DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION

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Differentiating instruction may either mean that a teacher uses the same material to all learners in a variety of instructional strategies, or it may require the teacher to deliver lessons at different levels of difficulty based on the ability of each learner. In other words, it is like a tailoring instruction to meet individual needs.

Differentiated instruction has started to the days of the one-room schoolhouse, where one teacher had students of all ages in one classroom. As the educational system grows it turned into grade level system assuming that children learned similarly of the same age. In 1912, achievement test result revealed the gaps in learners’ abilities within grade levels. Later on in 1975, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) passed. Promoting children with disabilities to have the equal access to public education. To reach the large number of learners, many teachers used differentiated instruction strategies until it came the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2000, which further encouraged differentiated and skill-based instruction - and that’s because it works.

According to Tomlinson, teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile:

1. Content

It refers to as what the learner needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information.
To differentiate the content, a teacher may craft activities for small groups of learners that cover various levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy (a classification of levels of intellectual behavior going from lower-order thinking skills to higher-order thinking skills).

As examples of differentiating activities, for lower levels: The teacher could ask the learners to match up vocabulary words to definitions; or to read a passage of text and answer related questions. For the middle levels, teacher could ask the learners to think of a situation that happened to a character in the story and a different outcome; or ask them to differentiate fact from opinion in the story. And as for the higher level, the teacher could ask them to identify an author’s position and provide evidence to support this viewpoint; or to create a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the lesson.

2. Process

It refers to the activities in which the learners engages in order to make sense of or master the content.

Learners have a preferred different learning styles, and successful differentiation includes providing the material to each style: visual, auditory and kinesthetic, and through words. This method addresses the fact that not every learner requires same amount of help of the teacher. Learners could choose to work in pairs, small groups, or individually. As some learners may benefit from one-on-one interaction with the teacher, others may be able to progress by themselves.

As examples of differentiating the process, the teacher could provide textbooks for visual and word learners; allow auditory learners to listen to audio books; as well as to give the opportunity to complete an interactive assignment online for the kinesthetic learners.

3. Products

It refers to the culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit.
Product is what the learner constructs at the end of the lesson to show mastery of the content. It can be in the form of tests, projects, reports, or other activities. The teacher could assign learners to complete the activities in a way the student prefers, based on learning style.

As examples of differentiating the end product, the teacher could read and write learners write a book report; ask to create a graphic organizer of the story for the visual learners; give an oral report story to the auditory learners; and to craft a diorama illustrating the for the Kinesthetic learners.

4. Learning environment

It is the way the classroom works and feels.

Physical and psychological elements are conditions for optimal learning. Incorporation of various types of furniture as well its arrangements to support both individual and group work. It is wise for a teachers to use classroom management techniques to support a safe and supportive learning environment.

As examples of differentiating the environment, teacher may break some students into reading groups to discuss the assignment; may also allow students to read individually if preferred; or to create quiet spaces where there are no distractions.

References:

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