

The Differentiated Classroom – “Equity in the learning process”

Differentiated instruction is an approach that assumes there is a diversity of learners in every classroom and that all of those learners can be reached if a variety of methods and activities are used. It is modified instruction that helps students with diverse academic needs and learning styles master the same challenging academic content. **Think –readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles.**

Do NOT “aim for the middle.” Research has shown this as ineffective because it ignores the needs of advanced students, often leaving them unchallenged and bored, while it intimidates and confuses lower functioning learners.

Differentiation is most successful when combined with the use of high-quality curriculum, research-based instructional strategies, well-designed activities that address the needs and interests of students, and active learning.

Start small, assess daily, use simple assessment tools, keep groups FLEXIBLE, teach when and what is needed, and use materials you have.

Differentiation can improve achievement, self-confidence, and motivation.

☺ Don't forget that you can increase your repertoire of skills by sharing ideas/strategies with your colleagues and consulting those with specialized training in differentiation, such as special education teachers and teachers of gifted students.

Four Steps:

- ❖ First, you must have a thorough understanding of the academic content or skill you want your students to learn.
- ❖ Second, you must determine what your students already know and what they do not know about the content.
- ❖ Then, decide which instructional methods and materials will most successfully address those needs.
- ❖ Finally, design ways to adequately assess student mastery of what is taught.

Step One and Two: Be familiar with our new state standards and follow the curriculum map and pacing guide. Administer regularly used, classroom-based assessments. These may include: initial skills assessment (not only at the beginning of the year, but these could be offered at the beginning of units of study), formal (diagnostic tests, student performance notebooks, student

surveys/questionnaires), informal (review work/writing samples/test results, conferences, and observations).

Step Three: Vary the materials. The use of varied materials will encourage students to understand the concept. For example: Use fiction and nonfiction books, leveled readers, pictures, video clips, newspaper/magazine articles and pictures to teach “main idea.”

Vary the process. How do students interact with these various materials?

Think- varied levels of support, challenge, or complexity. Instead of generating isolated tasks, you may work with the whole class, small groups, individual students, or a combination of all three. For example: when introducing a new concept, you might address all students but make use of graphs, pictures, or artifacts in addition to lecturing. You might ask students to work in pairs or independently while you assist a small group of students, using questioning that encourages critical thinking or assesses the students’ level of understanding. Small groups can be arranged by achievement levels, but also can be grouped by interest level or reading levels. One-on-one might include an interview, individual assessment/questionnaire, flashcards, etc.

Step Four: Vary the assessment. Give students options when it comes to demonstrating their mastery of the content. This might include: varying the length of time a student has to complete a task, using a written piece of work, or oral presentation. The use of rubrics has also been proven effective once the students are taught how to use them. These do not have to be complex. They can be modified and appropriate for any grade level.

Strategies for Differentiating Instruction

1. Use Technology (video clips, United Streaming, or create a power point). For example: During your animal unit, show pictures or video of bears. Some students will use creative writing and pretend they are the bear in the picture/video and write about their adventure. Some students could create a new undiscovered type of bear including a picture, description, feeding habits, and habitat. The third group of students could illustrate three types of bears from the unit and include all the details they have learned about the bears (feeding habits/diet, hibernation, habitat, etc.).
2. Group Lessons by dividing students according to their learning abilities. For example: Math – group one will work together with your guidance and manipulatives to go through the activity. Group two will use manipulatives, but will work together, without you, to solve the problems. Group three will be made up of partners who work together to figure out the problem(s).
3. Group Discussions by addressing all levels of learning and including each child in the discussion.
 - ❖ Recall Questions (knowledge or comprehension) for students who have trouble thinking on the spot and answering. They can recall facts and build confidence.

- ❖ Include questions with no right or wrong answers. This allows them to think outside the box and apply what they are discussing to other situations.
 - ❖ Evaluative questions are those that promote further discussion.
 - ❖ Application questions allow students to relate their topic to their own lives and personal experiences.
4. Learning Centers – each center can include differentiated tasks and assignments to meet the various needs of students. These should be planned for the week and NOT different centers each day. The students can complete assignments throughout the week. Work smarter NOT harder! 😊

Easy Self-Assessment:

Thumbs up, down, or sideways

Glass, Bug, or Mud (referred to the front of a car windshield)

Glass – means the student can see through the windshield clearly and has a strong understanding of the concept.

Bug – is a partially covered windshield, indicating the student's understanding is not completely clear, but there is evidence of knowledge of the subject.

Mud – refers to a windshield completely covered by dirt; the student shows no understanding of the concept.

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