



DIFFERENTIATE

The Learning Theory Behind Our Programs

At Differentiate we pride ourselves not just on what we teach, but on how we design learning that genuinely transforms graduates into future-ready professionals.

Our Learning Design Process is built on a strong foundation of respected educational theory, ensuring that every program is intentional, inclusive, and impactful.

Here is a summary of the main theories that inform our strategy.



01.

Competency-Based Learning

Our programs are built around clearly defined competencies and the core capabilities that new graduates need to thrive in the workplace. Each competency is carefully unpacked into three dimensions:

- **Skills** — the practical abilities graduates need to perform tasks effectively.
- **Knowledge** — the essential information and concepts that underpin confident decision-making.
- **Behaviours** — the attitudes, values, and interpersonal approaches that define professional excellence.

By addressing all three dimensions, we ensure graduates don't just know what to do, they can apply, adapt, and embody their learning in real-world contexts.



02.

The Five Stages of Learning



Our learning experiences take into account the Five Stages of Learning:

1. **Unconscious Incompetence** — the learner doesn't know what they don't know.
2. **Conscious Incompetence** — awareness of the skill gap develops.
3. **Conscious Competence** — the learner can perform, but effort and focus are required.
4. **Unconscious Competence** — skills become second nature.
5. **Mastery** — the learner can not only perform but reflect, adapt, and teach others.

Our programs are designed to put learners on a journey towards conscious competence, giving them the tools to continue the journey independently through the remaining stages.



03.

Bloom's Taxonomy

This theory of educational objectives has stood the test of time. It paves the way for setting learning outcomes that take the learner on a journey of progressive levels of cognitive demand. It is the stepping stones from conscious incompetence to conscious competence.



Remember (recall facts)

Understand (explain ideas)

Apply (use information in new situations)

Analyze (draw connections)

Evaluate (justify decisions)

Create (produce original work)

This structured progression ensures that graduates are not only absorbing knowledge but are empowered to think critically, solve problems, and innovate, vital capabilities for dynamic work environments.



04. Experiential Learning

Learning by doing is essential for real-world readiness, but action alone isn't enough. Our programs are built around Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle, which emphasizes a continuous process of:

- **Concrete Experience** (doing)
- **Reflective Observation** (reviewing & reflecting)
- **Abstract Conceptualisation** (making sense of experiences)
- **Active Experimentation** (applying insights gained)

A key focus in our design is the **development of reflective practice**, which is the ability to critically assess one's actions, draw meaningful insights, and adapt future behaviour. We see this as a cornerstone of effective learning and professional growth, yet it is often a skill underdeveloped in early-career graduates.

Through guided reflection activities, coaching conversations, action-learning projects, and structured feedback loops, we ensure that graduates don't just experience, they learn from experience.

03.

Bernstein's Sociology of Education

Operating in South Africa, we are acutely aware of the diversity in our graduate cohorts, learners come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, educational experiences, and cultural contexts.

We incorporate principles from Basil Bernstein's Sociology of Education to ensure our programs are equitable and accessible.

- Being mindful of visible and invisible codes of communication and learning.
- Designing learning materials that are explicit, transparent, and supportive of different starting points.
- Fostering a learning environment where all graduates feel respected, included, and set up for success.
- By actively addressing potential barriers, we create programs where every graduate, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive.





Our Learning Design Process is not a one-size-fits-all solution.

It is a thoughtful, research-backed system that:

- Builds true competencies
- Supports progressive competency
- Encourages critical and creative thinking through establishing reflective practice
- Embeds learning through real experience
- Understand the unique sociological fabric of our country

This is the foundation that enables us to unlock the full potential of every graduate we serve.

