Differentiating the listening classroom

Supporting and challenging learners effectively.

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Aims of the session

- Improve understanding of the difficulties weaker learners face with listening in the classroom.
- Improve our understanding of why it is important to further challenge stronger learners.
- Learn how differentiation can support weaker learners and further challenge stronger ones.
- Learn effective differentiation techniques that take minimal extra preparation.

Differentiation

What is differentiation?

"Differentiation refers to "learning experiences in which the approach or method of learning is adjusted to meet the needs of the individual or a group of students."
(Culatta, R. 2016)

Discussion

Discuss these questions with the people on your table.

- What difficulties do your learners have with listening tasks?
- How do you support learners with these difficulties?
- What effect can stronger learners have on listening tasks in your classroom?
- Have you ever tried to challenge them further? How?

Supporting weaker learners through differentiation

Some key reasons weaker learners have difficulties with tasks...

- Too much to do.
- Don't understand/misunderstand the task.
- Don't recognize key vocabulary.
- Speech is too fast.
- Don't recognize different voices.

This can lead to...

- Disengagement
- Demotivation
- The learner falling behind even more

Supporting weaker learners through differentiation

Walk & Talk

- Walk around the room with your partner.
- Look at the authentic listening tasks.

Discuss

- Any problems you anticipate weaker learners could have.
- How you could differentiate the task to support weaker learners.

Supporting weaker learners through differentiation

Match the tasks to the suggested answers.

Each one has an anticipated problem, differentiation technique(s) and the reason(s) it supports weaker students.

Supporting weaker learners through differentiation

Answer Key

Task	Anticipated problems	Differentiation Technique	Reason
1	The gap fill often requires 3 words to complete the gap. Weaker learners may struggle when they encounter weak forms or connected speech.	**Variation** Removing some of the gaps by providing the words that are in weak form	Learners have a better chance of hearing the important key words and being successful with some or all the tasks.
2	The audio text is quite long, and the task has no signposting. This may cause weaker learners to become overwhelmed and lose their place, missing a lot of answers.	Adding headings to the question set. And allowing students to listen on their own devices (Personalized learning).	Carefully places headings can be used to help signpost when the topic has moved on to a new section and they should focus on the next question(s). Allowing them to listen on their phones gives them the opportunity to 'rewind'. This takes longer but can help them overcome key issues that have been causing difficulty.
3	The speakers speak quite fast and there are quite a few different speakers taking turns (3) this could confuse weaker learners. There are also a large number of questions.	Extra task to identify who is who by what they say at the start. Reducing the number of questions	The additional task to identify who says what at the start will help learners identify speakers better. Removing questions reduces the 'workload' on the learner so listening is less stressful, they have more thinking time and time to catch up.

Differentiation Examples

[Sample 1](#)

[Sample 2](#)

[Sample 3](#)

Challenging stronger learners

Learners can find a task 'too easy' because

- The task is too simple, short, repetitive
- They have a high topic/lexical knowledge on the topic area
- The task type is very familiar to them
- Their general listening skills are above the expected level

Why 'raise the challenge'?

- Raise learner engagement/ reduce disengagement.
- Add 'value' to the task.
- Avoid students distracting others.

How can we 'raise the challenge'?

- **Variation** – adapting tasks to make them more difficult .

- **Personalization** - giving students the option to relate to, reflect on or give their opinion on what they listen to.

- **Optional tasks** - extra tasks offered to fast finishers.

Task evaluation

In your groups

Look at the original/ differentiated listening tasks on your table.

Discuss
- How have they been differentiated?
- What extra 'value' could they provide to stronger learners?
- If you think it is an effective method of differentiation. Why/ Why not?

Answers

- The multiple-choice answers have been blacked out.
- Increases challenge – learners have less keywords/ signposting and need to write the answer in their own words.
- This is a form of task 'variation'.
- Suitable only for extremely strong students.
- If too difficult return the learner(s) to the original task.

Answers

- Learners anticipate what they might hear and check on the second playback of the audio text.
- This is a form of 'personalization' through anticipating the audio text.
- Provides purpose to a second listen when the task has been completed.
- Does require an extra task for weaker learners to complete simultaneously.
- Could pair up stronger/ weaker learners.

Answers

- Teacher makes the tape-script into a gap fill task to occupy students during a second listening.
- This is a form of 'variation' too but less effective as the student could see it as 'busy work' and not meaningful.

Answers

- Teacher provides an optional additional/follow up task where learners listen for who said specific quotes in the audio text.
- This is a way to use optional tasks that are not mandatory for the whole class to raise the challenge for stronger learners.
- This is a form of 'extension'
- This can make the listening seem more difficult and provide motivation.
- Could be adapted to listen for locations, data or prices.

Differentiation Task

Work in groups

You will be given an authentic listening task.

With your group discuss
- What problems a weaker learner might have.
- How you could support weaker students through differentiation.
- How you could further challenge stronger students in a meaningful way.

- Link

Feedback

With your new group.

- Share your groups ideas.

Takeaways

- Learners face a wide range of challenges when listening.
- Differentiating our listening tasks...
  - Can help with learner support, motivation and attitudes towards listening.
  - Can be accomplished through variation, scaffolding, personalization and optional or additional tasks.
  - Doesn't have to be complicated or time consuming.
  - Challenging stronger learners is as important as supporting weaker ones.

Thank you

- Any questions?

References

- Culatta R. (2016). What Are You Talking About?! The Need for Common Language around Personalized Learning. Retrieved from: http://er.educause.edu/articles/2016/3/what-are-you-talking-about-the-need-for-common-language-around-personalized-learning.