

Plenary Session: “Differentiation as a Path to Inclusion”

By Chloe Pakeman-Schiavone

Achieving Full Engagement through an Inclusive and Differentiated Classroom

by Züleyha Tulay

Day 2 of the EAQUALS Online Conference started with the plenary session given by Chloe Pakeman-Schiavone, who is the director of studies at International House Pescara, Italy. Her session aimed at understanding why differentiating materials is necessary and identifying tried and tested strategies and techniques that will support the teacher and the learners. During the session, she took the participants through a number of ideas that could lead to the development of an inclusive classroom where the focus is on facilitating learning for all.

Chloe Pakeman-Schiavone kicked off the session by asking what inclusion means and who inclusion is for. While mentioning some of the special education needs such as dyslexia, she highlighted the fact that inclusion means a lot more than that. She shared a definition of “inclusion” that was meaningful for her practice;

“We encourage an inclusive organisational culture, and we want to give our colleagues, learners, and everyone we engage with the opportunity to achieve their potential - regardless of their age, disability, gender, religion, belief, race, ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation.”

It was daunting for her when she faced with a class of 20 students, 10 of which had different educational needs. She had never considered differentiation until that time. She thought “differentiation”, which is about being fair and offering all students an opportunity to maximize their potential, was the solution. This was a steep learning curve for her and an important step to keep the learners engaged. She also shared her favorite definition of differentiation as tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Whether teachers differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction.”

For inclusion and differentiation to happen, she emphasized the significance of having a thorough understanding of our learners. This begins by learning about their passions, struggles, the things they like, and how their lives are structured. Embracing the fact that learners have a range of abilities and that teachers should pay attention to abilities when setting tasks can make a huge difference in class. Multisensory teaching, which offers every member of the group the chance to access the new material in whichever way they feel most comfortable, allows learners to *simultaneously* see, hear, and do something physical or tactile. In addition to empathy, teachers can keep their classrooms focused, remove distractors from the board area, have two-sided noticeboards, have calm areas, and keep a list of options for overloaded students.

Chloe Pakeman-Schiavone also elaborated on having clear objectives while differentiating and managing the learning process. Detailed statements of what a student will do or know at the end of a learning experience is a desirable step in inclusion. Getting regular feedback from learners both during and after classes and making use of methods such as using traffic lights, jars, and an anonymous questions box in which students may put their questions without being exposed or feeling invalidated or [Mentimeter](#) may prove useful as learning indicators.

Learning Indicators

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I don't get it!
I need some help understanding.

I think I understand but I need a little support.

I understand and can try this on my own.

1 2 3

How did you feel after today's session?

Happy Sad Not Sure

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Classic strategies such as chunking, which may be defined as dealing with information through manageable tasks, allow teachers to prevent anxiety and remove distractions. Signposting and scaffolding are other classic ways of helping learners move forward. Making use of Bloom's Taxonomy can also guide teachers in assisting learners in achieving higher-order thinking skills. Considering whether our learners see themselves, their families, and their identities represented is also of utmost importance. Giving choices, such as a homework choice menu, may also underpin differentiation in the classroom. Chloe Pakeman-Schiavone maintained at the end of her session that if you have an inclusive and differentiated classroom, you will have full engagement. She concluded the session by pointing out that embracing diversity and being mindful of learners' representation can go a long way.

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* *The resources in the bibliography were shared by Chloe Pakeman-Schiavone at the end of her session.*