

Differentiated Instruction Demystified

Nishat Alikhan

Director of Curriculum & Student Affairs

4th & 5th Grade Teacher

New Horizon School – Los Angeles

January 2011

Objectives

After this presentation, you will . . .

- Understand what Differentiated Instruction is
- Understand the rationale behind Differentiated Instruction
- Understand the Process of Differentiation
 - Elements of Differentiation
 - Role of the Teacher
- Understand the Steps involved in Establishing & Managing a Differentiated Classroom
 - Preparing Students & Parents for Differentiation
 - Planning Lessons
 - Content
 - Process
 - Products
- Understand the Efficacy of Differentiated Instruction

What is Differentiated Instruction?

- “Differentiated instruction is a teaching theory based on the premise that instructional approaches should vary and be adapted in relation to individual and diverse students in the classroom” (Hall, 2002).
- To put it simply, differentiated instruction is an approach to teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class.
- It is the idea that every student can learn and that it is our jobs as educators to educate them.

History of Differentiated Instruction

- Differentiated instruction was most commonly seen in the one-room schoolhouses
- Current uses:
 - Special needs classes
 - A way to segregate gifted students from normal students
 - Multi-age / Multi-graded classrooms

Misconceptions Related to Differentiated Instruction

- Differentiated instruction is not simply assigning the same assignments to all the students with varying degrees of difficulty or grading some students more harshly than other students.
- It is not allowing those who finish early to play games or to assign advanced learners more work.
- It is not allowing students to choose which book to read or which task to do.
- *Differentiation is a concerted effort to meet students where they are and move them forward.*

What is Differentiated Curriculum?

- It is curriculum that is “different” where the differences “target and accommodate students’ diverse needs and deficiencies in the learning process through careful changes in content, process, and product” (Sacco, 2010).
- Differentiated instruction is proactive, qualitative, rooted in assessment, provides multiple approaches to content, process, and product, is student-centered, a blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction, and is dynamic.

Rationale for Differentiated Instruction

- The rationale behind differentiated instruction varies for each person, but it is centered on the idea that each student is different and has very different needs.
- “A differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each student can learn” (Tomlinson, 2001).

Keys to Differentiation

- Teachers must truly know their students
 - Student interests
 - Student readiness
 - Student learning profiles
 - How the students learn – the driving force
 - Clearly defined learning goals and objectives
 - Learning styles
 - Multiple intelligences
 - Learning environments

Areas of Differentiation (Tomlinson)

- Based on student interests, readiness, or learning profiles:
 - Content – what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information
 - Process – activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content
 - Product – culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit
 - Learning Environment – the way the classroom works and feels

Main Characteristics of a Differentiated Classroom

- A classroom, in which, instruction is concept-focused and principle-driven, that student readiness assessments are on-going and are built into the curriculum, that flexible grouping is consistently used, and that students are active explorers with the teacher guiding the exploration.

Content Differentiation

- Content Differentiation is differentiation of the instruction based on altering the basic curriculum.
- Examples of content differentiated instruction:
 - Readability levels
 - Digital versions of text
 - Spelling & Vocabulary lists
 - Visual & Auditory presentations
 - Varied Grouping
- Elements to Content Differentiation within a content area:
 - Using elements & materials to support instruction
 - Aligning all tasks to learning goals and objectives
 - Usually written incrementally to the point of achievement, resulting in a continuum of skills-building tasks
 - To ensure concept-focused, principle-driven instruction

Process Differentiation

- Process Differentiation is differentiation of the instruction of how students come to understand and make sense of the content.
- Flexible grouping is a key to Process Differentiation
- Classroom management is a very important factor during this stage of differentiation
- Examples of Process Differentiation:
 - Using Tiered Activities (Having the same assignment with different levels of scaffolding or complexity and support for students)
 - Student Interest Centers
 - Personal Agendas or Tasks Lists / Cards
 - Hands-on or Manipulative Supports
 - Time Task Completion

Examples of Process Differentiation (cont.)

- Grouping
- Instructional Resources
- Direct Instruction
- Cooperative Learning
- Multiple Intelligences – Activities
- Projects and Inquiry-Based Instruction
- Problem-Based Learning
- Web Quests

Product Differentiation

- Product Differentiation is differentiation of how students present what they have learned and what they know about a given content area.
- Examples of Product Differentiation:
 - Creating Puppet Shows
 - Writing Letters
 - Developing Murals with labels
 - Rubrics
 - Portfolios
 - Group Work vs. Solo Work
 - Student created presentations
- Elements of Product Differentiation:
 - Pre-, On-going, & Post- Assessment of Student Readiness & Growth
 - Students being Active and Responsible for their Learning
 - Responses from students is varied same as requirements & expectations

Learning Environment Differentiation

- Learning Environment Differentiation is differentiation of the way the classroom works and feels
- Examples of Learning Environment Differentiation:
 - Ensuring a Distraction-free, quiet work space for group work or solo work
 - Providing culturally- and home- sensitive materials
 - Providing clear guidelines for independent work
 - Developing routines for students to get help when the teacher is busy
 - Helping students understand that some students need to move around while others need to sit down to learn.

Teachers & Differentiated Instruction

- Teachers are the best place to begin differentiation
- Different interests and affinities
- Balance their needs with the needs of their students
- Reflections: classroom & educational philosophy
- Differentiation must be decided by the teacher – they are the ones that must establish and manage their classrooms

Establishing & Managing a Differentiated Instruction Classroom

- First steps include preparing students and parents
- Defining expectations for students and parents
- Constant communication
- Get the administration and fellow colleagues on board
- Planning for differentiation should be well researched and implementation should be gradual (prevent frustration & burnout)
- Example of implementation schedule:
 - Begin by incorporating one type of differentiation one time a day
 - Then slowly increase the time and types of differentiation
 - Monitor student progress throughout the process
 - Incorporate a successful classroom management routine – establish where students turn-in work, how to move around the room, and how they listen to directions

Steps to Plan for Differentiated Instruction: (Teach-nology, 2010)

- Know Your Students
 - Determine the ability level of your students
 - Survey student interests
 - Think about classroom / behavior management
- Build a Variety of Teaching Strategies
 - Direct Instruction
 - Inquiry-based Learning
 - Cooperative Learning
 - Information Processing Strategies
- Identify a Variety of Instructional Activities
 - That require students to develop and apply knowledge in ways that make sense to them and that is meaningful and relevant
- Identify Ways to Assess or Evaluate Student Progress
 - Portfolios
 - Rubrics
 - Performance-based Assessment
- Knowledge mapping

Conclusion

“At the core of true differentiated instruction is the creation of multiple paths to learning for students so that they all have equal and, more important, appropriate access to the course curriculum” (Sacco, 2010).

Differentiated instruction can be developed by the ability to vary content, process, and product to meet the needs of a diverse student body.

Contact Information

Nishat Alikhan

■ E-mail address:

nalikhan@newhorizonla.org

Thank you for coming!

Jazakallahu' khairan!