types of differentiation are there?
3. What is cooperative learning and where does it come from?
4. What activity types and strategies are used in cooperative learning?
5. How can cooperative learning help with differentiation?



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jigsaw
questions

synthesis
question



Jigsaw time!

Read your text, then in your current group discuss it for a few minutes:

- If there is anything that is unclear, ask each other about it.
- Is there anything surprising? Interesting?
- Is there anything you can add? Anything that you would dispute?
- Anything you want to ask Jason? (Check with your group members first!)





Jigsaw time!

Get together in groups of 4(ish):

- Group A are experts on the background to differentiated instruction.
- Group B are experts on how exactly we (are expected to) differentiate.
- Group C are experts on the background to cooperative learning.
- Group D are experts on different activity types and strategies in cooperative learning.

1. Introduce yourselves, then...

2. Tell each other about what you read, and then, based on what you already knew and what you've learnt today, discuss:

- **How can cooperative learning help with differentiation?**

synthesis question



Feedback

- Interesting comments, reflections, criticisms, etc.?



The rise of 'differentiated instruction / learning'

[Google Ngrams Viewer Search](#)



Typical taxonomy of differentiation

(E.g. Algozzine & Anderson 2007 [not me]) Differentiate by:

- 1. Content:** E.g. text type / exercise choice.
- 2. Process:** E.g. work alone or in group / with or without translators
- 3. Product:** E.g. choice of assignment / presentation topic.
- 4. Environment:** E.g. where student sits; use of headphones.
- 5. Tuition support:** E.g. how to scaffold learning for individuals / how much support.

My opinion - perhaps neglected?



Differentiation through cooperative learning

Within group:

- 1. Text / task choice:** E.g. In a jigsaw activity, 'stronger' group member gets more difficult text.
- 2. Task completion:** E.g. How many questions they answer: Q1-6 for everyone / 7-10 for stronger students. OR How long a writing composition is.
- 3. Role in group:** E.g. chairperson? secretary? timekeeper?
- 4. Role in presentations:** E.g. preparation of slides? compere? who presents what?

Between groups:

- 1. Speed of progress:** Faster groups get extension task.
- 2. Feedback:** Get the first group to finish to lead feedback. / Or get the first two groups to finish to write their answers/solution on the board.



Use of ability groupings to support differentiation

“It is not the similarity or dissimilarity of individuals that constitutes a group, but interdependence of fate.”
(Lewin, 1939).

- **Home/base groups** are mixed-ability: Success is measured in home group performance:
 - Students know each other well (rapport, relaxation, awareness).
 - Peer-tutoring is often from stronger to weaker (but useful for both). ← *really?*
- **Expert groups** are (usually) same-ability (e.g. students with higher levels of English sit together):
 - Their discussion can be more ‘advanced’.
 - Teacher can select text / task is for each group.
 - Teacher can provide different group support / tutoring.
 - Teacher has back up question/task(s).



Personality groups

← *My idea for adult EFL*



Let students choose one of 4 desk groups for an activity:

- 1. Chatty:** let's talk about it all the way through.
- 2. Pairs first:** I want to talk to a partner, then work in a group.
- 3. Pensive:** I need time to think – I want to do it alone, make notes and then discuss.
- 4. Research:** I want to be able to find out more, use a dictionary.



What ELT lost from cooperative learning

- **Positive interdependence:** For an activity to be truly cooperative, learners need to depend on each other to complete a given task. They must work as a team, not in competition with each other.
- **Individual accountability:** To ensure that each learner works hard and contributes, her team-mates need to depend on her in order to succeed. Success may be interpreted as group completion of a task, answering of a set of review questions, or success in a class quiz, taken individually after the team has prepared together.

How much of a loss is this?



Working effectively with mixed-ability groups in the English language classroom

← *We know all this, don't we?*

- Build rapport and trust between learners
- Celebrate difference and diversity as assets
- Vary between mixed-ability and same ability groupings, and between inter-group competition and no competition
- Win over the stronger learners: use them and challenge them
- In a multilingual class: use the learners' 'L1 assets'
- In a monolingual class: differentiate L1-use expectations



Key questions I wanted to explore

1. What is differentiation (differentiated instruction) and where does it come from?
2. What different types of differentiation are there?
3. What is cooperative learning and where does it come from?
4. What activity types and strategies are used in cooperative learning?
5. **How can cooperative learning help with differentiation?**



Effective differentiation through cooperative learning

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Keep an eye out for...

Activities for
cooperative
learning

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