

Differentiated Instruction:

The Strategies:



Readiness / Ability

Teachers can use a variety of assessments to determine a student's ability or readiness. Also, to learn new concepts students may be generally working below or above grade level or they may simply be missing many prerequisite skills.

However, readiness can change and it is important that students be permitted to move between different groups (see flexible grouping). Activities for each group are often differentiated by complexity. Students whose understanding is below grade level will work at tasks less complex than those attempted by more advanced students. Those students whose reading level is below grade level will benefit by reading with a buddy or listening to stories/instructions using a tape recorder so that they receive information verbally.

Varying the level of questioning and compacting the curriculum are useful strategies for accommodating differences in ability or readiness.

Adjusting Questions

During large group discussion activities, teachers direct the higher level questions to the students who can handle them and adjust questions accordingly for student with greater needs. All students are answering important questions that require them to think but the questions are targeted towards the student's ability or readiness level.

An easy tool for accomplishing this is to put posters on the classroom walls with key words that identify the varying levels of thinking. For example putting posters on the walls (based on Bloom's taxonomy) one for Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis

and Evaluation. Different students may be referred to different posters at certain times depending on ability, readiness or assignment requirements.

With written quizzes the teacher may assign specific questions for each group of students. They all answer the same number of questions but the complexity required varies from group to group. However, the option to go beyond minimal requirements can be available for any or all students who demonstrate that they require an additional challenge for their level.

Compacting Curriculum

Compacting the curriculum means assessing a student's knowledge, skills and attitudes and providing alternative activities for the student who has already mastered curriculum content. This can be achieved by pre-testing basic concepts or using performance assessment methods. Students who demonstrate that they do not require instruction move on to tiered problem solving activities while others receive instruction.

Tiered Assignments

Tiered activities are a series of related tasks of varying complexity. All of these activities relate to essential understanding and key skills that students need to acquire. Teachers assign the activities as alternative ways of reaching the same goals taking into account individual student needs.

Pacing

Accelerating or decelerating the pace that students move through curriculum is another method of differentiating instruction. Students demonstrating a high level of competence can work through the curriculum at a faster pace. Students experiencing difficulties may need adjusted activities that allow for a slower pace in order to experience success.

Flexible Grouping

As student performance will vary it is important to permit movement between groups. Student's readiness varies depending on personal talents and interests, so we must remain open to the concept that ***a student may be below grade level in one subject at the same time as being above grade level in another subject.***

Flexible grouping allows students to be appropriately challenged and avoids labeling a student's readiness as fixed. Students should not be kept in a fixed group for any particular subjects as their learning will probably accelerate from time to time.

Even highly talented students can benefit from flexible grouping. Often they benefit from work with intellectual peers, while occasionally in another group they can experience being a leader. In either case peer-teaching is a valuable strategy for group-work.

Learning Profiles/Styles

Another means for assigning students to tasks is by learning style, such as adjusting preferred environment (quiet, lower lighting, formal/casual seating etc.) or learning modality: auditory (learns best by hearing information) visual (learns best through seeing information in charts or pictures) or kinesthetic preferences (learns best by using concrete examples, or may need to move around while learning) or through personal interests. Since student motivation is also an essential element in learning, understanding individual learning styles and interests will permit teachers to apply appropriate strategies for developing intrinsic motivational techniques.

Student Interest Surveys

Interest surveys are often used for determining student interest. Brainstorming for subtopics within a curriculum concept and using semantic webbing to explore interesting facets of the concept is another effective tool. This is also an effective way of teaching students how to focus on a manageable subtopic. Mindmanager (<http://Mindjet.com>) and Inspiration are two very useful software applications that can facilitate the teacher in guiding students through exploring a concept and focusing on manageable and personally interesting subtopics.

Peer Coaching & Teaching

More often than not, a student may have personal needs that require one-on-one instruction that goes beyond the needs of his or her peers. After receiving this extra instruction the student could be designated as the "resident expert" for that concept or skill and can get valuable practice by being given the opportunity to re-teach the concept to peers. In these circumstances both students benefit.

Reading Buddies

This strategy is particularly useful for younger students and/or students with reading difficulties. Children get additional practice and experience reading away from the teacher as they develop fluency and comprehension. It is important that students read with a specific purpose in mind and then have an opportunity to discuss what was read. It is not necessary for reading buddies to always be at the same reading level. Students with varying word recognition, word analysis and comprehension skills can help each other be more

successful. Follow up tasks can be assigned based on readiness level.

Independent Projects

Independent Projects is a research activity where students learn how to develop the skills for independent learning. The degree of help and structure will vary between students and depend on their ability to manage ideas, time and productivity.

Study Buddies

A study buddy permits two or three students to work together on a project. The expectation is that all may share the research and analysis/organization of information but each student must complete an individual product to demonstrate learning that has taken place and be accountable for their own planning, time management and individual accomplishment

Learning Contracts

A learning contract is a written agreement between teacher and student that will result in students working independently. The contract helps students to set daily and weekly work goals and develop management skills. It also helps the teacher to keep track of each student's progress. The actual assignments will vary according to specific student needs.

Classroom Learning/ Activity Centers

Activity centers have been used by teachers for many years and may contain both differentiated and required activities. However a center is not necessarily differentiated unless the activities are varied by complexity taking in to account different student ability and readiness. It is important that students understand what is expected of them at the center and are encouraged to manage their use of time. The degree of structure that is provided will vary according to student independent work habits. At the end of each week students should be able to account for their use of time. Preparing students in advance and monitoring activities is essential with utilizing activity centers.

Anchoring Activities

This is a list of activities that a student can do to at any time when they have completed present assignments or it can be assigned for a short period at the beginning of each class as students organize themselves and prepare for work. These activities may relate to specific needs or enrichment opportunities, including journals to write or problem solving activities. They could also be part of a long-term project. These activities may provide the teacher with time to provide specific help and small group instruction to students requiring

additional help to get started. Students can work at different paces but always have productive work product. These activities may have been previously called seat-work, and should not be confused with busy-work. ***These activities must be worthy of a student's time and appropriate to their learning needs.***

With the use of differentiation in the classroom, the teacher becomes a facilitator, assessor of students and planner of activities rather than an instructor. It is less structured, busier and often less quiet than traditional teaching methods. However, it has been found that differentiation engages students more deeply in their learning, provides for constant growth and development, and provides for a stimulating and exciting classroom.

Additional useful resources:

<http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/differentiated-instruction/>

http://www.differentiatedresources.com/differentiated_resources.htm

http://www.cast.org/publications/ncac/ncac_diffinstructudl.html

*Adapted from information on: **www.enhancelearning.ca***

Intervention4Success is a SW SELPA project supporting best practice to help teachers systematically use assessment data to individualize instruction and meet the needs of all students. For more information contact: Mary P. Ring @ 310-798-2731