



Cap sur l'école inclusive
en Europe



Resource sheet

Differentiated school education: individualization and didactic personalization

Section D for/Define

1/ Report of the situation:

Not all students in a classroom learn a subject in the same way or share the same level of ability. Teachers must consider a wide range of learning modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.) in designing instruction. They have to know their students well so they can provide each one with experiences and tasks that will improve learning.

2/ Demonstration-approach:

This sheet has three main objectives :

- to show what is differentiated school education and in which way this can be done;
- to explain why differentiated education is increasingly needed in our schools;
- to provide a summary scheme of the characteristics of an individualized and customized didactic approach.

What is “Differentiated school education!”?

Differentiation is a way of teaching; it's not a program or package of worksheets. It asks teachers to know their students well so they can provide each one with experiences and tasks that will improve learning.

Differentiation means giving students multiple options for taking in information.

Differentiating instruction means that you observe and understand the differences and similarities among students and use this information to plan instruction. Here is a list of some key principles that form the foundation of differentiating instruction.

Differentiated school education is a method of designing and delivering instruction to best reach each student.

One of the most important principles of inclusive education is that no two learners are alike, and so inclusive schools place great importance on creating opportunities for students to learn and be assessed in a variety of ways. Teachers in inclusive schools therefore must consider a wide range of learning modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.) in designing instruction.

Certainly this enhances the way in which educators provide supports and accommodations for students with disabilities, but it also diversifies the educational experience of all students. Differentiated instruction increases student engagement.

As Tomlinson writes, “at its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.” (1) Teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile:

1. **Content** – what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information;
2. **Process** – activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content;
3. **Products** – culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit;
4. **Learning environment** – the way the classroom works and feels. (2)

Content

Examples of differentiating content at the elementary level include the following:

1. Using reading materials at varying readability levels;
2. Putting text materials on tape;
3. Using spelling or vocabulary lists at readiness levels of students;
4. Presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means;
5. Using reading buddies;
6. Meeting with small groups to re-teach an idea or skill for struggling learners, or to extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners.

Process

Examples of differentiating process or activities at the elementary level include the following:

1. Using tiered activities through which all learners work with the same important understandings and skills, but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity;
2. Providing interest centers that encourage students to explore subsets of the class topic of particular interest to them;
3. Offering manipulatives or other hands-on supports for students who need them;
4. Varying the length of time a student may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a struggling learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.

Products

Examples of differentiating products at the elementary level include the following:

1. Giving students options of how to express required learning (e.g., create a puppet show, write a letter, or develop a mural with labels);
2. Using rubrics that match and extend students' varied skills levels;
3. Allowing students to work alone or in small groups on their products;
4. Encouraging students to create their own product assignments as long as the assignments contain required elements.

Learning environment

Examples of differentiating learning environment at the elementary level include:

1. Making sure there are places in the room to work quietly and without distraction, as well as places that invite student collaboration;
2. Providing materials that reflect a variety of cultures and home settings;
3. Setting out clear guidelines for independent work that matches individual needs;

4. Developing routines that allow students to get help when teachers are busy with other students and cannot help them immediately;
5. Helping students understand that some learners need to move around to learn, while others do better sitting quietly.

Personalization and didactic individualization

Personalization and individualization are a way of teaching that seek to develop, in any situation, every person with a disability and no, the maximum possible competence in as many fields as possible.

The goal of developing each student's personal study method and the ability to approach critical and meta-cognitive skills is crucial to the modern concept of teaching.

The term "personalization" needs to be distinguished from the term "differentiation", in relation to the opportunity of choice that is offered to the student than what to learn, when and how.

Sometimes "personalization" is improperly used as a synonym of "individualization": the two terms have two distinct pedagogical implications.

Individualization refers to all of the teaching strategies that aim to ensure that students achieve the same learning objectives at different times at different times and different ways to cognitive styles. The teacher manages and chooses the best solution for learners.

Personalization intends to enhance the cognitive potential of learners, their biography, intelligence, sensitivity and skills (including emotional ones) that characterize each person as a person in order to achieve a form of cognitive excellence by developing all the own attitudes, abilities and talents. The learning outcomes and objectives will therefore be different for each student, and it will not be possible to establish them from the beginning of the learning. It is not so much the type of skills to acquire to influence the results, but the different degree of skill in using these same skills.

Here is a summary scheme of the features of an individualized and customized didactic approach.

Class group Individualization	Equal goals
	Different strategies
	It guarantees the Right to Equality

Integrated approach based NEIGHBORS of the pupil Customization	Different goals
	Different strategies
	It guarantees the Right to Diversity

In the didactic individualization, objectives are the same for all pupils in the class (knowledge, skills, abilities), while changing the strategies adopted by each person for their achievement in terms of time, materials and cognitive styles learning of every single person.

In the didactic personalization, the goals can be changed according to each person's working situation and accordingly, depending on the abilities, interests, motivations and potential of each individual person.

Over the years, an intense debate has taken place over the personalization inherent in both the meaning of the term itself and the possible limitations of the approach. (3)

The school should adopt an integrated approach because, as Guerra says, this would allow them to pursue the logic of the right to equality and the right to diversity. In other words, the task of the school is "to teach a few things to everyone, using every means available (individualization) and to allow / stimulate the ability for each student to conduct personal learning paths." (4)

Redistribution of resources

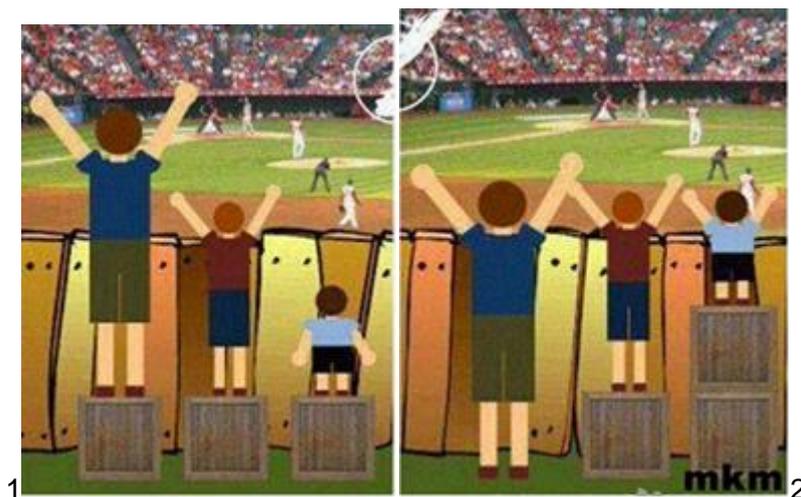


Figure 1 and 2- Two levels of resource distribution for a common goal

Children in these images have the common goal of seeing the baseball game. The left image represents an equal distribution of resources for everyone but not everyone reaches the same goal of watching the game.

The image on the right represents an approach that involves a redistribution of resources, given the context and functioning of people.

This approach allows everyone to achieve the same goal, that is to look at the baseball game.

Taking the thought of Don Milani, we could say that the concept of justice, in school as well as in social life, is not to give all the same things, but in giving to each what he needs. As Don Milani says,

"A class (or a school) is a unity made up of differences, where Marco is not the twentieth part of a class of twenty pupils (he can not be homologated), but he is Marco with his story, his uniqueness, his family, his problems, his doings, which are his and unmistakable." (5)

NOTES

NOTES

(1) TOMLINSON Carol Ann (August, 2000). Differentiation of Instruction in the Elementary Grades. ERIC Digest. ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. - Claudia Montedoro, La personalizzazione dei percorsi di apprendimento e insegnamento. Modelli, metodi e strategie didattiche, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001.

(2) Ivi.

(3) Claudia Montedoro uses the terms individualization and personalization as synonyms, referring to a training course aimed at adapting educational and educational actions to the individual characteristics of students so as to support them in improving their possibilities.

- MONTEDORO Claudia, *La personalizzazione dei percorsi di apprendimento e insegnamento. Modelli, metodi e strategie didattiche*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2001.

Marco Guspini, an adult learning expert, defines personalization as the exploitation of the potential that everyone can express through a complete sharing, collaborative and non-competitive interaction, empathic participation in the entire development process. According to Guspini, personalizing means using a broad set of strategies that enhance the biography, intelligence, sensitivity and skills that characterize each person so that it can achieve a form of cognitive excellence by developing the best of their abilities and talents.

- GUSPINI Marco (a cura di), *Personalizzare l'apprendimento in ambito EdA*, Roma, Aincia, 2005.
- GUSPINI Marco (a cura di), *Complex Learning*, Roma, Learning Community, 2008.

Mario Martinelli distinguishes individualization from personalization. He refers to the individualization of the theories of activists, elaborated at the beginning of the twentieth century, by Montessori, Decroly, Freinet, Dewey and Claparede. Martinelli defines personalization as the pedagogical response to the demands of promoting learning processes and training paths. This means organizing all the teaching and training activities in order to promote the best development of each student's abilities. Personalization aims to offer everyone the same learning opportunity, so as to contain the professional disadvantage and the abandonment of school, by developing meta-cognitive skills of self-reflection, awareness, self-learning and professional orientation. Martinelli specifies that customization must be distinguished from individualism. Personalization is the point of balance between the specific characteristics of individual culture and belonging, between the process of personal learning and the social construction of knowledge. In accordance with this definition, customization is based on recognizing differences as a value. Differences that need to be identified and known to differentiate learning pathways, but in a context of solidarity, collaboration, common interests, equal respect and support.

- MARTINELLI Mario, *La personalizzazione didattica*, Brescia, La Scuola, 2004, p. 13.
- MARTINELLI Mario, *In gruppo si impara. Apprendimento cooperativo e personalizzato dei processi didattici*, Torino, SEI, 2004, p. 14

According to Benedetto Vertecchi, customizing a learning path means adapting training objectives to the results that each student is expected to be able to achieve and then adapt the training goals to the expected successes. Vertecchi hypothesizes that this approach could be seemingly realistic if compared to the individualization approach, which claims to allow everyone to achieve the same results. However, if a teacher has low expectations about a student, he probably will achieve lower results than anticipated, with a tendency to get worse.

- VERTECCHI Benedetto, *Le sirene di Malthus. Pensieri sulla scuola*, Roma, Aincia, 2001, pp.82.83.

(4) GUERRA Luigi, *Individualizzazione – personalizzazione*, Istituto Pedagogico Bolzano, articolo tratto dall'indirizzo http://data.over-blog-kiwi.com/0/39/86/31/201301/ob_f339d3_scheda-individualizzazione-personalizzazione.pdf

(5) Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa – Ediz. speciale «Quarant'anni dopo»*, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Firenze, 2007

