



Supporting Differentiated Instruction with Listening

Differentiated instruction (DI) is an approach that seeks to maximize each student's learning by providing instruction well matched to his or her unique background knowledge, readiness and ability, interests and talents, and learning profile (Tomlinson, 2001). Teachers use pre-assessment to evaluate these characteristics and then differentiate instruction accordingly.

Differentiation focuses on three curriculum components: content, processes and product (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003; Tomlinson, 2001).

Incorporation of listening into the curriculum supports differentiated instruction across all three curriculum components. As a presentation medium, listening offers teachers a means to differentiate **content**, in terms of both medium and difficulty. For students who may lack skill or interest in text, listening is a beneficial alternative for content delivery, supporting access and learning. Also, digital read-aloud can be used to vary the difficulty of text-based learning. Moreover, when using multiple media, including listening, it may be easier for teachers to focus on key concepts, principles and skills, which should be independent of the medium; this is an important facet of DI (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003).

Additionally, listening can support differentiation of the curriculum **process**, a key element of which is the use of flexible grouping. With digital listening technologies such as CD-ROM books and text-to-speech, listening can take place at a whole-class, small-group or individual level.

As a medium for demonstrating learning, listening can help teachers differentiate curriculum **products**, or outcomes: the expectations and requirements for student responses (Hall, Strangman, & Meyer, 2003). Listening provides an alternative means for demonstrating learning, one that may be essential for students who lack interest or ability with text.

Student engagement is foundational to successful DI and affects all three curriculum components. In this respect listening may prove indispensable, relating learning to the medium and technologies that now predominate students' social and recreational lives.

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