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Differentiating Instruction: Ten Easy Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms

by Dr. Paula Kluth

Many teachers believe that differentiation is complex and necessary for only a few learners. In this short article, I share ten ideas that are not only easy to implement, but effective for many students in the diverse classroom.

1. Comfortable Classroom

For some students, lessons are a challenge to access not because they don't have the necessary skills, but because they are not comfortable. Try offering seating options (tables vs. desks, beanbags), when possible. You can also adjust lighting by sitting some students closer to natural light or by using lamp lighting in certain spaces.

2. Student Surveys

Would it help your teaching if you knew the personal interests, hobbies, and learning preferences of your students? Every year, create periodic surveys to learn more about your learners. After all, you cannot differentiate for students you do not know.

3. Choices

Throughout the year, students should be given choices whenever possible. Students can choose which assessments to complete, which problems to solve, and how to receive personal assistance, for instance.

4. Tech Tools

Adapting different books for different learners once meant a lot of cutting and pasting. Today, differentiating literature selections can be done by

using free programs and websites or supplying learners with e-readers.

And so much of the technology that can help educators differentiate is no or low cost. For instance, Microsoft Word contains many tools that can help diverse learners write, read, and learn with more ease.

5. Big Questions

One of the most elegant ways to differentiate is to frame units as questions. If "What is a poem?" is used as a frame, some students would be able to understand that poetry is an art form. Others would learn that it involves the creative use of language to express emotions or ideas. This question that can be answered again and again, debated (e.g., Are all songs poems?), and understood differently by every single student.

6. Learning Agendas

A learning agenda is customized list of activities that must be completed during a specific period of time. Everyone in the class may be working on their agendas, but not all students will have the same work to do. Typically, students work independently on agendas, collaborating when necessary.

7. Stations

Using stations involves setting up different spots in the classroom where students work on various tasks simultaneously. Stations invite flexible grouping because not all students need to utilize all stations.

8. Project-based Instruction

Project-based instruction is especially appropriate for students with diverse learning profiles as many student needs can be addressed; there are increased opportunities for peer support; and a number of disciplines can be addressed. Making a film, for instance, can involve many different students in many different roles.

9. Service Learning

If service learning isn't big at your school, you are missing out on a very effective tool for differentiating. As students design a community garden, for instance, there are opportunities for different students to engage in different tasks (e.g., planting, budgeting, planning) and to strive for different goals (e.g., mastering software, writing proposals).

10. Curriculum Overlapping

When teachers use curriculum overlapping, some students focus on objectives that are different from but clearly connected to those being addressed by the class. For example, a student who already knows a lot about world geography can opt out some lessons to design a website that helps classmates study geography and connect to pen pals around the world.

Dr. Paula Kluth is a consultant, author, and advocate dedicated to supporting inclusive education. She is the author or co-author of numerous books on inclusive education including: "From Tutor Scripts to Talking Sticks": 100 Ways to Differentiate Instruction in K-12 Inclusive Classrooms.

To learn more about Paula and her work, visit her on Facebook or on her professional website: www.paulakluth.com. You can also find recommendations from Paula on the blog she maintains to help teachers differentiate in K-12 classrooms: www.differentiationdaily.com

TIPS FROM THE CORNER: Effective Behavior Plans

When a student's behavior becomes a problem, schools will often lay out a carefully crafted plan for what moves a student to each increasing level of behavior correction, including ultimately being placed in a restrictive or exclusive setting. We set these out as a cautionary tale hoping each level will deter the student from continuing on this disruptive path to the next. Once a student has reached the most serious level of correction, seclusion or exclusion, the plan

FEB 1, 8:30-10:00AM
ADOS-2 Practice Webinar - Module 2
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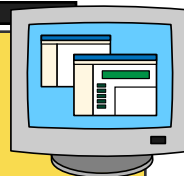
FEB 4, 3:00-4:30PM
ADOS-2 Practice Webinar - Module 3
Presented by Sarah Hoffmeier - Online

FEB 7, 3:30-4:15PM
Webinar Series: Literacy & ASD, Part 1 of 3
Presented by Dr. Amy Finch, FHSU - Online

FEB 8, 8:30-10:00AM
ADOS-2 Practice Webinar - Toddler Module
Presented by Sarah Hoffmeier - Online

FEB 12, 3:30-4:15PM
Webinar Series: Literacy & ASD, Part 2 of 3
Presented by Dr. Amy Finch, FHSU - Online

FEB 19, 3:30-4:15PM
Webinar Series: Literacy & ASD, Part 3 of 3
Presented by Dr. Amy Finch, FHSU - Online



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seems to come to an end. This type of plan is an incomplete behavior intervention plan that is full of problems for the school, family and student.

Every plan that "steps" a student to a more serious intervention without the steps to back up has a fatal flaw in its design. The steps listed in plans to back up need to be as clearly delineated as the steps designed to move forward. What will it take to get my recess time back or go to lunch with my peers? Often times, once a student reaches the end of the steps, they become stuck in a perpetual loop that keeps them isolated from peers and instruction.

Every behavior plan should also show the student, family and staff just what is expected from the student for their return to the classroom setting. These should be extremely clear to staff and student. The lesson isn't always "don't ever get in trouble" but is often "how do I regroup and return when I do mess up?" This is a lesson we all use from time to time in life and should be specifically taught to students, with or without chronic problem behavior.

