



## **DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION: TO REACH & TEACH ALL LEARNERS IN AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM**

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### **Abstract**

***“We are not all the same; we do not all have the same kinds of minds; education works most effectively for most individuals if these differences ... are taken into account rather than denied or ignored.”***

*“Reflections on Multiple Intelligences”*

(Gardner, 1995)

*Inclusion in education is concerned with providing equal learning experiences and equal opportunities for all children, youth with a specific focus on groups susceptible to be left out from society life. Inclusion applies not only to children with special educational needs but even those considered to have emotional, behavioral, physical and mental disabilities but also to minority communities; gifted or talented students; children with social difficulties such as street children, children of prison inmates; people in disadvantaged and rural areas and people with vernacular mediums. The right to education Act (RTE) – 2009 necessitates the present day classroom to be inclusive in nature that is welcoming and is pedagogically capable of educating the above mentioned students arriving at its door. Inclusion in the classroom requires a Teacher / Educator to consider all the students whether normal or with special educational needs simultaneously, to plan for their learning needs and to address the curriculum. There are strategies that consider school reform and diversity within the classroom. Differentiated instruction is an example of such a strategy. Differentiated instruction is a technique that teachers use to accommodate each student’s multiple intelligences and instructional preferences. Gardner stated that human beings possess a basic set of intelligences at varying levels, and that no intelligences should be viewed as bad or good. Gardner identified the existence of eight distinct intelligences and suggested that one of the intelligence may be stronger than the other but they all are utilized by an ordinary person. In the differentiated classroom, teachers provide educational opportunities in such a way that nurture the strong area of intelligences but also allow students to use all their intelligences. Curriculum can be differentiated at 3 levels namely Content, Process and Product. Differentiation using multiple intelligences can be successfully used at process and product level. Differentiated instruction using multiple intelligences supports inclusive education as it seeks to provide meaningful instructions to students (varied backgrounds) through activity based instruction where students are working in groups, thus included in mainstream. Present paper explores the concept, strategies and role of teacher in providing differentiated instructions using multiple intelligences in an inclusive setup.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusive Education, Differentiation, Multiple Intelligences, Content, Process and Product.*



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## **INTRODUCTION**

The greatest resource of any nation is its human resource. A nation is rich or poor to the degree that its institutions enable each individual to become all that they are capable of being. Education is a major instrument of human progress and national development. The functions of education cannot be fulfilled if education caters only to a selected few. It is essential that education reaches to all. A developing country like India must capitalize on its human resources to its maximum for its progress. The RTE Act - 2009 provides a legal framework that supports free and compulsory elementary education for all the children of India, between the age group of 6-14 years. It also advocates for an education that is free from fear, stress and anxiety and of reasonable quality, based on principles of equity and nondiscrimination. This can be possible if we wholeheartedly follow the philosophy of inclusive education. Inclusive education is a real implementation of the basic human right to education. It is not only about attaining universal access to education, but universal access to meaningful and purposeful knowledge and learning for ALL. For this to happen, teachers, schools and systems may need to change so that they can better accommodate the diversity of needs that pupils have and that they can be included in all aspects of school-life.

## **WHAT IS “INCLUSIVE EDUCATION”?**

Inclusion involves all learners having access to learning and the actions taken to ensure there is no barrier of inequality, inferiority and/or discrimination. It promotes a sense of belonging on the part of each pupil in the learning environment, where everyone is accepted despite their unique differences.

- According to UNESCO, inclusive education is seen as “**a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education.**” The goal is that the whole education system will facilitate learning environments where teachers and learners embrace and welcome the challenge and benefits of diversity. Within an inclusive education approach, learning environments are fostered where individual needs are met and every student has an opportunity to succeed.

## **INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM**

We can compare an inclusive classroom with a bus station. Student passengers arrive from a variety of backgrounds with very different needs. They form a medley of diversity—academically, culturally, linguistically, economically, socially, and motivationally. The road to their education demands different teaching learning routes. The inclusion of students from

vernacular mediums, students with multiple intelligences and disabilities need teachers to re-evaluate their existing instructional strategies and identify strategies that cater to a wide variety of learning profiles. Unfortunately the instructional strategies used presently by the teachers that are catering to the average students will no longer be useful for an inclusive classroom. We know that not all students are alike, yet they are often faced with participating in a “**one-size-fits-all**” lesson despite their individual knowledge and skills. The result is alarming. Few Research findings are as follows:

- Research has proved the argument that individuals do not learn in the same way (Fischer and Rose, 2001; Green, 1999; Guild, 2001; Mulroy and Eddinger, 2003).
- While educators understand that not all learners are the same, and that their needs are diverse, few teachers accommodate these differences in their classrooms (Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, and Van Acker, 2000; Guild, 2001).
- Uniformity, rather than attending to diversity, dominates the culture of many contemporary classrooms (Gable et al., 2000; Guild, 2001; Sizer, 1999).
- Contemporary student populations are becoming increasingly academically diverse (Gable et al.,2000; Guild, 2001; Hall, 2002; Hess, 1999; McAdamis, 2001; McCoy and Ketterlin-Geller, 2004; Sizer, 1999; Tomlinson, 2004a; Tomlinson, Moon, and Callahan, 1998).

Today’s Classrooms are filled with disengaged, bored, unsuccessful and uninvolved students. There is only solution to this problem and teachers can reach all students in an inclusive classroom by **Differentiating instruction!**

It is need of the hour that all educators develop knowledge and skills related to differentiation and use in their classrooms. The present paper tries to discuss the meaning of differentiation and ways of differentiation. Paper highlights the strategies used for differentiation in an inclusive setup with practical examples. Differentiation is a challenging process; hence this paper equips teachers with few tips for successful differentiation.

#### **WHAT IS DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION?**

- “Differentiated instruction can be defined as **a philosophy of teaching that is based on the premise that students learn best when their teachers accommodate the difference in readiness levels, interests and learning profiles.** (Tomlinson, 2001, 2004).
- “Differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching that is comprehensive and guides teachers in all aspects of their practice. It does not mean grading gifted students harder

than other students or assigning extra work to keep students busy (Tomlinson, 1995). It is a continuous process of **learning about students' needs and interests** and using that knowledge to guide instruction. Teachers use their knowledge of students to determine how content is presented, what activities are appropriate, and how to guide students in demonstrating what they have learned (Tomlinson, 1999).

### **WHY DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTION?**

There are plenty of reasons to opt for differentiated instruction, few are as follows:

- Every child can learn
- All children have the right to high quality education
- Progress for all students will be expected, recognized and rewarded.
- Learners in a classroom have common needs (Group needs) and individual needs (Specific needs).
- Every student is different and he learns differently from other students.

### **THEORETICAL BASES FOR DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION**

The rationale behind differentiated instruction is **Piaget's constructivist theory**, **Vygotsky's zone of proximal development**, and **Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences**.

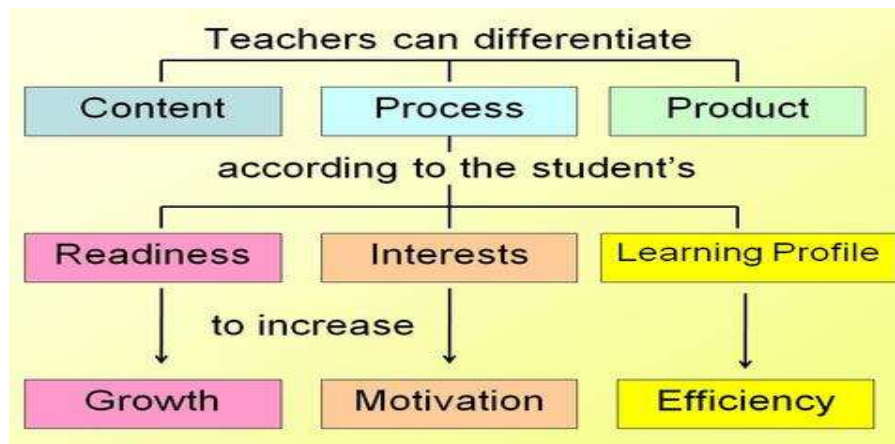
- **Piaget's** research in developmental psychology centered on the question of how knowledge develops in the mind. Piaget approached the problems of thinking and learning by focusing on the mental and cognitive processes that make them possible. According to Piaget, children shape their own conceptions of reality through continuous interaction with their environment. This theory suggests that humans create and construct knowledge as they try to bring meaning to their experiences. In the differentiated classroom, teachers should facilitate the learning process by organizing learning activities and using variety of aid material according to the level of functioning of student's cognitive structure to enable him to construct knowledge through his experiences.
- **Lev Vygotsky's Social Cognitive Development theory** asserts that culture is the prime determinant of individual development. Humans are the only species to have created culture, and every human child develops in the context of a culture. Therefore, a child's learning development is affected in ways large and small by the culture--including the culture of family environment--in which he or she is enmeshed.
  - He gave two important points, one more knowledgeable others that is peer with whom a child learns. The other important concept was the **zone of Proximal development**

(ZPD) is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and or with peer collaboration and the student's ability of solving the problems independently.

- According to Vygotsky learning occurs in this zone. In differentiated instruction, first the teacher need to identify what the students can achieve independently (level of actual development) and for further learning of the more challenging tasks, differentiate learning tasks accordingly and provide academic support from teacher as well as from more proficient peers so that students acquire necessary academic skills for independent learning (level of potential development).
- **Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences** is more widely known among educators, possibly because it reflects what teachers know about their students: that there are many different ways of being "smart." Gardner developed his theory by combining studies of the brain with research on the contextual aspects of intelligence.
  - So far, he has identified eight different types of intelligence (Gardner, 1983; 1999): *logical-mathematical, linguistic, visual-spatial, body-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic*. Schools usually concentrate on the realms of logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligence. Traditional IQ tests and most other standardized tests also measure these two types of intelligence exclusively. However, this may be beginning to change as teachers become interested in Gardner's theory and attempt to weave all eight intelligences into their teaching.
  - When teachers consider students' interest, they give students the opportunity to develop skills and concepts through the topics which students enjoy studying. When teachers consider learning styles they plan learning activities taking into account visual, auditory and kinaesthetic preferences. When teachers consider students' readiness level, they take into account the academic needs of their students that are multiple intelligences.
  - An instructional technique or program that is heavily reliant on one of the intelligences minimizes opportunities for students who may not possess a propensity to learn in this way (Gardner, 1999). Creating opportunities for all students, by enriching the classroom through multiple techniques and assessment forms, develops students and brings out their strengths (Campbell et al., 1999; Gardner, 1999; Green, 1999).

## WAYS TO DIFFERENTIATE

Three elements of the curriculum can be differentiated: the content, the process, and product (Tomlinson, 2001).



### *1. Differentiating the Content*

The content refers to the knowledge and skills that students are supposed to learn. First in differentiating content, we can adapt what we teach i.e. by varying learning outcomes on the basis of what students already know. The teacher may differentiate the content by selecting and organizing learning experiences at various levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. The second way to differentiate is to choose resources how we give students access to the learning material but keeping learning outcomes same for all students.

### *2. Differentiating the Process*

Process refers to how we engage students to learn the content so that all students are able to understand or make sense of the content and skills, as well as to incorporate the content and make connections to what is already known, understood or able to do. Based on the results of multiple intelligences inventory teacher can decide various instructional strategies. For example for teaching the same content teacher can use various strategies catering to multiple intelligences profile of the students for example: graphic organizers, composing songs, assignments, group activities, nature studies, role plays, flow charts and debates.

### *3. Differentiating the Product*

The product is essentially what the student produces at the end of the lesson to demonstrate the mastery of the content. The product is an integral component of the differentiated instruction, as the preparation of the assessments will primarily determine both the 'what' and 'how' instruction will be delivered. Assessments determine what level of understanding the students have of the subject matter. Assessments using multiple intelligences allow students to successfully display their understanding of the concept which is not possible through only

one type of test. This component allows students to display their knowledge in several ways for e.g. in English a student may be asked to compose a poem or to create a different end of the story, or to prepare a 3-dimensional model or role play the end.

### **STRATEGIES OF DIFFERENTIATION IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM**

1. **Study Corners:** Study Corners of learning can be set up at various places in a classroom. These corners are set up depending upon the difficulty level of the concept. If a child is well versed with content he will choose a corner where teacher has planned for advanced display of skills in that particular topic. Corners involve flexible grouping because not all students need to utilize all corners. Study corner teaching is ideal for use in the inclusive classroom since it allows teachers to work with individual students or small groups of learners without needing to push them to achieve the desired objectives.
2. **Project-based Learning:** Project-based learning is one of the best ways to differentiate instruction. Group or individual projects can be allotted to the students. If it is a group project, than students who are academically weak or belong to categories mentioned in the definition get opportunity for peer support which in turn leads to accomplishment of results by all the students. If a child is not comfortable with group learning he can select individual projects.
3. **Tiered assignments:** Tiered assignments are the learning activities designed at different levels according to students' learning preferences viz. Gardner's multiple intelligences. Tiered assignments can be planned by teachers both for Process and Product. For example tiered assignments in Process for a science class (Topic: Functioning of Heart) , based on the students' multiple intelligences, learning tasks can be differentiated to achieve the same objective viz. Tier 1: The students who have **visual/spatial intelligence** can be asked to prepare working model of heart. Tier 2: Students with have **bodily/kinesthetic intelligence** may be asked to Role play the functioning of heart. Tier 3: Students with **verbal/linguistic intelligence** can be asked to write a description about the functioning of heart. Students with **Musical intelligence** can be asked to compose a poem on functioning of heart. In this way all students with varied intelligence profile can be given learning tasks with the same outcome. The assignments also meet the needs of at-risk students as these students can complete the task with the group. Activities can be designed for small groups as well as individual students
4. **Entry Level Assessment:** Assess learners' knowledge and skills before beginning a unit of study. Also identify their learning profile with the help of inventories so as to plan

learning tasks at process level and assessments at product phase. Entry level assessment helps in planning for study corners or support needed for a particular child.

5. **Use Technology:** Supplement class instruction with online classes or learning opportunities such as webinars, online chats, blogs or social networks. Use new book formats such as CD-ROM or downloadable storybooks in which the size of text and pace of presentation can be controlled by the student. Use CD-ROM encyclopedias, which make it easy to locate information without applying skills related to alphabetical order. All these will help varied learners in an inclusive classroom.

### **TEACHERS ROLE IN SUCCESS OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION**

Success or failure of differentiation in an inclusive set up depends upon teachers and their planning. Here are few essentials teachers must consider before differentiating:

1. Identify your own **dominant intelligence** and avoid planning learning tasks only based on your learning preference.
2. Deliberately plan part of a lesson using different **learning preference** that you do not usually address.
3. Determine ways of learning that **motivate** your students the most that is their group multiple intelligences profile and individual profile. Use the information to plan the learning tasks.
4. Begin by providing a single **choice to a standard assignment**, making sure that each choice is equally respectful, takes roughly the same amount of time and satisfies the same expectations. Later, provide a few options, supporting students as necessary as they work at their choices.
5. Create assessments that will allow you to give **meaningful feedback** to the students about their learning and also about your teaching.
6. Encourage **student reflection** and involve students in activities that require them to engage in assessment as learning. Talk with students about times they will want to use areas of strength.
7. Develop a habit of **self – reflection** so as to refine your instructional approaches.
8. Most important have a **positive attitude** towards inclusion and differentiation as both require a lot of patience, perseverance and hard work. Miracles don't happen overnight teachers must keep this in mind.

### **CONCLUSION**

Differentiated instruction is helpful to any teacher and critical for teachers in inclusive classrooms. Differentiated instruction provides a vehicle for meeting students' needs. "The



fact that students differ may be inconvenient, but it is inescapable. Adapting to that diversity is the inevitable price of productivity, high standards and fairness to kids.” – TheodoreSizer (1985). With differentiated instruction, the teacher aims to create learning situations that match students’ current abilities and preferred multiple intelligences so, as to **TEACH & REACH ALL** students in an **INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM**.

**“Strength lies in DIFFERENCES, not in SIMILARITIES”**

- **Steven R Covey**

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