**Differentiation Strategies for Supporting
AEN & EAL Students in the Post-Primary Classroom**

Webinar Reflection Notes – 28th January 2025, 7:00 pm
Sligo Education Centre
(After AEN Inspection at Cabra Community College)

1. Subject Performance

Outline the strengths and challenges faced by students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) in key subjects.

Provide examples of areas where differentiation can support students in these subjects.

2. Class Engagement

Focus on student participation, concentration, and contributions within lessons.

Discuss engagement strategies that promote active learning and inclusivity for all learners, especially those with AEN or English as an Additional Language (EAL).

3. Social Interaction

Comment on peer relationships and interactions in group settings.

Discuss the importance of fostering a supportive classroom environment that encourages collaboration among students, including those with AEN and EAL.

4. Behaviour

Highlight positive and concerning behavioural observations.

Share insights into how positive reinforcement and appropriate behavioural interventions can support students with additional needs.

<u>**Support Needs Identified**</u>

1. Additional Support

Detail any additional support required, such as assistance with focus, tailored materials, or behavioural strategies.

2. Current Strategies in Place

Outline existing strategies and their effectiveness, with particular focus on AEN students' needs.

Plan for Further Development

Collaboration: Work with AEN Coordinators and Year Heads to develop specific actions for each student, including Individual Education Plans (IEPs), additional support sessions, and other accommodations.

Accommodations: Consider possible accommodations, such as extended time for assignments, reduced workload, or access to specialised resources.

Extracurricular Support: Suggest involvement in extracurricular activities to support the development of personal skills and confidence in students.

Next Steps

Arrange meetings with relevant staff, parents, or guardians to discuss the ongoing support for students.

Set up regular check-ins to monitor student progress.

Review any external assessments, evaluations, or referrals that may be required.

Student Support Plans (SSPs)

Purpose of SSPs
SSPs are essential for understanding and supporting students with additional educational needs. They serve as a comprehensive document summarising a student's key information, needs, and strategies for success.

1. Communication Logs

Track interactions between the AEN team, parents/guardians, and external professionals.

2. Recommendations

Insights from psychologists, occupational therapists, and speech and language therapists to inform teaching strategies.

3. Best Practices

Provide clear guidance on what works well for each student, and what strategies may not be effective.

Why SSPs Are Important

They provide an overview of how to tailor teaching for students with diverse needs.

Teachers should consult SSPs when they are unsure of how best to support a student, as they contain specific recommendations and strategies.

Accessing SSPs

AEN Coordinator or Team: Identify the individual or team responsible for managing AEN in the school. If unsure, consult school management for clarification.

Year Heads: Year Heads can also provide valuable insights regarding students' specific needs.

SNA Allocations: Ensure that the role of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) is understood and integrated into the SSP for each student requiring support.

Key Takeaway

SSPs are a vital resource for all teachers working with students with additional educational needs. Familiarising oneself with these plans and knowing how to access them through the AEN Coordinator or team is crucial for supporting students effectively.

Effective AEN Support Strategies

To support students with AEN, it's critical to understand both effective and ineffective strategies. SSPs offer this insight, and teachers should review them regularly to ensure appropriate differentiation in teaching.

Q&A Session Tips

Share key resources (such as graphics or screenshots) directly in the chat during workshops or webinars. This ensures that attendees can engage with the materials without needing to switch between multiple resources.

Always involve SNAs in these discussions as they play an integral role in implementing strategies and ensuring consistency in the classroom.

Recommended Classroom Resources

1. Goblin.Tools

A versatile tool with basic AI capabilities that simplifies tasks for students, breaking them down into manageable steps. It supports differentiation for learners at different levels and provides adaptive suggestions based on individual needs.

Supporting Students with EAL (English as an Additional Language)

1. Recognising Language Barriers

Tasks that seem simple for most students may require additional support for EAL learners. Differentiation should be inclusive to avoid singling out students.

2. Rewordify

A tool that simplifies complex text by replacing difficult words with synonyms. It's particularly helpful for EAL students to enhance comprehension and vocabulary.

3. Immersive Reader and Read&Write

Tools that assist students with reading and writing challenges by providing features such as text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and background colour changes to support EAL learners and students with learning differences.

4. Assistive Technology

Devices like laptops, granted by the Department of Education, help students with specific needs. Ensure these tools are used effectively by consulting with the AEN coordinator.

Inclusive Differentiation Techniques

1. Task Breakdown

Provide tasks in a sequence (e.g., "First read, then answer questions") to avoid overwhelming students, particularly those with attention difficulties.

2. Collaborative Goal Setting

Involve students in defining behavioural expectations and goals to foster ownership and engagement.

3. Consistency and Feedback

Use tools like ClassDojo to provide regular, positive feedback and help build confidence, especially for shy or EAL students.

Key Takeaway

Technology can enhance accessibility for all students, including EAL learners. Integrating these tools and strategies fosters a more inclusive classroom environment that supports diverse learning needs.

To consolidate your research reflection and resources, this section can be framed as an exploration of your ongoing learning journey, reflecting on how your professional and personal development in education, art, and faith intertwine. Here's how you can structure the notes from your recent webinar, integrating them into your framework for research reflection and resources:

<center>**Research Reflection & Resources**</center>

Differentiation Strategies for Supporting AEN & EAL Students in the Post-Primary Classroom

Webinar Reflection: 28th January 2025

This webinar provided a valuable opportunity to engage with and reflect on strategies for supporting students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) in post-primary classrooms. Below is a synthesis of key takeaways and how I plan to integrate this learning into my teaching practice and ongoing development.

1. Subject Performance: Understanding Strengths & Challenges

Reflecting on the unique strengths and challenges that students with AEN face in key subjects, I'm reminded of the importance of tailoring lessons to meet individual needs. Differentiating instruction to allow students to engage meaningfully with content—be it through modified assignments or flexible groupings—aligns with my commitment to creating inclusive, empowering environments where all students can thrive.

Application in Practice: By documenting these strategies, I can develop more inclusive materials and approaches that are directly tied to the AEN students' individual strengths. This

also provides an opportunity for me to reflect on the broader philosophical question of how education can serve as a tool for empowerment and inclusivity.

2. Class Engagement: Strategies for Active Learning

The webinar highlighted the importance of fostering student participation, especially for AEN and EAL learners. Active learning strategies that focus on engagement and inclusivity are crucial for creating an environment where all students feel valued and capable of contributing.

Personal Reflection: As an educator, I'm challenged to continuously assess my own classroom environment and teaching methods. How can I modify tasks to ensure that every student, especially those who may face language or learning barriers, is able to actively engage in the lesson? The use of technologies like Rewordify or Immersive Reader aligns with my values of accessibility and inclusion, enriching my own toolkit for teaching.

3. Social Interaction: Building Peer Relationships

Encouraging collaboration among students with AEN and EAL fosters a supportive classroom culture. This aspect of the webinar reinforced my belief in the importance of social learning—where students develop not only academic but also social skills in a safe, supportive space.

Reflection on Values: Collaboration is not only a key pedagogical strategy but also aligns with my Christian values of community and mutual support. I aim to create classrooms that mirror these principles, where students, regardless of their background or ability, can experience meaningful connections.

4. Behaviour: Positive Reinforcement & Interventions

The importance of implementing positive behavioural strategies for students with AEN was discussed. Effective classroom management supports student learning and creates an atmosphere conducive to growth.

Integration into Practice: I plan to explore how positive reinforcement can be systematically applied to build student confidence and behaviour. Tools like ClassDojo offer opportunities for feedback that is constructive and motivating for students, particularly those with shy dispositions or learning challenges.

Support Needs Identified

Additional Support
The need for tailored materials and focus strategies was emphasized. Differentiation involves more than content adaptation; it requires an understanding of students' unique needs, including behavioural and emotional support.

Future Planning: The development of Student Support Plans (SSPs) will be an ongoing resource that will guide my teaching strategies. Reflecting on these plans allows me to more precisely cater to the individual learning needs of students, contributing to their success in the classroom.

Plan for Further Development

The webinar also outlined steps for collaborating with AEN coordinators and Year Heads to create personalised plans for students. This highlights the importance of continuous professional collaboration in refining teaching practices.

Action Steps: Moving forward, I will be working on individual education plans (IEPs) for students, ensuring that I align these with best practices and the tools available, like Goblin.Tools and assistive technology.

Next Steps: Ongoing Support & Collaboration

By arranging meetings with staff and parents to discuss the ongoing support for students, I can further my goal of being a reflective educator. The reflective process is not just about internal learning but also about fostering transparent, cooperative relationships with colleagues, students, and their families.

Reflective Integration: Regular check-ins with stakeholders will help me refine my approach, ensuring that learning is not static but evolves to meet the changing needs of my students.

Key Takeaways: Tools & Resources

The webinar's emphasis on digital tools—such as Rewordify, Immersive Reader, and assistive technology—was particularly relevant in making my teaching more accessible to EAL students. These tools support my ongoing exploration of integrating technology into education, enhancing my understanding of its role in differentiated learning.

Personal Commitment: By integrating these resources, I will further develop my educational practice to ensure that I'm meeting the diverse needs of my students. Each tool offers a unique

way to personalise learning experiences, something I am keen to continue exploring and documenting for future teaching.

Conclusion

This webinar reinforced the importance of reflection as an essential element of professional growth. By integrating these insights into my daily practice, I am better equipped to provide the support needed for all students to succeed. My approach to teaching continues to evolve, shaped by my commitment to inclusion, the value of community, and the pursuit of personal and professional growth.

By documenting and reflecting on these insights, I create a dynamic research repository that informs both my teaching and my ongoing practice. The fusion of creative, theological, and educational reflection is at the heart of how I build meaningful learning experiences, both for myself and for those I serve. Through this reflective process, I continue to explore how learning can shape and be shaped by the work I do as an educator, artist, and community member.