

Guiding principles for differentiation

A differentiated classroom is flexible

- Flexibility is at the heart of differentiation.
- The teacher is continually looking for ways to modify classroom elements – including time, space, groupings, materials, modes of presentation, modes of investigation, resources and instructional strategies – to make learning as effective as possible for the greatest number of students.
- Flexibility involves the teacher searching for solutions to the dilemmas and problems inherent in teaching complex content to a variety of students.

Assessment and instruction are inseparable

- Student differences are expected, appreciated and studied as a basis for instructional planning.
- The teacher knows what to do next when they recognise where students are in relation to the learning intentions/goals.
- The teacher is primed to teach more effectively if they are aware of the students' needs and interests.
- Pre-assessment informs the teacher of the student status (knowledge and skill) in relation to upcoming learning intentions/goals, student interests and the students' preferred ways of learning.
- On-going assessment (assessment *for* and *as* learning) throughout the lesson sequence/unit sharpens the teacher's sense of what is working and what is not yet working for all the students in the class. It enables the teacher to continue working with students in ways that target their particular strengths and needs in light of important learning intentions/goals.
- Summative assessment (assessment *of* learning) should be designed to maximise student opportunity to demonstrate what they have come to know, understand and be able to do as a result of the lesson sequence/unit. It can also 'feed forward' to the next lesson sequence/unit so that the teacher is continuously gathering data on student growth and refining instructional plans based on the data.

All students participate in respectful work

- The teacher's goal is that each student finds their work challenging and interesting, and grapples squarely with the knowledge and skills which give them the power to understand, apply and progress to the next learning stage, most of the time.
- Differentiation does not presume different tasks for each student, but rather just enough flexibility in task complexity, working arrangements and modes of learning expression that varied students find learning a good fit much of the time.

Students and teachers are collaborators in learning

- Students need guidance in becoming self-guided learners.
- Classrooms are more effective and inviting when responsibility for their operation is shared by all members of the learning community.
- Students hold pivotal information about their likes and preferred ways of learning.
- Students can learn to make choices that enhance both their learning and their status as a learner.

Flexible student grouping options

Sometimes students:

- work in similar readiness groups with peers who manifest similar academic needs at a given time
- of mixed readiness work together in settings that draw upon the strengths of each student
- work with classmates who have like interests
- of varied interests cooperate towards completing a task that calls on all their interests
- work with those who have similar learning patterns (a group of auditory learners listening to a taped explanation)
- work with students with varied learning patterns (an analytic student and a practical student) to complete a task
- work with whoever is sitting beside them
- count off into groups
- draw a partner's name
- choose who they work with.

The teacher is clear about what matters in subject matter

The teacher:

- provides a compass for curriculum that both engages students and promotes understanding in students
- develops work that is squarely focused on what matters most
- provides a basis for extending the work of students who are advanced and scaffolding the work of students who require extra support.

The teacher modifies content, process and products in response to student readiness, interest and learning profile

By providing key opportunities for students to work with content, 'sense-making' learning experiences and products in ways that are responsive to their readiness needs, interests and best modes of learning, teachers provide maximum opportunity for success for each learner.

References

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Tomlinson, C. A., & Allan, S. D. (2000). *Leadership for Differentiating Schools and Classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.