



Problems of individualization and differentiation of education at different stages of training.

Zukhra Safarova Qurbon qizi

Karshi 1-son IMI

E-mail: Zuhkras22@gmail.ru

Abstract

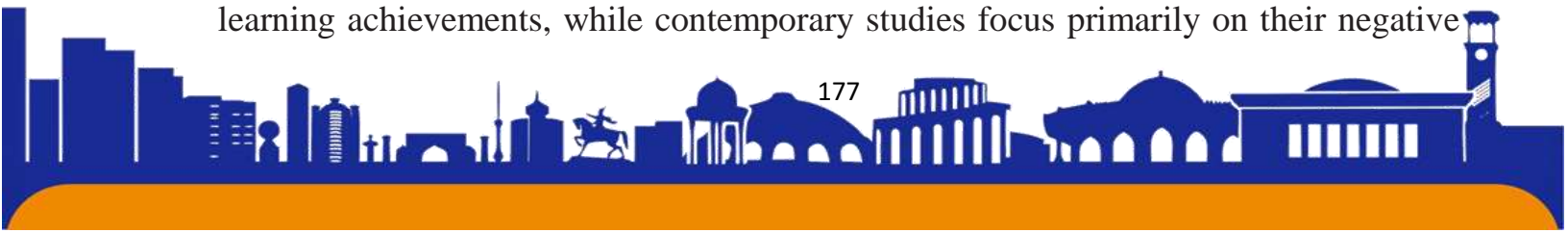
Nowadays one of the most important methods of encouraging students during class is the implementation of appropriate differentiating and individualizing measures. This article addresses the core aspects of this technique and gives clear examples of successfully conducted lessons.

Keywords: aspirations, inclinations, social-reproduction, devoted to, hospitalization

Introduction

Fostering the students' optimal development primarily takes place by implementing the principle of individualization, which requires schools and teachers to plan and implement the educational process in a way that allows each student to acquire knowledge and develop their abilities and personality traits as best they can. Doing so relies not only on the individual student's learning ability but also on their interests and needs (Dixon et al., 2014; Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Strmčnik, 2001; Subban, 2006; Tomlinson, 2001; Wang, 1984). Individualization is a didactic principle that requires schools and teachers to adapt classroom teaching and learning to the individual educational and learning characteristics, needs, aspirations, and inclinations of each student, allowing them to learn independently.

Although they are two different concepts, individualization and differentiation are closely related because putting individualization into practice always presupposes some form of differentiation. Generally speaking, a distinction can be made between organizational and formal differentiation (Le Tender et al., 2003), which refers to differentiation among different types of schools, i.e., between vocational and academic upper secondary schools, and curriculum differentiation, which takes place at the school level. Curriculum differentiation denotes "a process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes. [... Students are often] placed into fast, average, or slow classes" (Oakes, 2005, p. 3). Organizational and curriculum differentiation have long been targets of severe criticism due to their unfavorable effects: early studies indicated their unfavorable effects on learning achievements, while contemporary studies focus primarily on their negative





impact on equity of education (Cankar et al., 2017; Dupriez, 2010; Field et al., 2007; Oakes, 2005; Slavin, 1987, 1990; Willms, 2006). As early as 1987, Slavin concluded, “The use of ability grouping may serve to increase divisions along class, race, and ethnic group lines” (1987, p. 297). Differentiation has been criticized as a key mechanism that strengthens the system’s social-reproduction role, yet it can also serve to lessen this role and improve education equity if it is organized as a flexible mechanism (Dupriez, 2010).

It is not a secret that our country’s education development is much slower than in other nations. As such, schools face major professional challenges in their day-to-day work, as they have to carry out educational programs in a different climate. This can be less favorable to learning and for students who have not only poor prior knowledge, underdeveloped learning strategies, and low motivation (Bren et al., 2017), but also several personal, family-related, and financial hardships (Belasić & Čop, 2020; Poročilo o spremljanju, 2008).

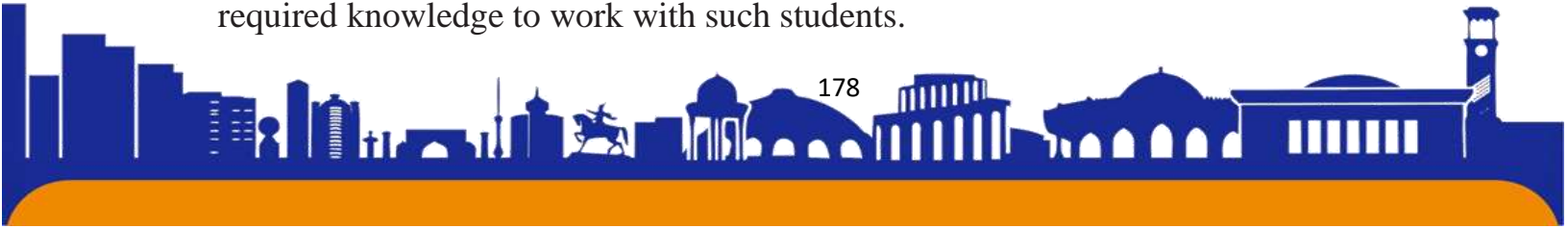
The Role of School Management in the Implementation of Individualization

When asked about the way they encourage teachers to implement individualization and how it could be strengthened even further, the HT explained that special attention is devoted to supporting class teachers³. Being a class teacher is considered a great challenge, and class teachers are therefore encouraged to organize “*themed class meetings because they strengthen the class teacher’s interaction with students. We have workshops on strengthening social skills, etc.*” (HT). Some class teachers conduct individual student consultations; some keep individual records. The HT pointed out:

“Our school is a vocational school and the students have it anything but easy. They have to be employed and attend school at the same time. The fact is that we adapt the program to these students.” (HT)

The school also encourages peer support so that, for instance, students with immigrant experience help newly immigrated students. However, the school also wants to devote more attention to more able and highly motivated students.

The school encourages teacher teamwork so that teachers share knowledge and experience. Teachers share knowledge using shared online classrooms, and thematic conferences, where teachers can present examples of good practice, are also organized occasionally. The school works with companies where students do compulsory work experience; however, they work more closely with companies that are willing to take on students with special educational needs because mentors in companies often lack the required knowledge to work with such students.





Regarding how many students in individual programs have a personal education plan (PEP) and the most common reasons for having one, no exact figures were obtained because the school does not keep any comprehensive records. However, the reasons PEPs were prepared were listed in the preliminary questionnaire. The most common reason is a statement of special educational needs—if a student has one, a PEP is a statutory requirement. In addition, PEPs are prepared for students who have many failing marks, for immigrant students (according to the law, they are entitled to assessment accommodations for two years after immigrating to Slovenia), when a student transfers from another school or program, and when instructional accommodations are needed for students after a lengthy hospitalization. Of the students who were asked if they had a PEP—a quarter answered in the affirmative—which corresponds with the school's assessment.

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