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# SEEING THE INDIVIDUAL IN THAT SEA OF FACES: HOW I MAKE INDIVIDUALISATION WORK

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## WHAT'S THE CONTEXT HERE?

- My teaching context:
  - > a state grammar school preparing students for the Matura and thus for university study.
- This workshop builds on ideas I shared on differentiated instruction (Thun, Jan 2014) and my reading, thinking and practice since then.
- This time the focus is on individualising tasks for interest and approach in order to maximise on engagement.

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER TO ME?

- A gradual wish, which has grown stronger over the years, to work with ‘what’s in the room’;
- A profound interest in heterogeneity and differentiated instruction and related issues of task design, classroom implementation and assessment;
- An initial intuition that learners take more with them when they are personally involved – and some reading that corroborates this;
- A strong need to prepare my learners for the world of study and work, involving competences, taking responsibility and being heard;
- A wish to develop my own practice – making it interesting, and making me sit up and take notice.

## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SUGGEST? - AMBROSE ET AL 2010

- «Connect the materials to students' interests
- Provide authentic real-world tasks
- Show relevance to students' current academic lives
- Demonstrate the relevance of higher-level skills to students' [future] professional lives
- Identify and reward what you value
- Show your own passion and enthusiasm for the discipline.»

Ambrose et al 2010, pp. 83-90

## «PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY AND CONTROL» - AMBROSE ET AL (2010)

- «Where possible, allow students to choose among many options and make choices that are consistent with their goals and the activities that they value. One way to give students greater flexibility is to allow them choices in portions of the course content, topics for papers and questions for class discussion. *Flexibility lends a sense of control, which can contribute to a student's expectation of success.*

(my italics)

Ambrose et al 2010, p.89

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT – WILLINGHAM 2009

- «If students have a strong voice in deciding which problems they want to work on, they will likely be engaged in the problems they select, and will likely think deeply about the material with attendant beliefs .»

Willingham 2009, p.82

# A DISTINCTION BETWEEN DIFFERENTIATION & INDIVIDUALISATION?

- As I see it, **differentiated instruction** works essentially at the level of **ability** (eg pace of work – Sherrington 2017).
- The teacher modifies input and tasks to accommodate differing degrees of prior knowledge and skill sets amongst learners.
- **Individualisation** has, as I see it, more to do with **process** (how an individual works on a task) and **output** (what he/she does with/makes of a task).
- That is, individualisation is what happens when I as teacher **set tasks which an individual can process, carry out, evaluate and reflect upon in his/her own personal way.**

# OPEN TASKS – INDIVIDUALISED RESPONSES AND PROCESSES

- ‘Open-ended tasks can play an important role in creating opportunities for students to explore their ideas; they can be a great source of top-end differentiation and lead to lovely, unexpected outcomes.’
- What kind of ‘lovely, unexpected outcomes’ might come of open-ended tasks?

(Sherrington 2017) p. 245



## OVER TO YOU AND YOUR CLASSROOM

- Pick a task you frequently set in class. Decide how you could individualise it. Share your ideas with a neighbour.
- Explain why you have individualised the task you chose. Are your reasons similar to your neighbour's?

## HIGH-LEVEL LITERATURE WORK – TWO TASKS FOR DIFFERENT REASONS

Reading ‘Moon Palace’ by Paul Auster: The moon as leitmotif.

- Input: keyword ‘leitmotif’, analogy with a recurring melody or riff in music
- A quotation: ‘A leitmotif is the whispering voice of the author instilling ideas and broadening perspectives’

<https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-leitmotif-what-some-examples-leitmotifs-474433>

- An image (see right)
- An open (but clearly framed task with a certain anticipated outcome)



# COMPARE THIS WITH...

## **Preparation for a group discussion on a chapter read:**

- My impressions of this section:
- Questions which it raises for me:
- What I would like to talk about:

# RESPONDING TO LITERATURE

**(class) Vocab & writing: Kate Tempest's *Europe is lost***

**(date)**

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1. Underline a line or group of lines you like. What do you like about it/them? (rhythm, choice of words, picture created in your mind etc.)
2. Underline a section of the poem you agree with.
3. Underline a section you disagree with.
4. What would *your* Europe is lost poem say? Discuss some ideas with another student.

# DEALING WITH INDIVIDUALISATION IN ASSESSMENT SETTINGS

- E** What are some of the challenges we face today in society, in your view? What can we do about them? Use words and phrases from the unit to share your ideas. Pay attention to grammar, especially topics from our work of last school year. Write 100-120 words. (12 marks)

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# PRESENTATION ON A HOBBY – INDIVIDUALISED AT EVERY STAGE

- Brainstorming      **Speaking assessment (Thursdays/Fridays)**

- Selecting

Later in the semester, you will be asked to make a short presentation of 5-6 minutes about a hobby you have. You will prepare this individually (with some time in lessons to help you) and present it in a group of 4-5 students who will be your 'audience'. The other students and your teacher will ask you a few questions afterwards.

- Summarising

- Organising

- Structuring

- Starting & finishing

- Practising

- Giving feedback

# HOW STUDENTS SEE INDIVIDUALISATION – AND WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ME

- Asking for student feedback has helped me know that individualisation is well worth it.
- My students appreciate having the option to pursue their own interests wherever this is sensible.
- Responding to an open task means you can respond not just at your level but also with your own ideas/opinions.
- I have come to realise that it is typically not so much the input materials that need adapting to achieve individualisation, but rather the expected (and accepted?) **outcome**.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Plenary discussion:**

- Where would there be room to offer learners the chance to pursue their own interests in your classrooms and general task design?
- Sherrington (2017) suggests that, while open-ended tasks can be very productive, they can also 'fall flat if the expectations aren't clear' - 'It's no good to just 'hit and hope.' What are the implications of this for our planning and task design?

Sherrington 2017, p.245



## A RANGE OF SUGGESTED AREAS FOR INDIVIDUALISED TASKS

- Over to you! ...

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are there tasks or scenarios where you would choose not to individualise? What are they and why would you decide against individualisation in these cases?
- How can we still sustain learner involvement and engagement in these situations?

LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

- Thank you for listening!

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## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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