Same Room, Different Needs: Differentiation Strategies for In-Person Adult ESL

Friday, November 20th
10am-12pm

Presented by Janice M. Batista

Keep the learning goal consistent.

Vary the pathways, scaffolds, practice, and ways learners show what they know.

Not three lesson plans

One shared objective, with flexible ways to reach it.

Not lower expectations

Provide access and support while keeping meaningful challenge.

Not extra work for everyone

Make a few intentional adjustments where they matter.

Objectives

01 Explain

Describe what differentiation is—and what it is not.

02 Recognize

Identify content, process, product, and support adjustments.

03 Try

Experience practical strategies as learners.

04 Apply

Revise one lesson using at least three strategies.

Agenda

Opening challenge	Experience the learner's perspective
Four Ways to Differentiate	Four dimensions and one shared objective
Station orientation	Directions, groups, and rotation
Four stations	8-10 minutes per station, including transitions
Debrief	What made learning accessible?
Lesson makeover	Revise a lesson you already teach
Gallery walk	Borrow a strategy
Exit ticket	Choose one next step

Opening challenge: One goal, three pathways

SCENARIO

Your child is sick and will not be able to attend school tomorrow. You need to contact the school to let the teacher or office know.

A • More support

Use a word bank and sentence frames to complete a short message.

B • Some support

Write a short email using a checklist of details to include.

C • Extend

Write an email and politely ask about missed work.

Same goal: Communicate an absence appropriately. | Choose one pathway.

Pause and notice

1. What felt comfortable? What felt challenging?
2. Did more support make the task less meaningful?
3. **What stayed the same across all three pathways?**
4. How might this help adult learners with different literacy backgrounds?

Fairness is not always giving everyone the same thing. It is giving everyone meaningful access.

Four ways to differentiate

CONTENT | What learners work with

Adjust text complexity, vocabulary, length, visuals, or input.

PROCESS | How learners practice

Offer matching, rehearsal, discussion, sorting, movement, or role-play.

PRODUCT | How learners show learning

Allow written, spoken, visual, or demonstrated responses when appropriate.

SUPPORT | What helps learners succeed

Use models, word banks, sentence frames, checklists, and extensions.

One familiar topic. Four possible adjustments.

SHARED LEARNING OBJECTIVE

I can make a medical appointment.

CONTENT	Picture-supported appointment card ↔ clinic policy text
PROCESS	Match phrases ↔ rehearse a dialogue ↔ role-play a call
PRODUCT	Write a request ↔ leave a voicemail ↔ perform a role-play
SUPPORT	Word bank ↔ model dialogue ↔ independent challenge

What is one challenge you experience when teaching students with different English proficiency levels?

- **Think independently**
- **Discuss with a partner**
- **Write a response**
- **Share orally with the group**

Station rotations

1 CONTENT

Same goal, different texts

Topic: Clinic reading

2 PROCESS

Different ways to practice

Topic: Giving directions

3 PRODUCT

Different ways to demonstrate

Topic: Landlord repair request

4 SUPPORT

Scaffold without lowering expectations

Topic: Speaking to a supervisor

8 minutes per station • Complete the learner task, then try the design challenge.

Rotate when you hear the timer. Leave the materials ready for the next group.

Station 1 | CONTENT

LEARNING GOAL • Find key information in a community clinic announcement.

Try it

Read one version of the clinic information. Find: opening time, how to make an appointment, and what to bring.

Explore

Compare the supported, standard, and extended versions. What changed? What stayed the same?

Design

Take a reading from your class. Create two entry points without changing the learning goal.

Try: chunk the text • add visuals • highlight key information • provide a glossary • add challenge questions

Station 2 | PROCESS

LEARNING GOAL • Give and understand directions.

Match

Match direction phrases to pictures: turn left, go straight, cross the street, next to.

Sequence + rehearse

Put dialogue strips in order. Practice asking for and giving directions with a partner.

Map challenge

Use a neighborhood map to explain a route. Add a second destination for an extension.

Try: matching • sorting • partner rehearsal • movement • flexible grouping • role-play

Station 3 | PRODUCT

LEARNING GOAL • Explain a problem and request a repair.

Your kitchen sink is leaking. Contact your landlord.

WRITE

Send a short text message describing the problem and requesting a repair.

SPEAK

Role-play a conversation with your landlord.

RECORD / SCRIPT

Leave a voicemail requesting a repair.

Every option must include: the problem • the location • a clear request. Use the same rubric.

Station 4 | SUPPORT

LEARNING GOAL • Explain a scheduling problem to a supervisor.

More support

"I have an appointment at ____. Could I ____?"

Use the phrase bank.

Some support

Use a model conversation and a checklist of details to include.

Independent challenge

Explain the conflict and negotiate an alternative shift without a script.

Try: sentence frames • word banks • model answers • visual steps • checklists • extension prompts

What made learning more accessible?

1. Which station gave you the strongest sense of differentiation as a learner?
2. Which strategy could you use tomorrow with materials you already have?
3. Where did choice help without changing the learning goal?
4. How do we avoid confusing English proficiency with intelligence or prior knowledge?

Keep these three principles in mind

Clear shared objective • Strategic adjustments • Use learner evidence to adjust support

On the spot differentiation strategies

1 Mixed Pairs

High/Low

High/High

Low/Low

2 Intention

choose specific examples for learners

let stronger students begin exercises to provide a model

timed exercises

3 Leveled Readings

Newsinlevels.com

4 Small Shifts

Read and repeat

complete and read

Create and read

Literacy support:

- **use visuals and matching**
- **copy text**
- **spell words or dictate**
- **read simplified text**
- **specific roles in groups**

Lesson makeover

THE CHALLENGE

Make your existing lesson more accessible in 15-20 minutes—without writing a new lesson plan.

1 Identify the goal	What should learners know or be able to do? What evidence will show learning?
2 Find a sticking point	Where might learners need a different entry point, more practice, or added support?
3 Make three changes	Adjust at least three: content, process, product, or support.
4 Peer coach	Glow: What works? Grow: What could improve access? Go: What is one next step?

Your differentiated lesson planner

Lesson / topic

One shared learning objective

CONTENT | What can I adjust?

PROCESS | How can learners practice?

PRODUCT | How can learners show learning?

SUPPORT | What scaffold or extension can I offer?

Evidence of learning

Aim for three practical changes—not a complete redesign.

Gallery walk: Steal a strategy

Display your revised lesson or write your favorite strategy on chart paper.

BORROW

One strategy I want to try in my own class…

ASK

One question or suggestion I have…

CONNECT

One way this could work with my learners…

Look for ideas that are low-prep, useful in multilevel classes, and offer challenge—not just more work.

Exit ticket: Choose one next step

1 One differentiation strategy I can use this week is…

2. One part of my current lesson I will modify is…

3. One thing I will look for to see whether it helped learners is…

One lesson. More than one pathway.
More opportunities for success.

THE TAKEAWAY

Differentiation is not creating a different lesson for every learner.

It is creating more than one pathway into meaningful learning—using the time and resources we already have.

KEEP THE GOAL. VARY THE PATHWAY.

Workshop Survey



Thank you!

Janice M Batista
jbatista@framingham.k12.ma.us

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