

**Differentiated Instruction for English Language Learners**

by

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### **Abstract**

This capstone project aims to support teachers who work with English Language Learners (ELLs), also known as English Learners (ELs). The goal of this capstone is to help teachers integrate differentiated instruction (DI) for ELLs into their regular lessons. The one-size-fits-all strategy teachers have been using for so long is no longer appropriate for our students' needs, preferences, and learning styles. To enhance students' learning, teachers must differentiate instruction and offer them a variety of learning opportunities. This capstone project shows that ELL students make academic progress when DI is implemented. Their success is influenced by the overall school setting, not just classroom instruction. Research in this project has revealed effective instructional strategies necessary to provide support to all ELLs in the classroom. These effective instructional strategies are also included in the professional development designed to help teachers at Discovery Charter School support ELLs.

*Keywords:* ELLs, acquisition, differentiated Instruction, professional development

## Chapter 1: Introduction

English Language Learners (ELLs), sometimes known as English Learners (ELs), are a rapidly rising group in public schools in the United States. In fall of 2019, about 5 million ELLs attended public schools in the United States, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020). English Language learners frequently struggle to completely comprehend the language of instruction in their classrooms. Learning English is a multi-year process. It is contingent on the comprehension, quality, and durability of language and subject learning experiences. While advocating for fair testing is vital, the most important thing that can be done is to improve instruction to make it accessible to ELLs. To support ELLs who struggle, we as educators must differentiate our instruction. Teachers should be consistently thinking how to make an activity or a lesson accessible to everyone (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2019).

Differentiating education is "mixing up" what happens in the classroom so that ELLs and all students have a variety of ways to absorb knowledge, make sense of ideas, and articulate what they have learned. It cannot take place without first knowing the basics of both intercultural communication and the language acquisition process, including characteristics of each stage of language development. Matching these predictable stages of language acquisition with specific instructional strategies will result in meaningful input that discretely scaffolds the learning of ELLs in order to maximize their achievement in the content areas. (Subban, 2006)

In order to ensure that ELLs enjoy equal access to the curriculum and, therefore, an equal opportunity to realize their maximum potential, every teacher must embrace the perception that she or he is responsible for the learning of each of her or his students. In other words, the learning of the English language learner is the full responsibility of the classroom/ content teachers as well as the responsibility of the English as a second language teacher or bilingual

education teacher. As a whole, we need to tailor our instruction and assessments so that they are appropriate for ELLs in their classrooms (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2019).

When implementing differentiated teaching for ELLs, it is critical that it be written in great detail and clarity. Teachers from general education and ENL collaborate to get to an agreement on the terminology of adjustments and differentiation. This can be done by critically considering ELLs' interests, needs, and backgrounds while introducing differentiation. Students will have more options and flexibility in how they learn, and teachers will be able to modify learning and instruction. Daily, ELLs need to be able to successfully access content and participate fully in learning activities. It is important to know ELL's strengths and weakness in English before planning the differentiated instruction. Setting a common content objective and differentiating the language objective is an important part of this process.

The implementation of differentiated instruction is a challenging endeavor. It will take several shapes based on the teacher's and students' personalities. However, when teachers use it more frequently, it should become more familiar to them (Baecher et al., 2012). Teachers should explore differentiation rather than thinking of it as unique learning programs for each student. Addressing the needs of English language learners can provide teachers with an opportunity to gain new skills, materials, resources, and approaches that will help all students in the classroom (Baecher et al., 2012).

One of the goals of this project is to provide a trustworthy source of assistance for teachers who want to construct learning environments that address the range of academically diverse classrooms. Another purpose is to assist these teachers in determining what differentiated instruction is, why it is important for all students, how to start planning for it, and how to get comfortable enough with student differences to make school enjoyable for all students. In

chapter 2 I will discuss relevant research related to the problem as well as previous theories regarding differentiated instructions. Chapter 3 will be covering general guidelines for teaching ELLs, providing background regarding the second language acquisition process, and specifying essential assignment and instructional strategies that are appropriate for ELLs at all proficiency levels.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The surge in globalization and migration has made the field of English language teaching to be highly diverse and thus, the need for the continuing need for differentiated instruction (Raza, 2020). However, the increasing classroom diversity is challenging teachers every day to create teaching strategies that continuously help them successfully facilitate ELL experiences of diverse student populations. Today, teachers are finding it helpful to use differentiated instruction when dealing with diverse learners. This has culminated in the one-size-fits-all approach in educational materials such as textbooks, which seeks to cover a broader student population. Even researchers among them argue that differentiated instruction can meet ELLs' language needs and should be adapted to a particular student population.

As educators continue to grapple with appropriate instruction and content for ELLs, empirical studies have made it clear that educational parity can only be attained if ELLs have the same opportunity to learn similar academic content as native English-speaking students (Aljaser, 2019; Bondie et al., 2019; Borja et al., 2015; Förster et al., 2018; Raza, 2020). This goal can only be achieved through differentiated instruction as it considers various factors that impact learning such as the diversity of students within a classroom. When working with students from diverse economic and socio-cultural backgrounds, teachers must consider a more comprehensive teaching approach, notably differentiated instruction to deliver the subject matter. Diversity is the main factor that is consistent in ELL education. The diversity leads to a classroom environment that comprises mixed-ability learners and where each learner has a different Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Lev Vygotsky (1978) defines a ZPD as the difference between what a student can do without assistance and what they can do with the teacher's guidance. Diversity in instruction is the only solution to this issue of learner diversity.

According to Tomlinson (2017), this solution is known as differentiated instruction. Tomlinson argues that some students require more teacher guidance, repetition, and more time to understand the taught material. Therefore, for teachers to explicitly address the diversity challenge among ELLs, they must group these students according to their ability levels. In so doing, the teacher will be able to cater to the students in the same classroom by delivering differentiated instruction. The project answers the research questions of, what is differentiated instruction? What are the best methods for teaching English Language learners?

This Chapter reviews qualitative and quantitative literature on differentiated instruction for ELLs. First, I will present the theories of constructivism, cognitivism, and humanism, which help explain why DI is important for ELLs and how teachers can differentiate instruction for ELLs. Next, I will discuss the themes emerged from the literature: the effects of differentiated instruction on ELLs and means of differentiation through content, process, and product.

### **Learning Theories of Constructivism, Cognitivism, and Humanism**

Having a good learning theory enables teachers to chart their teaching material and ensure the session is relevant to the learner. Teachers can use varied learning theories to create effective and authentic learning experiences for each learner. However, the emergence of new technologies and the concept of student-centered learning have created new challenges for educators, including how to teach diverse students including ELLs. Moreover, the teacher now has multiple roles in the classroom, including facilitator, instructor, and coordinator. From this perspective, numerous learning theories can benefit teachers in their delivery of differentiated instruction, particularly in the technology-supported class environment. The existing research has mainly drawn on the humanistic learning theory developed by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, and James Bugental (Tomlinson, 2017); Jean Piaget's cognitive learning (Tomlinson,

2017); and constructivism learning theories (Tomlinson, 2017). These theoretical perspectives can also help teachers and researchers to understand the importance of differentiated instruction for ELLs. In the following section, I will elaborate on these theoretical perspectives respectively.

### **Constructivism**

Research on differentiated instruction for ELLs draws on the theory of constructivism (e.g., Johnson, 2019), which posits that students construct knowledge rather than passively take in information (Vygotsky, 1978). The underlying idea behind the theory is that learning is an active process and new knowledge comes from prior knowledge. As human beings experience the world and reflect upon these experiences, they use the added information to build their own representations and new knowledge. In an ELL classroom, the theory of constructivism helps in the learning and teaching process, where the constructivist teacher believes that students learn by making inferences to construct what is right or wrong through personal experiences (Tomlinson, 2015). Learners are unable to instantly understand new knowledge presented to them. Instead, learners construct their own knowledge based on their prior experiences. In a constructivist classroom, the teacher's role is to shift the student's thinking rather than standing in front of the classroom and passing on new information to students. The teacher interacts with students and the teacher guides the students to reflect on past knowledge and experiences to achieve self-discovery of new knowledge. That is, constructivism makes a clear connection to differentiated instruction in that it highlights the importance of students' prior knowledge, including their life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and their talents and skills. Since ELLs usually have varied knowledge and skills, teachers need to give the instructions differently.

### **Cognitive Theory**

Jean Piaget (1963) developed the cognitive learning theory, which favors a learner-centered approach to teaching. Just like the constructivism theory, the cognitive learning theory argues that students tend to remember things that are meaningful to them (Johnson, 2019). Therefore, this theory also works with the student's previous knowledge. Piaget refers to the prior knowledge as schema or the internal knowledge structure. The underlying idea is that students obtain new information and compare it with the information they already have or the schema or the existing internal knowledge. After receiving new information, the students combine the schema and combine it to create a final product which is new knowledge. Cognitive learning largely relies on the use of organizers to combine new and old information. By using such tools, teachers can convert hard topics into meaningful and more relevant topics making it easier for students to learn.

Considering that cognitive theory is all about ensuring that learning is meaningful, it can be applied to the concept of differentiation which aims to confront a student's individual needs to create an individualized learning process and experience. In a cognitive classroom environment, the teacher uses technology to help better individualize learning activities (Johnson, 2019). In turn, this creates a meaningful learning experience that aligns with the student's prior knowledge and experience such that the learner finds a way to stimulate added information into the memory. Through differentiation instruction, students obtain personal and meaningful learning experiences. Different from the cognitive theory's focus on how information is processed, another theoretical perspective used in the research is humanistic learning theory which involves the entire person emotionally and socially as I discuss next.

### **Humanistic Learning Theory**

American psychologists, including Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and James Bugental, developed the humanistic theory as a response to the common educational theories of behaviorism (Johnson, 2019; Tomlinson, 2017). Abraham Maslow first pioneered the humanism movement and later Carl Rogers and James Bugental reviewed and expanded it. The humanist theorists believe that other psychological theories including behaviorism held a negative perception of learners. For instance, they argued that behaviorism theories suggested that students only acted in a bad or good manner because of the punishment or reward attached to the behavior. On the contrary, Humanist theorists argue that students are inherently good and will act in a good manner so long as their needs are fulfilled. As such, students may be trained based on the desire for good rewards. The idea behind humanistic language education is that learning should involve the entire person—emotionally and socially—rather than just the mind. The humanistic learning theory advocates for student-centered and personalized learning. So, it is important for teachers to know more about their Ells as individuals and learn about their backgrounds and lives. Drawing on the humanistic learning theory, the teacher's overall role is to be a role model and a facilitator, not necessarily to be the one standing in front of the class imparting information into the learners' heads (Förster et al., 2018). Humanistic teachers concentrate on assisting students to sharpen their learning skills. On the other hand, the student's role is to understand the learning choices. Therefore, in the humanistic learning theory, teachers achieve success by helping students to understand the best ways to learn.

Learning theories of constructivism, cognitivism, and humanism all argue for a student-centered teaching approach. In the constructivist classroom, the students reflect on past knowledge and experiences to achieve self-discovery of new knowledge. On the other hand, in the humanistic class, the teacher encourages students to explore diverse learning methods and

choose the best method to learn. Finally, in the cognitive classroom, the teacher focuses on creating a meaningful learning experience that aligns with the student's schema or prior knowledge. These theories will help me to analyze the effects of differentiated instructions and the factors influencing differentiated instruction, and the ways to differentiate instructions.

### **The Effects of Differentiated Instruction on ELLs**

Research has shown that differentiated instruction can help improve students' academic achievements, self-esteem, and engagement in learning. Indeed, ELLs benefit more when teachers adopt differentiated instruction, which provides students with a variety of entrance points and learning opportunities into the curriculum, with outcomes that are tailored to match each student's academic needs. According to Cardimona (2016), Differentiated instruction improves ELLs' problem-solving skills. Students are given the opportunity to practice and take risks in a safe environment. The findings of this study are consistent with Vygotsky's perspective on learning, and they can provide secondary mathematics teachers of ELLs with useful teaching techniques that encourage student engagement, vocabulary growth, and autonomous problem-solving.

### **Achievement**

Various studies have revealed the positive effects of differentiated instruction on students' achievements, including reading, language skills, content area like math and science. According to Johnson (2021), when it comes to addressing students' varying academic achievements and success levels, differentiated instruction (DI) has been advocated as the answer. He explained that to further increase students' achievements, teachers must implement differentiation instruction. DI enables teachers to change how students work—alone or in groups, using aural or visual tools. Johnson has also found that differentiated instruction has some

elements that are more effective at raising student achievements than others. These elements include making lessons accessible for all students, targeted and individualized lessons, and the variety of teaching methods that teachers can apply. Another study done by Dunn et al. (2019) at an elementary school found that students whose learning requirements were met through DI, outperformed peers who were not given the same accommodations on a statistically significant basis. At the start of each school year, learning styles inventories should be given to all students to provide the teachers with this crucial information. Dunn observed two different 4<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. One class implemented differentiated instruction during their reading period and the other 4<sup>th</sup> grade class did not apply DI. Differentiation in reading was based on learning preferences, with students choosing how to show that they understood the reading and the comprehension aspect. This class was the only one in the building to have all of its students pass the state exam in the reading section. Students in this class were able to apply 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading skills. Skills advanced reading comprehension techniques include understanding the material, drawing conclusions, figuring out the main idea of a passage, and finding important details.

In their rigorous literature review analysis of 28 U.S.-based research studies conducted between 2001 and 2015, Bondie et al. (2019) found students who received differentiated instruction scored higher on tests than those who were taught in the same way. The studies reviewed included P-12 students classified as general education students, students with learning disabilities, and students at risk. While the teachers used worksheet completion and reading with the control group, they applied peer tutoring to teach students how to complete tasks. Likewise, in her quasi-experimental study of 58 high school students, Aljaser (2019) investigated the impacts of differentiated instruction in the classroom for 12 weeks and found that this teaching method boosts student motivation and language achievement in the classroom. In Aljaser's

study, teachers delivering instruction to the students in the control group used traditional teaching approaches such as memorizing content. On the other hand, the students in the experimental group received instruction using hands-on activities whereas poor-performing students got peer support with differentiated material based on three levels namely production without guidance, production with prompts to develop tasks and material that represented the study's contents.

By differentiating learning materials by levels, the students worked on the levels that they felt comfortable with and practiced on the other levels if they required more practice. Thus, differentiated instructions improve students' scores, especially on high stake tests. Studies reveal that differentiated instruction can improve ELL students' language skills. In addition, DI can also develop ELLs' content knowledge. A study done by Uribe, 2018, In a sizable Florida school district, they gathered quantitative survey data from General education teachers who worked at the school with the highest concentration of ELLs. The data analysis showed that students made progress and were able to reach several learning content knowledge objectives when general education teachers applied some of the ESOL teaching strategies, such as DI.

In addition to reading, Differentiation is also useful in other subjects. For example, Small and Tomlinson (2020) published a book on how differentiated instruction in math is also essential and achievable. They first expressed that the concept of differentiated instruction is still quite new in mathematics. It is difficult to simply offer an alternative math problem (unlike in reading). differentiated instruction in math starts at planning the questions. The question can be asked to the whole class, but it is intended to allow for response differentiation based on individual student's understanding. This method differs significantly from asking a question, seeing which student do not comprehend, and then asking a question that is easier for them to

answer. Students develop confidence by using the open question in math since they may immediately respond to the teacher's question. Small and Tomlinson's findings are focused on the way teachers plan questions and suggest that teachers should develop extensive lesson plan templates that include information on students' background, needs, and strategies for meeting those needs. Alternative grouping and the amount of work needed quickly are two examples of how the student perspective might be included in the process. The establishment of such a learning environment promotes the success of all pupils. Likewise, Herner-Patnode (2021) highlighted the importance of planning and questioning. Teachers should develop extensive lesson plan templates that include information on students' histories, needs, and strategies for meeting those needs. Alternative grouping and the amount of work needed quickly are two examples of how the student perspective might be included in the process. The establishment of such a learning environment promotes the success of all students. Herner-Patnode also highlighted the value of teaching math terms. It is important to note that some words as used in math may have completely different meanings as used in normal conditions. Take for instance words like *even*, *odd*, *function*, *differentiate* and *integrate*.

These are mathematical terms with definite meanings in the context of math and the field of their use but may confuse students if they have not undergone training to understand the context under which these words are used in the field of mathematics. Furthermore, the structuring of math questions may also pose a difficulty to students when not well understood. Math questions are often written in a manner that sometimes makes it difficult for students to comprehend the meaning of the questions since the grammar is not well understood. Math is an integral subject that is taught in schools to enable students deeply understand and solve the problems that arise in life. In as much as math may seem to be a difficult subject for many

students, it forms an important part of life skills and understanding math principles is important for all students in schools. To deepen their understanding of math, language must be understood by all learners. It may not necessarily be English though it is also an important language in the teaching of math.

Furthermore, ELL students consistently score lower on the science portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) at all grade levels and are more likely to score below basic (NCES, 2014). These findings indicate that ELL students are in need of greater support in STEM education as compared to their non-ELL peers (Goldenberg, 2013). Scientific texts are highly technical, linguistically challenging, and information dense. DI is highly recommended while teaching science. Estrella et al., 2018 study considers using engaging, multimodal activities in inquiry instruction will boost ELL students' access to scientific knowledge by simplifying the demands of scientific language. This study also suggests using inquiry-based learning methods allows ELL students to express their comprehension of scientific principles and practices, which may improve their oral and writing language abilities in science. Cervetti et al. (2015) claim that they also think that the DI approach, like in inquiry instruction, is the solution. However, it is impacted by things like teacher preparedness and class size. According to this survey, elementary school instructors felt underprepared to teach science to ELL pupils. The study added that through increasing instructors' pedagogical expertise and comprehension of ELL students' learning requirements, professional development has been demonstrated to enhance the delivery of inquiry instruction.

### **Engagement**

In Keane and Heinz's (2019) study, a student may be at any stage of their educational and be at danger of becoming or already being disengaged from learning due to a variety of

circumstances. School-related concerns are some of these circumstances. Regardless of a student's starting place or level of ability, differentiated instruction offers techniques to get all students in particular ELLs interested in and taking ownership of their learning. Knowing your students—their learning styles, talents, as well as their interests, motivations, and passions—is the first step towards increasing students' engagement in learning. To Chandra Handa (2020), when working collaboratively with peers on differentiated assignments or activities, ELLs exhibited indicators of genuine engagement and perseverance in the face of difficulty, whereas classmates who worked alone and on non-differentiated tasks were more likely to display signs of lack of excitement. According to Winarti et al. (2019), the teacher must concentrate on differentiated instruction by developing differentiated learning activities that result in differentiated products and were created to students' learning intelligences to increase engagement and motivation in the classroom.

### **Self-esteem**

Differentiated instruction also boost students' self-esteem and confidence in the classroom. (Moi, 2020). Students' learning is accelerated, and their self-esteem is raised by differentiation in the classroom. Moi first explained why self-esteem is important for students. For a variety of reasons, including the fact that it impacts almost every part of their lives, students need to have high self-esteem. In addition to enhancing academic success, high self-esteem also increases social skills and the capacity to build enduring connections. When teachers implement different methods and strategies of DI, it challenges students and pushes them to reach their high potential. For example, running small groups or 1:1 instruction, can boost students' confidence and self-esteem and they won't feel at the rear. This will lead them to share and participating in class more. Another strategy mentioned in the study is pre-teaching

vocabulary. One of the biggest challenges that English language learners face when reading is a limited vocabulary. The amount of academic content English learners learn in any particular subject area is strongly impacted by their reading fluency and comprehension in school, which are both hampered by a lack of academic vocabulary (words frequently found in school text). Since research shows that DI can benefit ELLs, increasingly teachers are seeking ways to differentiate their instructions.

### **Means of Differentiation through Content, Process and Product**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, teachers can accommodate the content, process or product while delivering differentiated instruction. Borja et al. (2015) argue that education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has progressed not just in terms of technology integration in classrooms around the world but has also resulted in substantial changes in the student population found in these classrooms, which are no longer evenly distributed. As a result, students from various socio-cultural origins, different languages, learning difficulties, and learning exceptionalities are now commonplace in the student population that makes up the class community. Borja et al. (2015) found that there is a need to find new ways to differentiate the teaching-learning process.

In Tomlinson's (2015) research, the teacher can differentiate the content in terms of the method used to deliver the content itself. Tomlinson defines content as comprising the skills, knowledge, and understanding that students must learn. Though a classroom may consist of diverse students, these learning goals remain the same for all. One aspect of differentiated instruction is giving different content to ELLs. When teachers differentiate their content lessons, the complexity level can be changed (Taylor, 2015). For instance, in Taylor's (2015) study, a teacher in an English class gave students the options to read textbooks or other literature catered to their individual needs at various reading levels. Other strategies discussed by Ismajli and

Imami-Morina (2018) are small instruction or small groups and one – one instruction. ELLs have more one-on-one opportunities, more opportunities to practice speaking and listening skills with teacher feedback, and more opportunities to ask questions to explain misunderstandings. Also, ELLs who are in smaller educational contexts feel more at ease vocally expressing themselves. Students are more comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions in a small group instructional setting since they are less likely to stumble in front of the full class.

Process differentiation is all about how students make sense of the content. This may involve students asking questions, brainstorming to figure out concepts, and making mistakes before arriving at the correct answer. At this stage, the teacher must consider the students' learning needs and interests to decide the most appropriate model that may be used to make meaning of the class content. The teacher could create groups based on each student's learning needs and interests, to work on different tasks to enable learning to happen. By differentiating instruction processes, teachers can change the learning activities in accordance with the interests or learning preferences of the students. For instance, in a history class in Taylor's (2015) study, while all students must learn the same material, they can select from a variety of techniques or activities that suit their interests or consider their different learning styles. For example, students used the Internet to investigate topics, interviewed locals, created models, or e, used a checklist to check their progress.

Differentiated instruction can also be manifested in the product of the learning. Product refers to what learners produce after the teacher delivers instruction in the classroom. The Tomlinson's study includes the culminating projects that learners do to demonstrate that they have mastered the content. Teachers assign students to complete the projects to assess their mastery of the concepts taught in class. In many schools, the curriculums provided to teachers

require them to ask students to write lengthy essays to demonstrate their knowledge of concepts. However, this could be a challenge for individuals with learning disabilities as they have unique learning needs. For such students, writing lengthy essays may not be their preferred method of demonstrating their knowledge of a given topic. Teachers can differentiate the end product by asking students to write essays, do tests, give oral presentations, or do any other activities that the student prefers. Therefore, in such a classroom, the teacher uses a variety of methods for students to demonstrate their acquired knowledge and skills. An example of product differentiation would be to allow students to choose a preferred method of how they would want to demonstrate their newly acquired learning content.

Each individual has a preferred learning method, so effective differentiation entails using varied methods such as visual, audio, and written to deliver instruction. All these methods are different processes of how students make sense of and understand the class content. Within the classroom, students have varied learning needs and interests. Such students will need to work with different supports, at different speeds and use different modes to make meaning of the class content. An example of how the teacher can implement differentiation is by using varied methods to ensure that students access the learning material. For instance, the teacher can encourage students to acquire new information by reading independently, discussing in groups, researching on the internet, role-playing, or listening to audio material (Tomlinson, 2015). Alternatively, the teacher can use other methods to present content in the classroom, for instance, using video or images to illustrate concepts.

By differentiating content, process, product, and method, teachers can address students' particular learning needs, ensuring that the learning experience is successful and meaningful for

each student. Indeed, whether teachers differentiate the content, process, or product, the teacher's efforts aim to respond to the variances among the students in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

Differentiated instruction is presented as one of the most effective methods of teaching students with diverse abilities within the same classroom. Generally, empirical studies have demonstrated how to implement a differentiated instruction. Students are inspired and driven to learn more when differentiated instruction is used in the classroom. When it comes to DI, knowing your students and designing projects with them in mind are more important than letting them choose anything they want to do. The differentiated instruction method is a way to put these top techniques covered in this chapter into a classroom. Teachers need time to review best practices and assess the methods they employ with their ELLs. (e.g., Aljaser, 2019; Borja et al. 2015; Raza, 2020). Understanding the theories of teaching and learning that have already been studied is necessary to comprehend differentiated instruction for ELLs. By removing the irritation that arises when assignments are either too easy or too tough for a ELLs, differentiation supports a brain-compatible classroom. Assignments that are too difficult cause the brain to downshift, which prevents learning from occurring.

### **Chapter 3: Description of the Product and Tools**

In this Chapter, I will discuss a professional development plan and its rationale for improving differentiated instruction for English language learners at Discovery Charter School. Working in the school for 4 years as an English as a New Language (ENL), 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, Alison Deacon states that differentiated instruction for ELLs has been a struggle for elementary teachers working at Discovery Charter School in the past 10 years (personal communication, June 10, 2022). Alison's statement is congruent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (e.g., Borja et al. 2015; Raza, 2020). Based on this body of research, various flaws exist in the school environment, which operates against ELL students receiving differentiated teaching. The product's components were chosen based on areas with high demands and actions that may be taken quickly to initiate the crucial changes. The ENL population is increasing at Discovery Charter School, and it became necessary to hold those PDs on a regular basis.

#### **Description of the Professional Development**

On August 15, 2022, the professional development plan will be presented at Discovery Charter School's annual summer meeting. From 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., the three-hour ELL professional development will be held at Discovery's gym. During the three-hour session, I will have the opportunity to speak with K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers. Gabriella Diaz, an ENL teacher, will also be present at the meeting and will be able to contribute to the conversation about specific ELL topics if needed. In addition to many handouts and materials, the professional development is presented in the form of a Google Slideshow (see Appendices A, B, C, D, E, F, & G.). The name of my professional development is Guide for K-6 teachers on Differentiated Instruction for English Language Learners. The professional development plan is first given an Ice Breaker activity. I will ask teachers to name one differentiated instruction method or strategy that they use

in their classroom with their ELLs. As teachers naming strategies, I will be writing them on a large poster. I will explain what DI is and why it is important.

Next, I will present a high-level overview of The Critical Role of the General Education Teacher. For the first few minutes, I will briefly discuss the role of the General Education teacher and what the general principles of differentiation instruction are. Subsequently, I will include descriptions for three language proficiency levels presented at Discovery Charter School (level 1 Newcomers and Entering, level 2 Transitioning and level 3 Commanding) by providing levels-specific descriptions for each level and describing practical strategies with teacher friendly examples for classroom implementations. The three descriptions of each level that will be printed out and distributed to each group.

K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade Teachers will be working in three small groups. Each group will include 4 teachers from K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade to read and work on a case study activity. There will be three different case studies. Each group will be provided with one case study, a description on each level written and distributed to the teachers, and a handout description of the English proficiency levels. Teachers will have 20-25 minutes to read their assigned case study and answer questions related to the study. Each group will be provided with a large poster to write their answers. Groups will come together to participate in a whole group discussion at the end of the PD. Each group will get a chance to share and present their poster and read their answers. As a group, I will handout Examples of differentiated instruction resource that they can hang in their classroom wall. Teachers will brainstorm and name ways or strategies to support ELL at Discovery and techniques to implement DI in their lessons.

### **The Critical Role of the General Education Teacher**

In today's classrooms, differentiated instruction has acquired popularity and reputation as an effective and powerful way to fulfill the requirements of diverse learners. This method allows teachers to evaluate each student's readiness while still providing instruction and evaluation based on the same topic standards for all students. (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2019). Chapter 2 discussed the importance of differentiated instruction. Humanistic learning theory explained the responsibilities of teachers. Teachers concentrate on assisting students to sharpen their learning skills and on the other hand, the student's role is to understand the learning choices. Therefore, in the humanistic learning theory, teachers achieve success by helping students to understand the best ways to learn. Additionally, research in Chapter 2 has reported that ELLs who received differentiated instruction outperformed those who were taught using conventional teaching methods such as memorization and recitation approaches on examinations (e.g., Aljaser, 2019; Bondie et al., 2019).

This differentiation process necessitates a thorough awareness of crucial cultural and linguistic characteristics that have a significant and predictable impact on each student's learning and language acquisition, information that will come in handy for all teachers. Effective differentiation for ELLs is impossible without first understanding the fundamentals of intercultural communication and the language acquisition process, as well as the features of each stage of language development, which is crucial for the teachers we've mentioned (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2019). As a teacher at Discovery Charter School, I believe that we must take a serious step in getting to know our students. Our teachers should know the English language proficiency levels of the students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The background knowledge and experience of students including their previous formal schooling. The cultures values, norms, beliefs, and practices of the students. Also, any additional relevant students' factors

Immigrant and refugee status. Teachers can develop relevant instruction that is customized to students' requirements and facilitates ideal learning by recognizing this consideration. Students will be able to completely represent their knowledge, skills, and talents in the content area if assessments take these elements into consideration. (Gibbons, 2014)

### **Differentiation Strategies Newcomers (Entering)**

Newcomer students have little to no English competency when they enter English-speaking schools. Such students are frequently in a state of shock, coming from environments that are substantially different from those seen in American classrooms. As a result, many immigrants are unsure of what to anticipate and how to act in their new surroundings (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2019, p. 177). Many times, such students try to fit into their new schools by copying the behavior of native English speakers. Furthermore, the newcomers exhibit traits that are typical of the language acquisition process (Shi & Watkinson, 2019). This possibility for misunderstanding necessitates the assistance of a knowledgeable advocate who is familiar with both the language acquisition process and the cultural aspects that influence each student's learning progress and integration into the classroom, so every ELL teacher must be that advocate.

While teaching newcomers, it is important that we provide sensory support for every lesson (real objects, pictures, hands-on materials and experiences, nonverbal communication, demonstrations, modeling, and simulation. This kind of support scaffolds new learning by allowing students to relate new information to the familiar.

### **Differentiation Strategies for Transitioning Level**

Students in this level are beginning to use language in new ways rather than relying on basic and typical memorize language. Students are developing the ability to use the academy's

language. According to NYS Department of Education (2020), a student at the Transitioning level shows some independence in advancing academic language skills but has yet to meet the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings). Students at this level have started to learn the language and will gradually progress toward full English proficiency and grade level academic performance with the help of skilled teachers and proper instruction. Using simplified, correct language, repeating, or paraphrasing as needed is essential while working with students in this level. Another important strategy is modifying the rate of teacher's speech. According to Brown (2017), teachers must modify or adjust the rate of their speech when talking to their ELLs. This will aid overall comprehension and offer students more time to assimilate the information. Incorrect information is occasionally repeated by teachers in a louder voice rather than speaking more slowly.

By presenting visual organizers, demonstrating their assembly when necessary, and encouraging involvement in conversations by soliciting phrases for basic sentences, teachers can promote higher order thinking processes during spoken instruction (Robertson, 2021). It is also very important to bring examples from real life. According to the cognitive theory (e.g., Piaget, 1936) discussed in Chapter 2, students tend to remember things that are meaningful to them.

### **Differentiated Instruction for Level 3 Students (Expanding Approaching Commanding)**

Students at this level are well on their way to proficiency and could be at risk of stalling language and academic development unless they receive targeted, linguistically differentiated instruction like mentioned in Chapter 2 (e.g., Raza, 2020; Tomlinson, 2015). It is important that teachers are aware of their language needs and gaps and utilize the appropriate strategies. According to Raza (2018), ELL teaching strategies should be adapted to a particular student

population based on their language needs. Students in this level are approaching proficiency but they are at risk for stalling their progress and never reaching full English proficiency (Sarwar & Hussain, 2021). Students in this level are often able to participate in grade level writing assignments if needed scaffolding is provided. Teachers are encouraged to ensure that such assignments are meaningful and relevant and that they stimulate extended writing reflective of abstract thought. According to Piaget (1936), learning a second language is a conscious, purposeful activity that involves using learning strategies. Learning strategies are unique approaches to information processing that improve understanding and learning. Learners in this level rely on adding new information to existing information and by using such tools like organizers, teachers can convert hard topics into meaningful and more relevant topics making it easier for students to learn. Lastly, teachers will get a chance to participate in an exit ticket activity. The activity is called Red, Yellow, Green. Participants must pick at least one colored sticky note and answer the associated question to the color.

Red: I need a lot more clarity about...

Yellow: I'm a little hesitant or feel unsure about...

Green: I'm 100% onboard with...

This exit ticket is important for gathering information for checking for understanding. The information teachers will provide can be extremely important and help me and the ENL team to prepare any necessary interventions or enrichment activities, or even just help teachers plan our next ELL PD session based on their answers. The main outcome of this PD is for teachers to understand the importance of DI and why it's important. It is important that we receive their feedback and share them with the administrators and confirm if we can come up with more opportunities to present and teach about ELLs at Discovery Charter School. Teachers

also are expected to be familiar with the different language proficiency levels and their description.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

This capstone project has explored differentiated instruction and its importance for ELLs. Millions of ELLs attend schools in the United States, and the majority of them are enrolled in regular classes alongside peers who are non-ELLs. It is important for classroom teachers and ENL teachers to consider implementing more differentiated instruction for ELLs in their classrooms. To support ELLs who struggle, we as educators must differentiate our instruction. Teachers should be consistently thinking how to make an activity or a lesson accessible to everyone (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2019). According to variety of theories behind differentiated instruction, learning should be tailored to the individual needs of each student in order to fully utilize their abilities and potential. Technique that views the variety of the students as a threat that can be turned into a strength by facilitating the disparities in the students' learning styles and rates so they can have the best procedure that fits their individual qualities (Ismajli & Imami-Morina, 2018).

When working with kids from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, educators must take a more thorough approach to teaching, especially when it comes to DI. The main aspect of ELL instruction that is constant is diversity. Because of the diversity, there are mixed-ability students in the classroom, and each one has a unique Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). The only way to address the problem of learner diversity is through diversity in instruction. In this Chapter, I first summarize the literature. Next, I will discuss implications DI for ELLs and will conclude with recommendations for future research. Numerous research questions established from these themes include: 1) What does Differentiated instruction look like? 2) What are the effects of Differentiated instruction on ELLs' learning? and 3) What is the role of the general education teacher in what?

## Summary

I have reviewed various studies and theories based on DI for ELLs and their experiences in schools. They include case studies based on the importance of DI for ELLs (Aljaser, 2019; Bondie et al., 2019; Borja et al., 2015; Förster et al., 2018; Raza, 2020). ELLs' data when compared to native English-speaking students (e.g., Aljaser, 2019; Dunn et al, 2019), effects of Differentiated Instruction on ELLs 'learning and academic progress (Cardimona 2016; Herner-Patnode 2021; Johnson 2021) students' academic achievements, self-esteem, and engagement in learning (Keane & Heinz's 2019; Moi,2020) and preparedness of teachers when working with ELLs (Cervetti et al., 2015), and best DI strategies when teaching content areas such as math, ELA, and science (Cervetti et al. 2015; Estrella et al., 2018; NCES, 2014; Tomlinson 2020).

There are several approaches that a school or district can adopt DI for ELL students. It's crucial to take into account the student population at your particular school, the programs and activities already available, and what would be most effective for them. Because there are various routes, each district's journey to improvement and implementation may seem different. The decision to finding ways to implement DI in classrooms is the first step.

In relation to my research questions, several conclusions are relevant to implementing DI and spread awareness of its importance. First, teachers and staff at school should be aware of what differentiated instruction is and why it matters. The number of ELL students being taught in U.S. classrooms is increasing quickly, but the majority of public-school teachers lack the necessary training. They are therefore faced with the task of figuring out practical ways to guarantee that ELLs are actively participating in subject-area instruction. DI is not necessary to teach every student a different lesson in order to differentiate instruction. Instead, differentiation is a method that teachers can use to modify their instructional approaches so that all students,

regardless of their talents or learning preferences, can achieve their academic potential and meet the needs of ELLs (e.g., Aljaser, 2019; Borja et al., 2015; Raza, 2020). Therefore, all school staff must educate themselves on how to effectively work with English language learners and understand that DI is achievable and the method to implement when working with ELL students. Second, the concepts and resources I discussed in this capstone will assist teachers in enhancing their students' capacity to learn content vocabulary and concepts, engaging students' prior knowledge, modifying subject-area materials in ways that specifically address language and content learning, and effectively communicating content to ELLs (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2019). Some of these strategies are

- Creating classroom settings that improve learning for ELLs.
- Creating lesson plans that maximize ELL participation.
- Arranging small groups that incorporate ELLs into regular instruction.
- Teaching vocabulary in a way that aids ELLs in comprehending subject-matter material.
- Creating reading and writing lessons for ELLs that are appropriate for their English language proficiency
- Developing efficient communication with ELLs' parents.

Additionally, ELLs who received differentiated instruction outperformed those who were taught using conventional teaching methods such as memorization and recitation approaches on examinations (e.g., Aljaser, 2019; Bondie et al., 2019). General education teachers' first role is understanding their ELLs' levels. Effective differentiation for ELLs is impossible without first understanding the fundamentals of intercultural communication and the language acquisition process, as well as the features of each stage of language development, which is crucial for the teachers (Cervetti et al., 2015; Chandra Handa, 2020; Winarti et al., 2019). It is important that

teachers understand that ELLs progress through many phases to become proficient in English, and they would require intelligible input at every stage. The listening, speaking, reading, and writing levels of the ELLs ability should be known by the teachers. Their background knowledge and experience, including their prior formal education, the kids' cultural values, customs, beliefs, and habits. The status of immigrants and refugees is another important aspect that affects students. By taking this into account, teachers may create pertinent education that is tailored to students' needs and promotes optimum learning.

### **Implications**

Many recommendations and implications are drawn based on the reviewed literature. Students should know that they have teachers who can assist them through scaffolded lessons based on their needs. They should also be aware that they are not being left behind and that the education is appropriate for their abilities. It is crucial to keep in mind that even the most talented and committed teacher cannot, alone, guarantee that ELLs receive the support they require to succeed. There is a greater need for an educational system that supports ELLs and the teachers tasked with educating them. Teachers should have access to high-quality professional development followed up by ongoing staff support. Teachers of ELLs should be provided with materials and necessary recourses in order to implement DI in the classroom.

Making plans for differentiation methods is one way to make sure that the requirements of every student are met. While not all strategies have been covered in this capstone, it is an example of how they may be used in a classroom to meet ELLs' fundamental requirements. Differentiation is necessary for all students at some time during their academic careers, not only ELLs. The effects of DI on students' conduct and academic performance are both present. Increased student academic achievements, engagement, self-esteem in the classroom have all

been seen as changes that can be quantified when teachers use DI in the classroom. The ELL students' progress toward proficiency is enhanced by their attendance and participation. Every sign demonstrates to teachers that the ELLs are accomplishing the objectives set in the classroom.

Teachers can start to move in a direction of success achieved focusing on the goals and objectives set by the district or state as they transition from the traditional whole-class environment to a differentiated student-centered environment. The interventions they give for kids in the classroom and the data they gather to demonstrate student development can then be handled more carefully by teachers. What would occur if all teachers used differentiation? Students would feel safe and secure in their learning environment, and graduation rates would rise. All students would succeed.

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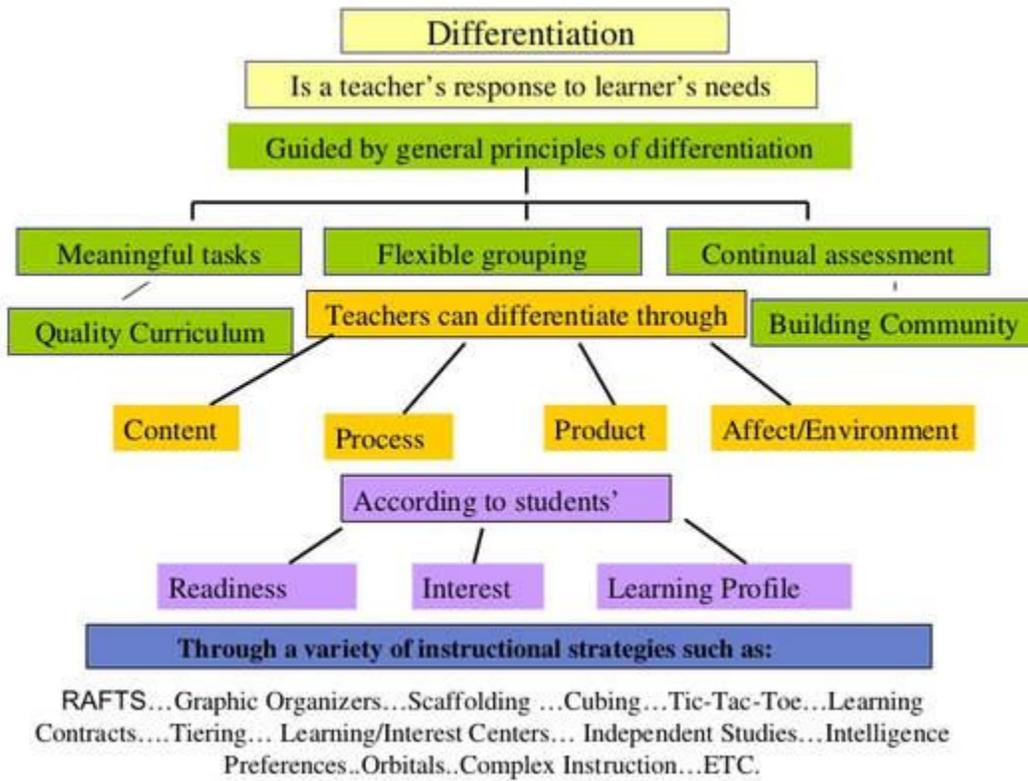
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**Appendix A**

**The Critical Role of the General Education Teacher**



<https://hmsinstructionalcoaching.weebly.com/differentiation.html>

**Appendix B:**  
**Proficiency Levels (Overview)**

Level	Description of English Language Proficiency Level
<b>Entering</b> (Beginning)	A student at the Entering level has great dependence on supports and structures to advance academic language skills and has not yet met the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings).
<b>Emerging</b> (Low Intermediate)	A student at the Emerging level has some dependence on supports and structures to advance academic language skills and has not yet met the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings).
<b>Transitioning</b> (Intermediate)	A student at the Transitioning level shows some independence in advancing academic language skills, but has yet to meet the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings).
<b>Expanding</b> (Advanced)	A student at the Expanding level shows great independence in advancing academic language skills and is approaching the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings).
<b>Commanding</b> (Proficient)	A student at the Commanding level has met the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate English language proficiency in a variety of academic contexts (settings). He or she is not an ELL.

[www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/nyseslatparentinfobrochure-english.pdf](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/nyseslatparentinfobrochure-english.pdf)

## Appendix C

### Examples of differentiated instruction

**50 STRATEGIES FOR DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION**

1. Curriculum Mapping	11. Learning Badges	21. Mock Trial	31. Learning Blends	41. Learning Through Workstations
2. Inquiry-Based Learning	12. Relationship-Building & Team-Building	22. The Hot Seat/Role-Play	32. Write-Around	42. Concept Attainment
3. Power Standards & Enduring Understandings	13. Self-Directed Learning	23. Student Data Inventories	33. Genius Hour	43. Flipped Classroom
4. Project-Based Learning	14. Choice Boards	24. Mastery Learning	34. Rubrics	44. Mentoring
5. Classroom Layout & Design	15. Bloom's Twist	25. Goal-Setting & Learning Contracts	35. QFT Seminar	45. Planning Through Learning Taxonomies
6. Learning Model Integration	16. Debate, 4-Corners, and Agree/Disagree	26. Game-Based Learning	36. Learning Menus	46. Assessment Design & Backwards Planning
7. Sentence & Discussion Stems	17. Sync Teaching	27. RAFT Assignments	37. Cubing	47. Student Interest & Inventory Data
8. Tiered Learning Targets	18. Double-Entry Journal/Essay Writing	28. Grouping	38. Layering	48. Learning Feedback
9. Learning Through Play	19. Analogies, Metaphors, And Visual Representations	29. Socratic Seminar	39. Jigsaws	49. Mini-Lessons
10. Meaningful Student Voice & Choice	20. Reciprocal Teaching	30. Problem-Based Learning/Place-Based Education	40. Graphic Organizers	50. Class Rules

teachthought

<https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/strategies-differentiated/>

## Appendix D:

### Newcomers and Entering Anna

**Anna** is an 11-year-old Newcomer English Language Learner who arrived in New York State from Kazakhstan in August, shortly before the current school year began. Her home language is Russian, although she learned to speak Kazakh informally with peers at a young age. English is her third language. Anna attended a school in Kazakhstan for six years that prioritized Russian, which means that classes were all taught in Russian except a daily Kazakh language arts class beginning in kindergarten. Anna has grade-level literacy skills in her home language, Russian. According to her parents, who are bilingual and biliterate in Russian and Kazakh, Anna's literacy skills in Kazakh are a little below grade level as compared to students who attend Kazakh-priority schools. [Note: Although both Russian and Kazakh use the Cyrillic alphabet, which is written from left to right, Kazakh is in the Turkic language family and is unrelated to Russian.] Anna's parents report that she is an avid reader in Russian. Anna has been receiving Stand-alone ENL instruction as a component of her ENL E N L program for approximately two months.

#### Discussion Questions:

- Describe an appropriate instructional strategy or activity to use with this student
- explain how the instructional strategy or activity you described would be effective in building on the student's identified strength to help them achieve the given standard.

**Appendix E:****Transitioning Level Profile: Amina**

**Amina** is a friendly, happy student who seems to enjoy school. She is very motivated and tries to do what she is supposed to always do. She speaks frequently with Russian friends in class who help translate for her, but I've noticed that she also tries to make new friends by speaking as best she can in English with non-Russian peers, especially other English Language Learners. Her mother reports that Anna enjoys playing soccer and volleyball, but her after-school activities are limited to helping care for younger siblings at home. Anna seems to have a good background in science. She participates well in small-group work and lab work, especially when paired with another Russian speaker. She performs well on scaffolded written assignments, such as matching key content words related to the lesson to appropriate pictures or diagrams, and she can also write one- or two-word answers to short written questions.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Describe an appropriate instructional strategy or activity to use with this student
- Explain how the instructional strategy or activity you described would be effective in building on the student's identified strength to help them achieve the given standard.

**Appendix F:****(Expanding going to Commanding)**

Ali is a fifth grader came to the United States from Mexico with his uncle and two young cousins, in first grade. Ali was on grade level in his Mexican elementary school and surpassed many of his peers in reading ability in Spanish. His speedy acquisition of English caused his ESL teacher to refer him for gifted and talented tests. While at school, Ali is an engaged student. He completes scaffolded and supported great level assignments when given class time, though not when assignments are given as homework. He happily participates in Group work, getting along with his peer both in the classroom and on the soccer field. Though his English is not perfect his mistakes rarely hinder understanding. He wants to play the trumpet, but his uncle cannot afford to purchase an instrument for him.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What issues does Ali has?
2. How can you best support Ali?
3. Why did you choose these supporting strategies?

**Appendix G:****Whole Group Discussion Questions**

- Describe DI in one word
- Why is it important to DI for our ELLs?
- Name one new strategy you think you will start using this year

**Appendix H:**

[Discovery Charter PD with voice updated.pptx](#)