

Product, Process, and Content: Practical Strategies for Differentiation on a University Debate Course

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Abstract

Since 2020, all first-year students at a Japanese university participate in a mandatory English CLIL Debate course in order to enhance their language skills, academic skills, and their general knowledge of a variety of topics. Classes are organised into four proficiency levels based on TOEIC scores. With 3000–4000 students entering the university every year, English proficiency ranges from elementary level, up to highly advanced returnees and international students. However, despite the vast differences between proficiency levels, the unified syllabus requires that all level groupings utilise a single in-house textbook and syllabus. Therefore, teachers face the challenge of differentiating this source material according to class proficiency level. Over the last few years, the author has addressed this challenge by employing a differentiation model proposed by educator Carol-Ann Tomlinson (2001), who emphasises differentiation in product, process, and content. In this paper, the debate course is analysed according to a framework proposed by Tomlinson, before the author reveals some of the adaptations made during his years teaching the course. Finally, the author reflects on the effectiveness of these adaptations.

Keywords: *Differentiation, Adaptive teaching, Content, Debate*

Introduction

Since 2020, all first-year students at Rikkyo University are required to take a debate course during the second semester. Whereas other mandatory first-year courses mainly focus on building language skills, the debate course was introduced to help ease students' transition into a program of CLIL elective courses (Nitta & Yamamoto, 2020, p. 54) implemented in the subsequent years of the university curriculum. Referred to as a CLIL course by faculty, successful debating requires more than language proficiency, as students need to acquire and refine various academic and critical thinking skills (Nitta & Yamamoto, 2020).

As 3000–4000 students are entering the university each year, they come from various educational backgrounds and have mixed levels of English. The students are split into four

proficiency levels.

Table 1

Debate Level Groupings by TOEIC Score

Level	TOEIC Score Range
Level One	680 or above
Level Two	480 to 679
Level Three	280 to 479
Level Four	Below 280

As you can see, this table represents a very wide range of English proficiency levels. In level one classes, the students are often highly advanced. This can include returnee students, international exchange students, and native English speakers, all of whom are experienced in studying with English-medium instruction. On the opposite side of the scale are level four students, who are still getting a grip on the basics of the English language. As mentioned, all students are required to take the course, however, teachers are only given one textbook and syllabus outline. Therefore, this presents a challenge. How can teachers adapt the debate course to the various proficiency levels?

In my experience of three years teaching the course, the various level classes experience the course in different ways. Higher proficiency groups can usually meet the demands of debating quite quickly, leaving the teacher with the question of how to ensure they remain sufficiently challenged. In contrast, lower proficiency groups will sometimes struggle to acquire the basics of a debate and sometimes can become overwhelmed.

With classes at such different stages of proficiency, and with teachers only provided with one textbook with which to teach the classes, there is a clear need to differentiate the content of the course to meet the diverse needs of the classes. In this paper, I will discuss some ways I have differentiated the debate course during my time teaching it and reflect on the effects of this differentiation. Throughout the paper, an advanced level one class and a lower proficiency level three class are compared in order to provide examples on the opposite ends of the spectrum.

Differentiation

Broadly speaking, differentiation in education is often described as adjusting curriculum or lesson content to variations in student needs. It often emphasises that teachers should seek to build profiles of students' characteristics as learners and adapt course content accordingly. The term seems to have come to prominence in line with the rising importance of equal opportunities for children in Western education, that every student should receive an equal opportunity to learn, such as with the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) or the 'School For All' policy in Scandinavian countries (Blossing et al., 2014). Therefore, in Western education this century,

there has been a considerable amount of academic discussion focused on differentiation (Eikeland & Ohna, 2022).

Roiha writes that differentiation is a synthesis of various ideas, such as Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory and Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Roiha, 2014, p. 3). By building a profile of each student's strengths and weaknesses, teachers can estimate their stage of development and teach according to their ZPD.

One prominent writer on differentiation in education is Carol-Ann Tomlinson, who has published extensively on the subject. Several of her works feature recurrent models that exemplify an approach to differentiation (e.g. 2001). These models appear to be influential in the area: a review of literature on differentiated instruction found 18 academic publications that employ her frameworks (Bondie et al., 2019, p. 339).

Two of Tomlinson's main themes can be summarised thus. First, in order to successfully differentiate course content, you need sufficient knowledge of your students. Second, particular areas of course content should be explored.

Tomlinson refers to the knowledge of your students as student characteristics, and suggests that these characteristics can be analysed through several variables. These variables include interest, learner profile, and readiness (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Interest covers student interests and motivations, that is, what kind of subject matter motivates and engages students. Learner profile relates to how students prefer to learn, for example, some students might prefer to learn visually, whereas others might learn better through dialogue. Finally, Tomlinson often emphasises awareness of student readiness. This refers to the current knowledge and skills regarding course content, which Tomlinson relates to Vygotsky's ZPD (p. 26). If the student does not have sufficient knowledge and skills to acquire course content, then efforts must be made to accommodate the student either by adapting the course content or through scaffolding.

Regarding course content, Tomlinson (2001) identifies variables that can be differentiated, and these usually include the elements of content, process, and product. According to Tomlinson, content means the input we provide students, "what we teach or what we want students to learn" (p. 72). She also includes access to input in this category and posits that a teacher should consider when to give access to certain content based on student readiness to acquire it (p. 72). Process means how students make sense of the content, and in turn how the teacher leads students to the content. In other words, we could say it means what students do in order to process the input. Tomlinson highlights that most teachers would refer to this as 'activities' students take part in to learn the content (p. 81). The last element, product, refers to the major pieces of work students produce. Tomlinson writes that product assignments should be designed to enable students to review, rethink, and extend what they have learned over a relatively long period of time (p. 85). Furthermore, the product provides the vehicle for the main demonstrations of student learning on the course (p. 8). Although she does not mention assessment or testing, my interpretation is that product refers to assignments that contribute significantly to formative and/or summative assessment, as these are the works

in which students typically demonstrate their cumulative learning across a number of lessons.

The Content, Process, and Product of the Debate Course

What constitutes the components of content, process, and product will naturally depend on the particular course.

Debate Course: Content

The debate course could be considered to have various main objectives and subsidiary objectives, however, I usually approach the course with three main objectives in mind: students enhance their knowledge of the topics they study, students develop critical thinking skills required for argumentation, and students build language skills. Therefore, I would say that these three particular areas form the content of my courses.

One of the primary outcomes is that students are learning about various issues. They investigate a range of themes, for example, textbook topics include vegetarianism, the environment, and gender. Students explore topics in class through discussions, texts and videos, and various brainstorming activities, before researching them independently or in groups. Finally, they put their knowledge to the test in the debates.

The language component of the course could be considered to be complex. The textbook features a set of phrases that are designed to help students participate in the various parts of a debate; namely opening statements, cross-examination, rebuttal, and summaries. However, students also need to be able to use topic-specific vocabulary, which is not designated in the textbook. Also in the language component, we can include various speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills. For instance, in order to complete a debate students need to be able to write an academic paragraph, they need negotiation of meaning skills to complete a cross-examination, they need listening skills to be able to take accurate notes during the opposition's statement, and so on. There are a broad range of language skills involved in a debate class.

Finally, there are critical thinking skills which mainly revolve around argumentation. For instance, students need to evaluate the strength of various arguments before selecting the strongest for their opening statements. They also need to predict the opposition's arguments, which gives them practice of thinking from various perspectives. Additionally, they need to evaluate the strength and suitability of evidence along with various other critical thinking skills.

Debate Course: Process

The process aspect of the course involves, first of all, students learning what a debate is, what its purpose is, how it is structured, and how to participate in one. After that, students will go through a mix of theory and practice on how to be successful at debating. On my courses, we spend between four to six lessons focused more on learning about debate as a genre. After that, students go through a process of preparation, debate, and then feedback and further practice through the end of the course.

Also integral to this aspect is the process students go through in order to complete a debate, as this facilitates significant learning on the course. This process generally includes brainstorming and sharing of ideas, deeper research, selecting and constructing arguments, participating in the actual debate, and finally reflection and feedback.

Debate Course: Product

As previously mentioned, the product of a course as described by Tomlinson (2001) is what the students are expected to produce, which helps us to evaluate learning. On the debate course, the most tangible product is the debates themselves. There are the four main sections of the debate, opening statements, cross-examination, rebuttals, and summaries. Within these sections students demonstrate competencies and knowledge on the course. For example, they show research skills and logic by integrating sourced evidence into opening statements, they demonstrate their counter-argument skills in rebuttals, and so on. Students take part in a mid-term and final debate, and these both carry significant weight toward assessment on the course.

There are also less quantifiable elements such as teamwork skills, confidence, and divergent thinking, that are more difficult to assess but could be made visible through activities such as written reflections.

Methods of Differentiation

Numerous adaptations can be made to the product, process, and content of debate in order to differentiate the course. In this section, I will discuss some of the changes I have made over three years of teaching the course, and the theory behind them.

Content Differentiation

The main differentiation I have implemented related to the content of the debate course has revolved around adapting debate topics and propositions, and in adapting the language focus according to the various levels.

Content Differentiation: Topics and Propositions

The topics and propositions used for the debate can have a big influence on the difficulty of the classes. Students need to have sufficient amounts of both knowledge and vocabulary in the subject area. Therefore, if they are lacking in both at the start of the process, then completing a debate will be difficult. Alternatively, if they already have some background knowledge and some vocabulary, then the debate becomes less demanding as students can focus more on building logical arguments and practising debate skills. Thus, topics, and also propositions, can be selected accordingly. Some may need an easier topic to complete a debate, whereas others might thrive on a more challenging, academic topic.

My approach to this is to be flexible in which topics and propositions are debated and

I achieve this through negotiation with students. This negotiation process involves asking for suggestions, voting, and getting feedback on the topics we use.

This process allows us to nominate topics and propositions that are within students' areas of interest but also allows me to apply a filter to the suitability of the topics and propositions in terms of difficulty. Here are the topics and propositions that were used in a level one and level three class last year:

Table 2

Topics Used in Two Classes in the Debate Course in 2022

Level One	Level Three
Animal Rights: Zoos are Beneficial for Animals.	Education: School Students Should Wear a School Uniform.
Crime and Punishment: The Death Penalty Should be Abolished.	Urbanisation: Living in the City is Better than Living in the Country.
Gender: Women Have a More Difficult Life than Men in Japan.	Social Media: Social Media is Beneficial to Society.
Free Speech: Insulting Others Online Should be a Criminal Offence.	Media: Video Games are Bad for Children.
Euthanasia: Euthanasia Should be Legal in Japan.	Education: Online Education is Superior to Face-to-Face.

The topics and propositions used in the level three class could generally be described as already familiar to students. In previous research on the university's discussion course, students stated that familiar topics were easier to discuss because they already had ideas to talk about (Minshull, 2021), and perhaps the same applies to debate. For example, the debate around online and face-to-face education has been a much-discussed topic over the last few years due to COVID-19, so it was safe to assume that students would have background knowledge in the topic, having recently experienced online education. Moreover, there was a good chance they had already discussed the topic in another English class in the first semester.

The level one class tended to gravitate toward more abstract topics, such as euthanasia and animal rights. It seemed as though students had limited knowledge of the discourse surrounding these topics at first, but were able to research the topics well enough to conduct impressive debates. Also noteworthy is that this particular class, which was especially strong in terms of English and academic skills, seemed to be more motivated by divisive topics than classes in other levels.

Content Differentiation: Language Focus

The textbook provides a set of functional phrases as the main language focus of the course. In my experience, the challenge of acquiring the set phrases and related skills varies depending on the group. Moreover, the language requirements of debate extend further than these phrases, and what is helpful can vary depending on the class. Therefore, the language focus is another content area than can be considered for differentiation.

I have usually implemented this differentiation reactively, meaning that I tend to work with emergent issues rather than predict what would be effective. The following table shows some of the language skills covered in the level one and level three classes last semester.

Table 3

Some Key Language Points Studied by Two Classes in 2022

Level One	Level Three
Understanding Propositions	Acquiring Textbook Phrases
Being Concise	Developing Arguments with Explanation
Cause and Effect	Fluency Practice
Persuasive Language	Negotiation of Meaning
Volume of Opening Statement Delivery	Issues Related to Delivery (e.g. pronunciation, volume, intonation)

In the example of the level three class, the major language work went toward acquiring the textbook phrases and the related skills, which was done gradually and through practice. They also often needed support in developing a strong written argument. This included sharing model statements to help them internalise structures, encouraging them to explain arguments in detail, and encouraging them to include evidence to support arguments. They also struggled in the cross-examination and rebuttal sections, mainly due to limited spoken fluency and difficulties with negotiation of meaning. To help with these issues, we practiced negotiation of meaning skills, such as paraphrasing, and would have pair and group discussions as often as possible. Finally, sometimes the delivery of statements could be an issue during debates. There were difficulties related to pronunciation, intonation, and volume, all of which impeded listener understanding. Students were given instruction on delivery, including how to independently learn the pronunciation of new words, intonation, and delivering arguments with volume and enthusiasm.

Conversely, the level one class were able to use the textbook phrases and skills almost immediately, or were already proficient in them, so I looked for further language points to help strengthen their debates. For example, some early opening statements exceeded the five-minute

time limit, so we practiced writing concisely. We also studied cause and effect to help them emphasise the importance of their arguments. A final example is that after a few debates, their opening statements seemed effective, but somewhat straightforward, so we studied persuasive writing to increase the impact of their statements and to encourage more creativity.

Product Differentiation

As mentioned, the major product of the debate class is the debates, because this is where students can best demonstrate their learning on the course. The two major debate sections I have focused on differentiating over the last three years have been the opening statements and the rebuttals.

Product Differentiation: Opening Statements

Opening statements can be differentiated by length and detail. This can be done by adapting the grading rubric, meaning students need to achieve a different set of standards in order to attain a high grade. Alternatively, it can also be done through suggestions from the teacher. The following table gives an example of how one might differentiate the rubric.

Table 4

Possible Differentiation of the Assessment Rubric Regarding Opening Statements

<p>Level One - In order to get maximum points, there should be 3 main points, all with sourced evidence. Sources should be mostly English language.</p>
<p>Level Three - In order to get maximum points, there should be 2 main points, 1 of which contains sourced evidence. However, students are encouraged to include a third point, and more sources, where possible.</p>

For an effective opening statement that lasts around 3–5 minutes, it seems that three main points are ideal. However, for classes that are finding preparing statements difficult, requirements can be changed so that two main points are sufficient. Having to produce fewer arguments can give them more time to work on producing arguments of good quality. With more advanced students, as mentioned previously, they can sometimes produce overly long statements, and requiring three points can work as a limitation, meaning they need to focus on arguing more concisely.

Related to this is the level of detail and research that students are required to integrate into the statement, which can be differentiated by requiring different standards of evidence. For example, a strong class could be required to include English language sources in all of their points. In contrast, less-ready students can be required to include less sourced evidence, for example, one or two points, with examples or common knowledge accepted elsewhere. Within these criteria there are several possible permutations, depending on what is suitable for the class.

Product Differentiation: The Demands of Rebuttals

In in-course and post-course surveys conducted over the last few years, students often say rebuttals are the most challenging aspect of debate. This seems to be because they are inexperienced in thinking of criticism, they are taken aback by a well-argued point, or they have difficulty producing counterarguments in English under time pressure. To help with this, what is expected during rebuttal is another thing that can be differentiated.

Table 5

Differentiation of Rebuttals

<p>Level One - Encourage students to rebut all three of the opposition's main points. Try and include sourced evidence in rebuttals if possible, otherwise explain your counter-argument thoroughly.</p>

<p>Level Three - Students should be encouraged to rebut two of the opposition's main points, and explain their counter-arguments in as much detail as possible.</p>
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First, as with the opening statements, the length of the rebuttals can be adapted. Producing three rebuttals is more challenging than producing two or one. With classes that are struggling, requiring fewer rebuttals can allow them to focus on quality over quantity. Second, we can also change what is required in terms of rebuttal content. For instance, if the class is ready for a challenge, they may be encouraged to include sourced evidence in their rebuttals.

Process Differentiation

Mainly due to COVID-19, the three years of debate I have taught so far have been conducted either online or under classroom restrictions, and I feel as though I have not made as many adaptations in the area of process as in content and product. Not being able to leave the teacher's desk sometimes made it difficult for me to see how students actually work during classes, such as how they write an opening statement. However, the following are some attempts made at differentiation of process.

Process Differentiation: Preparation Time

The amount of time students get to prepare for a debate can significantly affect their performance, so this can be moderated. For instance, lower-readiness students can get more time to prepare, while advanced students can be given less. However, this intersects with what students are expected to produce. If your more advanced students are expected to produce more work, and of a higher standard, then cutting their preparation time might be counterproductive. Regardless, it is still something that can be considered. Another approach to managing time during debates involves the allocation of preparation time before cross-examination and rebuttals, with lower-readiness students getting more and advanced students getting less.

Process Differentiation: Debate Personnel

I usually aim for groups of three in a debate, however, I have on occasion used less or more than this. With one class that seemed low on motivation and confidence, I made groups of four or five. With more advanced classes, pair debates can provide a challenge. However, as debates will probably need to be done simultaneously, this is difficult to grade and is best done in practice debates.

Another adaptation regarding debate personnel is grouping students based on their individual abilities. Usually, I will do this by grouping stronger students with weaker students.

Reflection on the Effectiveness of Differentiation

First of all, Tomlinson (2001) says that it is somewhat difficult to separate the elements of product, process, and content, as students do not experience them in isolation (p. 72). Also, in my experience, there is likely to be more than one adaptation in effect at the same time, so it is challenging to evaluate their individual efficacy. However, I will now offer a series of short reflections on the various differentiation strategies, and offer some advice for differentiating the debate course to different ability levels.

Table 6

Effective and Less Effective Differentiation

Effective	Less Effective
Negotiating Topics/Propositions	Differentiating Requirements for the Length of Opening Statement/Rebuttals
Scaffolding - Language and Knowledge	Preparation Time before Debates
Flexible Language Focus	Allowing Longer Times to Prepare for Rebuttals and Cross Examination
Standards Demanded during Debate (e.g. sourced evidence is required or not)	Larger Teams in Lower Readiness Classes
Proficiency-Based Debate Groupings	Moderating L1 Use

Adapting the Topics and Propositions

To start with, it seems that the topics and propositions tend to be the biggest factor in determining the level of difficulty of debates. Therefore, this is probably the highest yield factor in terms of differentiation.

Lower-proficiency classes tend to encounter difficulties with unfamiliar topics. They need to not only learn a whole new area of background knowledge but also need to learn related language up to the point where they can debate. This is a huge challenge and can lead

to students becoming overwhelmed. In level three classes, I have seen several debates that have more or less collapsed, or else been very short, and I believe this is sometimes due to the topic being too difficult or else uninteresting to students. On the contrary, using familiar topics will usually help them to obtain some success. Prior background knowledge and already acquired English vocabulary in the area seem to allow them to focus on building strong arguments.

In contrast, with stronger groups, I feel that using topics students are already very familiar with does not motivate them. I have also found that they might be unenthusiastic about topics that they have already studied during their first year at the university. For example, the level one class last year did not want to debate the environment as a topic, because they had already covered it comprehensively in other classes. Also, stronger classes tend to have confidence in their academic ability, and they often seem to thrive on the challenge of researching unfamiliar topics. Several students in stronger classes already study in English as the medium of instruction, or are planning to in the future, and perhaps this approach can provide a motivating way of practising research skills on academic topics.

With all groups, it is worthwhile discussing the topics of debate with students and paying attention to how students feel about them, either before selecting a topic or in feedback after a debate.

Flexible Language Focus

As mentioned, I tend to take a reactive approach to language input on the course. In lieu of more detailed needs analyses, working with emergent issues allows me to cater to students' ZPD more directly than with prescribed language points. Moreover, trying to prescribe language points can sometimes be unsuccessful. For example, last year, the level one class studied persuasive and emotive language and were able to integrate that into their debates, which seemed to improve the quality of their debates. Previously, I tried this language skill in a prescribed fashion with groups that were in the level two bracket, and while they seemed to be engaged with the point when studying it, there was little reproduction of it during actual debates, suggesting they were perhaps not ready to acquire it yet.

Another example is that classes tend to have their idiosyncrasies, which also means they have their specific challenges. The level three class last year seemed capable of writing decent opening statements, but would often have issues delivering them. Therefore, a focus was required on delivering a statement properly.

Without more detail on students coming into the course, I think that a flexible approach to language input, in which the instructor works with emergent issues, can help to differentiate the course.

Required Standards of Debates

I have found that moderating the standards of argumentation expected can be an effective way of differentiating debates. For example, around the middle of the course, my

level one students were not only able to include sourced research in each of their opening statement points but had also started to integrate it into their rebuttals. This looked promising, so I encouraged them to do this as much as possible, highlighting the impact it can have. By the final debate, they were integrating sources into rebuttals regularly, which was highly impressive to me.

This progressive elevation of difficulty might also have helped motivate them. Sometimes advanced classes can become proficient at debating quickly, and later debates can feel like they are just going through the motions, so this kind of increasing challenge might have helped invigorate them and maintain engagement.

With struggling classes, lowering expectations of the standard of argumentation seems to be a useful method of differentiation. By reducing the requirements related to integrating research into their statements, they can focus on foundational skills and on completing debates successfully. This is not to say they should not try and include sourced evidence, and I highlight that sourced evidence will usually make their arguments stronger. However, I will also emphasise that using examples and common knowledge can also be effective, and is acceptable. I believe that this allows students who are lacking in confidence, or readiness, to give a meaningful contribution to debates, whereas other students who feel ready can practise integrating sources into their arguments.

Required Length of Arguments and Preparation Times

On the other hand, moderating the length of statements and rebuttals has been less successful. Although it certainly simplifies debates, it can lead to them being so short as to feel underwhelming. In my classes, students get homework plus around 60–90 minutes to prepare for a debate, and therefore if the resulting debate is a matter of a few sentences, it feels unsatisfying. Therefore, I tend to adhere to asking for three main points in opening statements and two or three rebuttals, and seek alternative ways to differentiate the challenge.

Similarly, I have not had great results with manipulating the amount of time required to prepare for cross-examination and rebuttals. Ideally, students have two or three minutes before cross-examination in which they can prepare questions for the opposition, and about five minutes to prepare rebuttals. In the past, I have moderated this to be longer for lower-proficiency groups, on occasion going up to ten minutes for rebuttal preparation. Again, this can feel underwhelming if the resulting rebuttals are still quite brief. Moreover, this can make the debates rather long, which can interfere with lesson time-keeping. Instead, I try to address the difficulty of rebuttals through tactics such as encouraging students to start preparing them as early as possible in the debate, and by encouraging them to predict the opposition's arguments in advance.

Grouping Depending on Student Proficiency

Regarding process differentiation, I have had good results in grouping stronger students

with weaker students. This was particularly effective in the level three class last year. In the first third of the course, which is more theory than practice, I was concerned about the class's overall readiness to successfully complete debates because although they enjoyed talking in class, they did not seem particularly inclined to the more academic side of debate. However, in the first practice debate, I noticed several students were, in fact, quite talented when it came to researching and constructing arguments. Thereafter, I would endeavor to separate these students into different teams. I believe that this ensured debates maintained quality. This could also be good for building cooperation skills, as students can realise strengths and weaknesses, and take on different roles.

Larger Teams in Lower Readiness Classes

In contrast, making larger teams in lower readiness classes has been less successful. In theory, having more students working together should make the process easier, as there is more manpower to help out with doing the research and so on. However, I have found that in reality, this can lead to some students becoming seemingly idle for long periods during preparation time, making me wonder how much they are contributing. Also, having large groups makes it difficult for each member to significantly contribute to the debates in real-time, and also perhaps makes the process confusing as the delegation of work becomes more complicated.

Final Reflection One: The Need for Needs Analyses

As a first concluding thought, something that underpins any effective differentiation is how much you know about your students. On this course, when we meet the students, we know only their TOEIC scores from a test taken upon entering the university. In reality, this gives us little information about their skills, interests, and aptitude for debate. Thus, gathering further information about students early in the course would allow us to better cater to their needs. I usually attempt this through surveys, a written assignment, and group discussions, all done very early in the course. However, it is usually not until we have completed a full practice debate that I feel confident I have an understanding of the class. Also, my knowledge of student interests develops as the course progresses, so it can be difficult to prepare certain content, such as debate topics, in advance. A possible solution to this is to use more thorough needs analysis methods early on in the course, which I intend to do in the future.

To help with this, I encourage those involved in the debate course to share information. Around 4000 students are taking the debate course, and this means that a good deal of information about the classes could be shared, which could help to inform a more detailed, faculty-wide needs analysis. In lieu of this, I would recommend teachers gather as much information about students' needs, wants, and likes as possible early in the course.

Final Reflection Two: The Need for Differentiation

Working in the university context in Japan, I have found it is not unusual to be tasked

with delivering mandatory courses to large numbers of students, who will often have quite different levels of readiness and varying learner profiles. Preparing, delivering, and grading the courses can be time-consuming, so it can be tempting to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. However, in teaching these courses and reflecting on what I have done, I have increasingly realised the usefulness of differentiation in such situations. Many of us will have encountered classes that seem overwhelmed or unmotivated, and perhaps in many cases adapting course content to students' needs would help. Perhaps the course content is too difficult, or just does not seem relevant enough to motivate them. On the other hand, there is not always an easy approach to differentiating courses, particularly if your institution has specific requirements. Some might demand you use a particular textbook, that you must aim for a particular outcome, or that a particular assessment must be implemented, and these might not always fit with your students' levels of readiness. This can make differentiating course content difficult or even daunting. However, a framework such as Tomlinson's product, process, and content model could help us to make the implementation of differentiation more manageable.

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