

**Notes on the discussion of DI (Differentiated Instruction) by the English group
at the meeting at Sekolah Rendah Muhammad Alam, Seria on the 10 May 2016**

PART I

1. The Role of Teachers

At the outset, teachers need to know their students; their ability levels, their preferred way of learning, their interests, etc. This can be ascertained by a battery of tests including the pre-assessments at schools for Y7 and the VARK test by Neil Fleming. Teachers can also get to know more about their students by observation, direct questioning and discussions.

Once this knowledge is ascertained, the teacher should design teaching and learning resources, activities, lessons and assessments in line with the student's particular needs.

Assessments would also provide indicators about how close the designed programme is in meeting students' needs and how much more the programme should be amended to reach the desired outcome.

2. The Role of the Students

Students need to be upfront and honest about their individual preferences if DI is to succeed, regardless of peer and other pressures. Students should be confident enough to have an open, on-going dialogue with the teacher informing him/her how work is progressing and in what ways. This will also facilitate the students asking for help when needed. Students should participate and cooperate.

3. The role of School Leaders

Their roles are more geared towards facilitation, coordination and monitoring. They are there to see that the needs of both teachers and students are being met. These can be done by class observations, conferencing with the teachers and organisation of professional development where necessary. It is not their role to be overbearing, telling teachers what to do or forcing teachers to do what may not be necessary. Directing every teacher to do an activity although only a few may actually need to do so, for example.

4. What are teachers currently doing in class that is related to DI?

The school administration works on streamlining students into different classes according to their abilities using pre-testing or previous PSR results as a guide. Teachers work on their allocated classes, getting to know their students' interests, preferred methods of learning, what motivates them, what activities are more suitable, etc. This should lead to the design of DSOW, Differentiated Schemes of Work, with their classes in mind. These are auctioned by using resources, lesson plans, activities and assessments that are differentiated according to the level of their classes.

These account for differentiation according to classes but there is more that teachers do every day, sometimes without being fully conscious of doing so. They use appropriate language, translate if necessary, use different levels of questions, order their activities, grade questions according to difficulty, use different teaching and learning techniques, etc. to differentiate within the class.

In other words, all the teachers' output should be differentiated at class and at individual levels.

PART II

What English teachers currently do in terms of DI when teaching Comprehension

For the Lower Ability Students

A teacher may start with the questions based on the text because if students don't understand the questions, how can they answer them?

Students can underline the words they don't understand, including key words and questioning words. These can be discussed with the teacher guiding the discussion until the meaning is revealed. To do this the teacher can translate, simplify, summarise, give examples, etc.

Once the questions are understood, the teacher can move onto the text.

First, the teacher can approach the text as a whole. Students can be asked to examine the accompanying pictures, predict what will happen in the story, guess who are the main characters, state what will happen at the end, etc. After that the teacher can read the text to the class (good to have a first language speaker to do that) while students follow the text (to reinforce the relationship between the spoken words and the visual symbols on the page). Students can now direct the teacher to which words/ concepts are not understood. To check that students have understood the text, the teacher can ask students to re-tell the story (auditory), re-read the story after understanding the text (visual) or act out the story with friends (kinaesthetic).

Next, the examination of the text can become more detailed and specific as the teacher goes line by line, through concepts, focussing on important words, looking at punctuation, etc.

After these processes are complete, the students may be ready to answer the given questions on their own.

For the Higher Ability Students

This group can be launched into independent reading of the text and questions. It will be left to the individual student to raise any queries with the teacher and if these are recurring questions, then the teacher may engage the whole class in a discussion. It is always prudent for the teacher to give students an opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the text or the given questions no matter what the level of the students.

When students are answering the given questions, the teacher may focus not merely on the correct answer but on the best possible answer.

Another point of departure is focussing on more inferential questions.

Also, the teacher may go beyond the story to ask “what if...” questions. For example, if the story establishes that stealing is wrong, the teacher could ask , “What if the woman was stealing medicine for her young, sick daughter? Is it excusable now?” The teacher may examine the moral, social, political, religious, ethical issues surrounding the story, expanding the context of the story. Further, the teacher may take the story out of the given context to place it in another. A set of events set in the USA, for example, may be looked at differently if the same events occurred in Saudi Arabia. If students’ points of view on an issue in the story are different, this could be the basis of a class debate.