



DEMYSTIFYING DIFFERENTIATION: MAKING IT A HABIT

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Abstract

*Fair isn't everybody getting the same thing, Fair is everyone getting what they need in order to be successful. Diversity in the classroom takes multiple forms. We often think of diversity in demographic or group terms, such as age, class, culture, disabilities, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Teachers aren't simply teaching one students with different faces; they are teaching different students, each with distinctive needs and talents, and different levels of motivation, attention, knowledge, and maturity. Students enter classrooms with different abilities, learning styles, multiple intelligences and personalities. Educators are mandated to see that all students meet the standards of nation. With contemporary classrooms becoming increasingly diverse, educational authorities, teachers and school administrators are looking to teaching and learning strategies that cater for a variety of learning profiles. A paradigm that is gaining ground in many educational circles is **Differentiated Instruction**. This instruction proposes rethinking of the structure, management and content of the classroom, inviting participants within the learning context to become engaged in the process, to the benefit of all. Differentiated instruction is any instructional strategy that recognizes and supports individual differences in learning. Differentiated instruction maximizes learning by considering students' individual and cultural learning styles, recognizing that some students will require adjusted expectations, and offering different ways for students to explore curriculum and demonstrate learning (as well as accepting that these different methods are of equal value). With differentiated instruction, the teacher aims to create learning situations that match students' current abilities and preferred learning styles while stretching their abilities and encouraging them to try new ways of learning. Through the use of differentiated instruction strategies, educators can meet the needs of all students and help them to meet and exceed the established standards. In this paper the authors give insight into concept of differentiated instruction, strategies for differentiating content, process and product, and in so doing shed light on the rationale supporting differentiated instruction.*

Keywords: Differentiated instruction, learning styles & multiple intelligences



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Introduction

Every student can LEARN, just not on the same day or in the same way.

- George
Evans

Current educational trends across the globe reflect significant changes in student populations from two or three decades ago. The inclusion of students from vernacular medium, students with disabilities, students from diverse cultural backgrounds and students on accelerated programs, compel educators to relook at their teaching and instructional practices. The

homogeneity of yesteryear has been replaced by widespread diversity, however in many contexts; teachers do not appear to have adjusted their methods to keep abreast of these trends. Following on from this, attention is focused on the factors that intensify a shift in instructional practice. Finally, the differentiated instruction model is presented as a response to addressing learner variance.

Varying learning activities is an important way to provide appropriate opportunities for all students to explore concepts. Collaborative learning activities, tiered assignments, learning centers, learning logs, individual goal-setting, changing the pace or delivery of instruction, and using visual and verbal cueing are examples of differentiating process so that all students can be active participants in the classroom. Supporting differentiated instruction also involves using time flexibly by building in opportunities to address individual interests and needs, and allowing different students to work at different speeds.

Background

The history of differentiated instruction dates back to the 1600s when one room school houses were the staple in education. In this setting, one teacher was responsible for educating students in a wide range of grades and ability levels. "One room, one teacher, no technology". As our country transitioned from the one room schoolhouse to grading schools, it was assumed that all children of the same chronological age could learn the same materials at the same pace. However, struggling students still existed and those who could not keep up with their peers left school and sought work.

Conceptual Framework

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning is central to instructional enhancement, classroom change and redevelopment. To develop the ZPD, learners must actively interact socially with knowledgeable adult or capable peers. Vygotsky's Theory sees the student-teacher relationship as collaborative, with the learning experience becoming reciprocal. The teacher designs the lesson so that instruction extends the student to just above his/her current developmental level. Vygotsky's theory is base for differentiating the instruction and helps all learners attain their ZPD.

Need And Importance

Differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching and learning for students with different abilities in the same classroom. The theory behind differentiated instruction is that teachers should vary and adapt their approaches to fit the vast diversity of students in the classroom. Teachers who differentiate instruction recognize that students differ in many ways, including prior knowledge and experiences, readiness, language, culture, learning preferences, and interests. They realize they must change the way they teach in order to reach all students. Through differentiated instruction, students will get to the same place, but take different paths

Objectives Of The Paper

- 1) Discuss the concept and principles of differentiation
- 2) Explain modes of differentiation as per students
- 3) Modifications for differentiation

Objective Wise Description

Concept of Differentiation: Differentiated instruction is a teaching philosophy based on the premise that teachers should adapt instruction to student differences. Rather than marching students through the curriculum lockstep, teachers should modify their instruction to meet

students' varying readiness levels, learning preferences, and interests. Therefore, the teacher proactively plans a variety of ways to 'get at' and express learning." It's about matching the teacher's teaching to the student's learning.

Key Principles of a Differentiated Classroom

- The teacher is clear about what matters in subject matter.
- The teacher understands, appreciates, and builds upon student differences.
- Assessment is ongoing and tightly linked to instruction
- The teacher adjusts content, process, and product in response to student readiness, interests, and learning profile.
- Teachers ensure "respectful activities" for all students
- Students and teachers are collaborators in learning.
- Goals of a differentiated classroom are maximum growth and individual success.
- Flexibility is the hallmark of a differentiated classroom

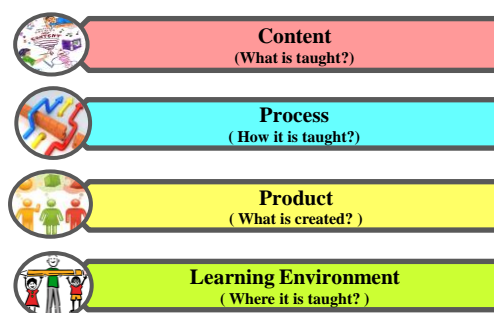
Modes of Differentiation as per students need: Differentiated instruction is effective instruction that is responsive to students' readiness, interests and learning profile.

All three characteristics of the learner—readiness, interests and preferences—allow educators and students to build new learning through connections to existing knowledge and preferred ways of working.

- ✓ **Readiness** refers to the student's starting point for learning, relative to the concept being studied.
- ✓ Attention to students' **interests** increases the relevancy of learning material by linking new information to students' 'experience and enthusiasm.
- ✓ **Learning profile** are the many different ways in which learners prefer to acquire information. It can be identified using two ways **Learning styles** and **multiple intelligences**.

Modifications for Differentiation

Teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile: (1) **content** – what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information; (2) **process** – activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content; (3) **products** – projects that ask the student to demonstrate what he or she has learned in a unit; and (4) **learning environment** – the way the classroom works and feels.



Content: The content of lessons may be differentiated based on what students already know. The teacher may differentiate the content by designing activities for groups of students that cover different areas of Bloom's Taxonomy. When teachers differentiate content, they may adapt what they want students to learn or how students access the knowledge, understanding,

and skills. In these instances, educators are not varying student objectives or lowering performance standards for students. They use different texts, novels, or short stories at a reading level appropriate for each individual student. Teachers can use flexible groups and have students assigned to like groups listening to audio books or accessing specific internet sources. Students could have a choice to work in pairs, groups, or individually, but all students are working towards the same standards and objectives.

Process: The process of how the material in a lesson is learned may be differentiated for students based on their learning styles and multiple intelligences, taking into account what standards of performance are required for the age level. This stage of differentiation allows students to learn based either on what method is easiest for them to gain knowledge, or what may challenge them most: some students may prefer to read about a topic (or may require practice in reading), and others may prefer to listen (or require practice in listening), or acquire knowledge by manipulating objects associated with the content. Information may be presented in multiple ways by the teacher, and may be based on any available methods or materials.

Product: The product is essentially what the student produces at the end of the lesson to demonstrate the mastery of the content: tests, evaluations, projects, reports, or other activities. Based on students' skill levels and educational standards, teachers may assign students to complete activities that demonstrate mastery of an educational concept (writing a report), or in a method the student prefers (composing an original song about the content, or building a 3-dimensional object that explains mastery of concepts in the lesson or unit). The product is an integral component of the differentiated model, as preparation of the assessments determines both the 'what' and 'how' of instruction delivery.

Learning Environment: Differentiating through the environment is important as it creates the conditions for optimal learning to take place. The learning environment includes the physical layout of the classroom, the way that the teacher uses the space, environmental elements and sensitivities including lighting, as well as the overall atmosphere of the classroom. The teacher's goal is to create an environment that is positive, structured, and supportive for each student. In a classroom where the teaching theory is based on differentiated instruction, students should feel welcomed and safe.

Strategies For Differentiation

Following are the strategies used by the teacher at different stages of instruction:

- *For assessing prior knowledge*
 - Quiz
 - Surveys
 - K-W-L
- *For acquiring new knowledge by the students*
 - Flexible grouping
 - TAPS: Total Group, Alone, Partner, Small Group
 - Cooperative learning techniques
 - Outline completion
 - Brainstorm response

- Demonstration
- Video
- SQ3R: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review
- PQRSST: P-Preview to identify main parts, Q-Develop Questions to which you want to find answers, R-Read the material, S-State the central idea or theme, T-Test yourself by answering questions (or Teach the material to someone else)
- PMI: Listing **P**luses, **M**inuses, and **I**nteresting points about a topic
- Tiered assignments
- Graphic organizers
- Paraphrasing
- *For application of new knowledge by the students*
- Independent projects
- Project menus
- Problem based
- Inquiry
- Research
- Independent study
- *For assessing the students' performance*
- Presentation
- Demonstration
- Content Journals
- "What Are You Thinking?" Journals
- Note Journals
- Varying questions
- Mentorship/apprenticeships
- Portfolio
- Rubric
- Conversations
- Anecdotal records
- Peer assessment
- Self-assessment
- Conversation

Summary/ Conclusions And Discussions

Differentiation is about change, challenge and choice in today's classroom: Change the content! Change the process! Change the product! Change the environment! Change the pacing! Change something! It's about the opportunity for teachers to use varied methods of instruction to meet the diverse needs of students in that classroom. Teachers must have a robust instructional repertoire if they are to reach the needs, talents and abilities of various students; they need a repertoire of strategies to structure the teaching / learning process individually for each student. Teachers must have a broad spectrum of instructional, curricular and assessment methodologies. Teachers must have a rich and versatile set of teaching tools and techniques to structure the learning process for the diversity of children in

their classrooms. Teachers in today's schools need multiple ways to tap the many kinds of minds. Differentiation doesn't mean teaching the same thing louder and slower. It does not mean special education, gifted education, learning resource rooms or pull out and push in programs. It's not about labeling, sorting or disenfranchising any student in any way. In fact, it's the antithesis of these things. It's about honoring the uniqueness of each student.

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