Toolkit for inclusive teaching strategies

How to differentiate learning online

Module 6
Module 6: How to differentiate learning online

🏁 Start here!

You have six sections to complete in Module 6:

- Introduction
- Principle 1: The content: what learners learn
- Principle 2: The process: how learners learn
- Principle 3: The product: how learners demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge or skills
- Apply the strategies
- Put it into practice

Then we recommend you set up a group discussion to:

- Reflect on the module

Before you begin, we recommend that you get yourself a notebook for taking notes as you work through the toolkit.
Introduction

What’s Module 6 about?

Case study

Before we start, read the case study. Do you have any students in your class like Sandra?

🔍 Sandra

Sandra is extremely frustrated with school. Although she makes some effort to study, she is still falling behind. Right now Sandra is very stressed as she has a written exam tomorrow, but the only learning materials available to Sandra are her textbooks which are above her reading level, and her own notes which are poorly written and organised.

💬 Why do we need to differentiate online learning?

Differentiation means adjusting your lessons for the different needs of your learners. Differentiation could involve changing the content, delivery, or methods of learning - to ensure that every person learns in a way that works for them.

Differentiation in teaching is important because (as Sandra might tell you) a one-size-fits-all approach doesn’t work.

In this module, you’ll read three principles for differentiating, and strategies to use in your upcoming classes. You may already be using many of these techniques in your online classroom.

The strategies in this module are especially beneficial for boosting engagement and enhancing motivation to learn, while also allowing learners to take more responsibility for their learning.

📝 Are you ready to start?

Take out your notebook. As you go through this module, take notes on:

- What inclusive strategies you already use
- Anything you hadn’t considered before
- What other small improvements you can make to create a more inclusive practice in your classroom
Principles and strategies

Read about three principles for differentiation that lead to your learners feeling more engaged and the strategies for using them in your classroom.

Principle 1: The content: what learners learn

Before you begin this section make a note on the following question:

Think back to your last lesson...
What percentage of the learning content was written?
What percentage was audio?

What is this principle?

Often our learning material consists of readings, and content-heavy presentations.

Differentiating content means providing different ways to access the learning material. By having different options (e.g. slides with text, links to video clips, audio recordings, and graphics), learners can choose how they learn.

The first step when considering how to differentiate in the classroom is to get to know the students in your classroom. One way to do this is to interview your learners about their favourite ways of learning and how confident they feel completing certain tasks.

How does this benefit our learners?

By providing a variety of ways to access information, learners who struggle with phonological processing don’t need to only rely on written texts for comprehension.

How can you apply this in your online classroom?

- **Strategy 1:** Vary the way you present information in class. For example:
  - Include screenshots and images throughout a presentation for visual aids
  - Engage learners with your voice, body language and by using real-life objects where appropriate

- **Strategy 2:** Try recording a video of yourself presenting what was previously written content, so that learners are able to read, see and hear the presentation. These presentations are reusable for future classes too! Being able to access the video before or after the session will have added benefits for learners who need adjustments to pace and schedule, too.
Prepare to discuss:

On a scale of 1-10, how good are you at accessing and understanding printed text? (1 = not good, 10 = very good)

Now, imagine you had given yourself a score of 1…

● How would you feel in your most recent lesson?
● What could you do to make this lesson more inclusive?
Principle 2: The process: how learners learn

Before you begin this section make a note on the following question:

Do all learners in your class work at the same pace?

What is this principle?

How do your different learners understand or make sense of information, ideas and skills?

This principle is about considering different learning paces and preferences and adapting the digital learning environment accordingly.

Some learners pick things up quickly, while others need more time. Often in a traditional classroom, tasks are completed in a set amount of time, which can mean faster learners can feel held up, and slower learners can feel rushed.

Every learner comes with their own preference for engaging with tasks. Some learners enjoy consolidating learning by discussing an idea, while others prefer to touch and explore concepts physically. Some prefer to work in groups, while others need independent study. And some students require the support of a teacher.

How does this benefit our learners?

Using a flexible approach to the process gives learners more autonomy over their learning. It also helps SEN students feel like they're not falling behind or holding the lesson up, which can reduce confidence and self-esteem.

How can you apply this in your online classroom?

- **Strategy 1:** Set work to be asynchronous.
- **Strategy 2:** Provide space for collaborating with other learners in groups.
- **Strategy 3:** Plan to use break-out rooms (or ‘stations’ if teaching a physical class) with different inputs. Allow learners to choose a station depending on how they want to interact with the material.

Prepare to discuss:

What are some challenges to differentiating 'the process' in your specific context?
What are some benefits?
Principle 3: The product: how learners demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge or skills

Before you begin this section read the following popular quote.

- How much do you agree?

“Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

What is this principle?

The 'product', or what learners produce, refers to how learners demonstrate their understanding of knowledge or a skill. For each task, offer more than one way in which learners can show their understanding.

For example, for a given task, you could give learners a choice to write an essay, or prepare a slide deck, or create a website, or submit a video, or submit an audio recording depending on their skills and preference.

You could also give learners options for how they produce the product. For example, using speech-to-text tools to help communicate ideas.

How does this benefit our learners?

Offering different ways to demonstrate understanding benefits both learners and teachers by leading to a greater sense of ownership of product. It also allows learners to use their strengths, and further helps build the confidence of SEN learners by not forcing them to do what they're less able to.

Speech-to-text tools are useful in the online classroom and especially helpful for:

- learners who forget their ideas once they shift to writing
- learners who struggle with getting any words on the page at all (feeling unable to transfer their thoughts)
- learners who are anxious about their spelling and grammar.

How can you apply this in your online classroom?

Different options for creating and sharing work online could include:

- **Strategy 1**: Presenting work visually in a slide deck, or on a platform like Jamboard or Flipgrid.
- **Strategy 2**: Submitting an audio or video recording answering the assignment using software like Loom.
- **Strategy 3**: Group work where learners take on roles related to their strengths.
- **Strategy 4**: Give learners the option to hand in an ‘offline’ assignment. For example, completing a hands-on activity with materials from their home and taking a photo.
Prepare to discuss:

- How can you find out from your learners about what works best for them?
Check your understanding

Draw a line between the principle, strategy and benefits to make groups. Include one principle, one strategy, and one benefit for each group.

Then make a note for each group with an idea of which learners in your class would benefit from this, or a challenge you see with using this strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Differentiate the content…</td>
<td>a. …by recording a short video reading a text aloud for learners to watch if they choose, so that…</td>
<td>a. …learners feel a greater sense of ownership of output!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Differentiate the process…</td>
<td>b. …by giving the option of submitting an essay or a mindmap with accompanying explanation, so that…</td>
<td>b. …learners can complete tasks at their own pace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Differentiate the product</td>
<td>c. by setting tasks to be done asynchronously, so that…</td>
<td>c. learners who struggle with phonological processing are supported!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answers: 1,a,c. 2,c,b. 3,b,a.
Apply to your classroom

Think about an activity that you are planning to do with your class in the next week. Make notes about:

What changes can you make to differentiate:

- the content (what learners learn)
- the process (how learners learn)
- the product (how learners demonstrate their understanding of knowledge or skills).

Make some notes to share with in your group discussion on:

- the changes you will make
- the benefits for your learners
- any challenges you see with using this strategy.

👏 Nice work. You’re done for today! Your next task is to meet your group to discuss your ideas from the module.
Reflect on the module as a group

Welcome to your group discussion for Module 6 on differentiation. This is a self-facilitated peer-learning session. Please follow the guide to go through the activities. Nominate a person for each letter A, B, and C.

When it is your turn, lead the activity by reading the instructions aloud to the group and ask any questions. See below for details of each activity.

Note: The group discussion is a powerful way to share ideas and build a sense of community and accountability around inclusivity at your school. However if you're not able to join a group discussion in your context, the activities can also be completed alone as reflection and review tasks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity leader</th>
<th>Activity name</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Check in and introductions</td>
<td>Five minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Group review</td>
<td>Ten minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Group reflection</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check in and introduction - led by Teacher ‘A’

Before you begin, prepare for the session with a ‘check in’. A check in is a short pause at the beginning of a meeting to reflect on how you feel at this moment.

It might be that you have just had a very stressful class, or maybe you were running late today and feel in a rush. Sharing with the group helps to build empathy. When we have shared we are ready to begin the discussion.

Take a moment to look at the traffic light. Which colour of the traffic light are you today? Then, introduce yourself: tell the group your name and share which colour you have chosen and why.

Spend about five minutes on this section.
Review - led by Teacher ‘B’
Choose a strategy and take turns and tell each other one or two things about this strategy. Spend about ten minutes on this section.

1. Differentiating the content: what learners learn
2. Differentiating the process: how learners learn
3. Differentiating the product: how learners demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge or skills

For example:
Since reading the module, have you used any of the strategies?
Do you have any more examples of how this principle can be applied in the online classroom?
Have you used any of these in your online classroom? Was it successful?

Reflect - led by Teacher ‘C’
Discuss the following reflection questions from the module as a group. Spend about 15 minutes on this section.

1. On a scale of 1-10, how good are you at accessing and understanding printed text? (1 = not good, 10 = very good).
   Now, imagine you had given yourself a score of 1. How would you feel in your most recent lesson? What could you do to make this lesson more inclusive?

2. What are some challenges to differentiating 'the process' in your specific context? What are some benefits?

3. How can you find out from your learners about what works best for them?

If you’re interested in this topic check out the links for further reading: