Differentiating according to readiness, interests, learning profiles

Readiness

- Readiness is not a synonym for academic ability. A student with high ability may struggle with a subject or topic. A less able student may be quite strong in some areas.

- It is important to veer away from attention to what is perceived as a student's ability and look closely at where the student is in regard to current knowledge, understanding, skill and classroom working conditions.

- Learning evolves most appropriately when a student progressively encounters work that is just a little too hard and when scaffolding makes it possible for the student to achieve at the new level of expectations.

- It is most important to attend to readiness when students work towards the same learning intention/goal. In most classrooms, whatever the learning intention/goal, it is likely to be too demanding for some students and too easy for others unless the teacher addresses readiness differences in some way.

Differentiating for readiness involves:

- constructing tasks at different levels of difficulty

- providing learning choices at different levels of difficulty.

To differentiate for readiness:

- adjust the degree of difficulty of a task to provide an appropriate level of challenge

- add or remove teacher or peer coaching, use 'hands-on' tasks, presence or absence of models for a task (scaffolding)

- make the task more or less familiar based on the proficiency of the learners' experiences or skills for the task

- vary direct instruction by small group need

- use text sets (collections of texts on same topic/concept, different levels of difficulty)

- use tiered assignments

- provide reading support for difficult texts

- provide graphic organisers to support note-taking

- add student-specific goals to checklists for success.

Interests

- When students are interested in what they are learning, the act of learning is satisfying.

- Interest and motivation are closely linked. When motivation to learn increases, student outcomes are likely to be more favourable.

- To assume there is not time to address student interests is to assume there is no time to motivate students to learn.

Differentiating for student interests involves:

- showing students how the subjects taught connect with their particular interests

- helping students discover new interests by providing an engaging curriculum

- aligning key skills and material for understanding with topics or pursuits that interest students, for example, a student can learn much about a culture or time period by carefully analysing its music.

To differentiate for student interests:

- use adults or peers with prior knowledge to serve as mentors in an area of shared interest

- provide a variety of avenues for student exploration of a topic or expression of learning

- provide broad access to a wide range of materials and technologies

- offer a choice of tasks and products, including student-designed options

- encourage investigation or application of key concepts and principles in student interest areas

- connect content with students' cultures, experiences, and talents

- use interest centres, interest groups, specialty groups or expert groups

- use jigsaw groups

- offer choice in topics for reading materials

- offer sub-topic choices within an area of study/topic.

Learning profiles

- Readiness is necessary for student growth; interest is necessary for motivation to learn; tapping learning preferences is necessary for efficiency of learning.

- Learning profile is shaped by at least four overlapping factors:

    - learning style

    - gender

    - culture

    - intelligence preference.

Differentiating for learning profiles involves:

- uncovering student learning profiles

- balancing presentations and learning experiences according to learning profiles

- offering choice in learning experiences and ways to demonstrate learning.

To differentiate for learning profiles:

- create a learning environment with flexible spaces and learning options

- present information through auditory, visual and kinaesthetic modes

- encourage students to explore information and ideas through auditory, visual and kinaesthetic modes

- allow students to work alone or with peers

- ensure a choice of competitive, cooperative and independent learning experiences

- balance varied perspectives on an issue or topic

- provide authentic learning opportunities in various intelligence or talent areas

- show part-to-whole and whole-to-part relationships

- create assessments that respond to different learning modes.

References

Tomlinson, C. 2006. *An Educator's Guide to Differentiating instruction*. Cengage Learning. USA.

Tomlinson, C. A. & Allan, S. D. 2000 *Leadership for Differentiating Schools and Classrooms.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.