Classics and Differentiation

Steven Hunt

DIFFERENTIATION IS THE way in which the learning needs of all pupils in a class are catered for. The National Curriculum enshrines this when it says:

'Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. This statutory inclusion statement sets out three principles for developing an inclusive curriculum which provides all pupils with relevant and challenging learning.

Schools must:
- set suitable learning challenges
- respond to pupils' diverse learning needs
- overcome potential barriers to learning and assessment for individuals and groups of pupils.'

(National Curriculum 2008)

Differentiation is thus applicable in every sort of school and every sort of classroom. While it is perhaps obvious that differentiation is important in the mixed-ability classroom, in those schools where setting or streaming occurs, a truly homogenous group of learners is difficult to attain. We also recognise that our pupils do not just differ in ability, but also in learning styles, motivation and prior learning. We should also consider specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. Differentiation is therefore just as important in the high-attaining set as in the mixed-ability.

The concept of differentiation has grown from the egalitarian principle that we should try to help all our pupils proceed upward along a ladder of opportunity. Pupils at the top, middle and bottom are all worthy of our attempts. Experienced teachers think this is exactly what constitutes 'good' teaching – an approach which seeks to help each pupil in the class succeed at their own level. By calling this fuzzy idea 'differentiation', teachers have an official frame of reference to exchange personal practice and develop new strategies to improve the teaching and learning of all our pupils.

Differentiation by outcome

This is often the most convenient and least problematic way of ensuring that tasks match pupils' learning needs. In its simplest form, this means asking all pupils to complete the same task with the expectation that the most able will produce more than the least. However, we should not please ourselves with the knowledge that the most able have merely produced more in quantity than the least. Research has suggested that the most able pupils lose motivation when the expectation is simply to provide quantity rather than quality. They also respond badly to being presented with an extra worksheet every time they finish, choosing instead to work at a slower pace than before to avoid this happening. A worse outcome still could be that two pupils produce pieces of work that are of a widely divergent nature. To ask pupils a question which is too open-ended, therefore, may not achieve quite the expected result. Instead we should consider the widely-adopted approach 'All pupils will be able to....; most pupils will be able to....; some pupils will be able to....' (QCA 2008), and ensure that pupils know what is expected for each outcome. So, for example, at one level, all pupils might be expected to learn a new grammatical feature and complete some practice examples, most will then go on to a translation where the feature is put into practice, and a few will identify and explain the new grammar feature in the context of the passage translated, feeding back to everyone at the end. This model could be replicated in almost every circumstance, in both linguistic and socio-cultural and historical subjects.

Differentiation by task

We see pupils come by many different routes to study classical subjects. Some have started Latin (or even Greek) in prep schools, others have attended *Minimus* lessons (on timetable or in breakfast clubs), yet others start late in Year 9. Our subject curriculum models are probably more varied than any of the others. We therefore expend a lot of energy on working out different ways in which we can accommodate the individuals' prior learning. We are delighted to have got the classes running at the times we wanted them. But that is just the start. Now we should consider the different *ways* in which pupils in the same class learn.

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983) suggests that there are different ways in which people learn and develop understanding. Some people have taken his VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic) model as a simplistic way of labelling individual pupils' sole learning styles, and then planning a whole sequence of lessons in the particular style of the pupil concerned. This is difficult to achieve and reflects a misunderstanding of the model. Instead we should use VAK as a tool when we plan our lessons. That is not to say that every lesson should incorporate something pictorial, as well as a tape recording (or should I say podcast!) and model-making and a bit of role-play – such a suggestion would be difficult to sustain every lesson, and both the teacher and the pupils would be exhausted, one by the planning and the other by the execution. Nevertheless, we should try to incorporate some aspects of the model when we plan our lessons so that we deepen and broaden pupils' understanding, and help to motivate and inspire them about the classical world. Latin or Greek should be read aloud, for example, either by teacher or pupil; pupils can respond to texts by creating cartoons or storyboards; the wealth of visual material, both ancient and modern, should be a constant feature of every lesson. Analysing pictures or performing a role play become the medium *through which* learning takes place, not an add-on, 'fun' activity at the end of a series of translations or exercises.

Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives (Bloom 1956) is helpful when we consider the order of the various tasks which pupils need to complete so as to understand a particular concept. Bloom arranges tasks in order of difficulty, with knowledge at the bottom and evaluation at the top. In order for a person to move from one task to the next, they need to gain mastery of the first three stages of knowledge, comprehension and application, before they move on to the so-called development tasks of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. We should try, therefore, to have a *mixture* of mastery and development tasks in the lesson. Mastery tasks include such statements such as 'recall, describe, define' moving higher through 'explain, classify, interpret' up to 'apply' and 'use'. Most pupils can cope with these tasks quickly and they often require no previous knowledge. Moreover, they serve a dual purpose: to motivate the pupils with the success of achievement and to prepare them with the information and skills for the more complex tasks ahead. Rote learning of grammar, the memorisation of dates or lists of events, the ability to recall the set texts off by heart, or seventeen different facts about the Vestal Virgins (I am not quite making this up!) are lower-grade tasks – but essential building blocks all the same. The development tasks see a further progression of complexity, ranging from analysis though synthesis to evaluation. These tasks are dependent on previous learning and assume their mastery. They tend to produce highly subjective, personal responses, with full marks being impossible to attain – even for the highest achievers. Rather, the point is the challenge itself – and the challenge of the task should be one that is interesting to everyone in the class, even the weakest.

Experienced teachers already use a range of questioning strategies, starting with closed questions and moving on to open questions, where a number of answers are possible – it's their stock in trade. They tailor the questions to the individual pupil's needs, knowing when to pass over a non-response, to encourage a hesitant reply, or when to engage another pupil as support. It should not be difficult to adapt that model to the design of the tasks in the lesson itself.

Differentiation by task should not mean that each and every pupil in a class is pursuing their individual plan. There would never be enough time for a teacher to prepare all that was needed, let alone to manage the divergent needs of so many pupils. In addition, research suggests that pupils are most motivated by the social interactions which occur in a whole class, directed by the teacher and other groups of learners. A strictly individualised learning programme would prevent this from occurring. Instead, we should develop a series of tasks based around a common activity, progressing with different levels of support, with work produced of differing complexity.

Where to start

- Identify pupils' prior attainment
- Audit departmental resources
- Identify, purchase or create new resources to support particular topic areas (for example, writing frames, extra vocabulary lists or dictionaries, powerpoint revision slides, podcasts, DVDs, grammar books, anthologies, translations of texts, etc)
- Build in differentiation to all aspects of teaching, written into schemes of work

Suggestions for differentiated tasks

- Graduate tasks from easy to hard on a worksheet
- Set open tasks: try to get the more able to interpret them in a more demanding way
- Higher order question and answer strategies
- Writing frames and 'skeleton' essay plans, or cloze sentences
- Compacted or accelerated learning for some tasks
- Use book-based or ICT resources for more in-depth research: presentations in powerpoint, tables and graphs, advanced presentational word-processing
- VAK: be aware of the different learning styles of pupils in the class
- Different texts, genres, audiences, styles of writing: pupils use different text types to explore or develop writing/translation skills.
- Comparison of different media representations of texts – film, cartoon, art
- Ability grouping: use the groups to feed back information to each other
- Peer-mentoring: get individuals who have 'mastered' a concept to help others in the class, or explain to the whole group
- Share with pupils the criteria for examination marking
- Peer or self-assessment: an excellent way to get pupils to evaluate and improve their own work
- Personal target-setting
- Ask pupils how they learn and get them to analyse why it is effective

Classical subjects provide pupils with one of the richest learning environments in the secondary school. The blend of language, literature, art, social, cultural and political history which we can offer is second to none. It provides a wealth of materials to explore, compare and contrast, combined with well-designed text books and excellent ICT support. We all know that there are very many reasons why pupils come to study and enjoy Classics. We can use differentiation as a way to focus our attention away from the prosaic demands of the examination specifications, and instead allow our pupils and ourselves to learn about and be delighted by the people, places and events of the ancient world.

Steven Hunt, Lecturer in Classics Education
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge

Bibliography

Gardner, H. (1993). *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*. London, Fontana.

Bloom, B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the classification of educational goals – Handbook I: Cognitive Domain.* New York: McKay.

Further reading

Coffey, S. (2007). Differentiation in Theory and Practice, in Dillon, J and Maguire, M. (eds.) *Becoming a Teacher: Issues in Secondary Teaching.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Eyre, D. and Lowe, H. (2007). *Curriculum provision for the Gifted and Talented in the Secondary School.* Abingdon: David Fulton Publishers.

Hubbard, T. (2003). Special Needs in Classics, in Morwood, J. (ed.) *The Teaching of Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Redondo, A. (2000). Mixed Ability Grouping in Modern Foreign Languages Teaching, in Field, K. (ed.) *Issues in Modern Foreign Languages Teaching.* New York: Routledge.

Cambridge Latin Course ICT in the Classroom

Andy Swithinbank

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) has developed at a rapid rate since the close of the 20th Century. The availability of consoles in classrooms as well as IT rooms and interactive whiteboards, combined with the seemingly endless range of software, has enabled teachers to use a range of methods to vary their teaching style, and individualise their students' learning. The Cambridge Schools Classics Project (CSCP) has continued its tradition of forward thinking, first displayed in the introduction, and subsequent development, of the *Cambridge Latin Course* (CLC), in its introduction of its own website – www.cambridgescp.com – and the creation of the e-Learning resources to support Books One and Two of the CLC. Some uses of these[1] in and outside of the classroom will be the focus of this article.

Schools vary in the facilities available to teachers within their own classrooms, and even in the availability of teaching rooms. This is no different with ICT, though recent years have seen maintained and even many independent schools using their ICT budgets to install interactive whiteboards[2] (IWB) into most classrooms. This, combined with the greater availability of consoles in classrooms and/or staff owned laptops, has enabled teachers to use a range of software in whole class activities; this will be my first focus. I will then look at the use of ICT suites and student laptops to aid individualised learning.

The CLC website is a hub of information and interactive activities. By accessing this website, teachers can employ a range of handy starter activities, as well as plenary work. Each book and stage of the website comes with its own 'Sorting Words' activities[3]. These activities require students to sort a selection of jumbled Latin words