



Differentiated Instruction with Kagan Structures

13 Tips to Make the Curriculum More Accessible to All

DR. SPENCER KAGAN & MIGUEL KAGAN



A question teachers sometimes ask is: "How do I do differentiated instruction with Kagan?" The basic goals of differentiated instruction are to make the curriculum accessible to all students and to help meet students' individual needs.

Simply by using Kagan Structures without any special modifications, you are already implementing some important principles of differentiated instruction. One important function of DI is to provide students more support with the curriculum. Using team and pair structures with peer tutoring provides an enormous amount of support for students that is simply not available with independent practice. Receiving modelling and assistance by more capable peers goes a long way in explaining why Kagan Structures are so effective for struggling learners.

Another principle of **DI** is to make the curriculum accessible to students who learn differently and are smart in different ways. There are many Kagan Structures and they are very different. Some structures have pairs coach each other; some have teams create a song; some have students act out the curriculum. This variety allows students to access the curriculum through their natural strengths and provides more onramps to learning than relying on a single or a few learning strategies.

So, by doing Kagan Structures you're already doing some important pieces of **DI**. You can take the next step by making adaptations and modifications of Kagan Structures to meet the needs of every student.

One word of caution: **Have high expectations for all students**. Make special modifications after you are certain students cannot be successful without special adaptations. Be careful not to water down the curriculum for students. Remember the motto: **What's good enough for the best is good enough for the rest**.

Ability Level Groups

Kagan recommends heterogeneous base teams to maximise tutoring and learning. However, occasional work in similar-ability groups is not only acceptable, but desirable. By creating similar-ability teams, you can create as many tiers as you have teams. So if you have 8 teams of 4 students, each team could work on its own developmentally-appropriate content. With similar-ability pairs for pair work, you have even more levels of differentiation possible. For example, try similar-ability pairs for Debate Partners to equalise the debate. For your own workload and sanity, be careful of creating too many tiers. See the next tip.

4 Basic Levels

Every student is unique and every student is at his or her own level. So you could go overboard on differentiated instruction and try to tailor-make each lesson to each individual student level. But that would

be highly impractical. As a rule of thumb, think of 4 levels or tiers:

- 1) Above grade level
- 2) At grade level
- 3) Below grade level
- 4) ELL or special needs.

Different Roles or Tasks Within Teams

In many team projects and presentations, each student has a unique role. For example, in a presentation by a team of four, two students may be responsible for the presentation, one for the visuals, and one for the music. You can differentiate instruction with team projects and presentations by giving students different responsibilities. When assigning the roles for Team Projects, assign each student to their ability-appropriate role. See also Ability Numbering.



Ability Numbering

Ability numbering is giving each teammate in a mixed-ability team a number based on their ability level. It looks like this:

- Student #1 – High
- Student #2 – High Medium
- Student #3 – Low Medium
- Student #4 – Low

Ability numbering is an easy system to use because you can give all your #1s the most challenging task and the #4s the least challenging. Also, when asking questions, you can adjust the difficulty of the question to which number you will select to respond. If you think students may become wise to the numbering system, try reverse numbering with #4s as the highs on each team. If you still think students will figure it out, it's probably better to drop ability numbering than have students feel they are in the "low" group. It can be a blow to their esteem, and some will even live down to those expectations.

My Buddy

Students can be assigned a higher-ability buddy or partner that can assist them. For example, a student who is unable to write can have his buddy write his ideas down in Jot Thoughts. A student who cannot speak, can have his buddy read his ideas for him when he is selected to share. A student who cannot read can have his buddy read for him.

Extra Practice Time

Some students may need extra practice time on a maths concepts, reading, writing skills, or on any topic. RTI encourages providing extra time to students on the required skill. Provide ample time for teams and pairs to complete the task or master the skill. For some students, this may mean additional practice. For others, it may simply mean extending the practice time. Make sure you use Sponges for pairs and teams who finish early. See the next tip.

Sponges

Each team will finish at their own rate. Create challenging sponge activities for teams that finish early. Ideally the sponge activities build on and extend students' knowledge in the topic of study. Having a good sponge activity at the end of most team tasks is oftentimes all the differentiation you'll need to do.



Language Buddy

A language buddy is a buddy assigned to an ESL student. The buddy is preferably bilingual or more proficient in both languages so the buddy can translate teacher instructions, worksheet writing, and student dialogue for her buddy.

Teacher Support

With Kagan Structures, a lot of time is spent in pair and team work. This frees the teacher (or an aide) to work with a student in need of extra support. The teacher or aide may assist the student as she contributes to the teamwork, or the teacher may pair up with student while other students pair up with classmates as in a RallyCoach.

Multiple Intelligences Options

Multiple intelligences theory teaches us that students are smart in different ways. Give students the opportunity to learn and express their learning using a different intelligence:

- Verbal/Linguistic
- Logical/Mathematical
- Visual/Spatial
- Musical/Rhythmic
- Bodily/Kinesthetic
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- Naturalist

Personal Interest and Choice

Students are often motivated by things they show a personal interest in. Give students choices when selecting what they are going to do. For example, in a Co-op Co-op, allow student teams to select their topics and students to select their mini-topics. In a Timed Pair Share, provide more than one sharing option for students. For example, "Share your best Christmas holiday memory OR share your Summer holiday plans."

Pre-Teach

One way of bringing students up to speed is to pre-teach the content to them. In this way, they have a headstart on the learning and won't get lost as easily. It's not brand new information for them. Pre-teaching can also be used to give lower-achieving students higher status. For example, in a Circle-the-Sage, you may pre-teach a topic to a student and she can be a Sage on the topic. Before a Find Someone Who activity, pre-teach a struggling student or students a solution so they can actually become a resource for classmates.



Increase or Decrease Difficulty

Writing is often more challenging than speaking. To increase difficulty, have students write their responses instead of or in addition to stating them orally. For example, to make Match Mine more challenging, students can write a note and pass it to their partner rather than verbally give their partner instructions. Drawing is sometimes easier than writing. For students who lack the ability to write out an answer, they can draw it out. For example, during a brainstorming session, a student can draw an idea. Multiple choice questions are easier than open response questions. Simple, short answers are easier than lengthy written

responses or essays.

In Sum

Without special adaptations Kagan Structures help you make the curriculum more accessible to students. But as we well know, each student is unique. Try one or more of these tips to better reach and challenge all of your students

For more ideas and training on Kagan Cooperative Learning check out one of T2TUK/ Kagan-UK's Kagan Workshops or Kagan Institutes. <https://www.t2tuk.co.uk/TrainingSummary.aspx>.