Differentiated Instruction

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**Introduction**

Not all students are alike. Based on this knowledge, differentiated instruction applies an approach to teaching and learning so that students have multiple options for taking in information and making sense of ideas. The model of differentiated instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjusting the curriculum and presentation of information to learners rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. Classroom teaching is a blend of whole-class, group and individual 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 classrooms. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student’s growth and individual success by meeting each individual students need and assisting in the learning process.

My class is unique in that such a large percentage of the students in the classroom cannot read. Typically, these adults know a great deal about how to negotiate life and very little about how to function in a classroom. It can be struggle just to get through the day, let alone to complete all assignments that the teacher has set for them. Looking in the U.S. today, I noticed that there are a number of challenges that make it difficult for instructors to address each student’s readiness levels and distinctive learning style. Being able to accommodate each student and their needs require differentiated instruction, which I know may be difficult to achieve. Tomlinson (2001) maintains that there are a number of drawbacks to traditional instruction as well as numerous benefits of differentiation.

**Differentiated Instruction**

In AET/520, Instructional strategies in adult education and training, I developed a five week class titled Basic Steps to Approach Reading/Literacy. The first class is titled Introduction to reading. The problem is that a long-awaited federal study finds that an estimated 32 million adult in the USA-about one in seven-are saddled with such low literacy skills that it would be tough for them to read anything more challenging that an children’s picture book or to understand a medication’s side effects listed on a pill bottle (Toppo, 2009). The focus of this instructional plan is to determine additional training and teaching of adults will increase adult reading and literacy skills. Using different methods, and ice breakers, to provide empirical evidence that a pro-active program can be implemented to adults with positive results.

**Differentiating Class Content**

The five week course follows a natural progression using Bloom’s taxonomy. The first week of class focuses on introduction to reading and literacy. The second week of class focuses on ice breaker activities. The third week of class focuses on word lists given out in the first week of class. The fourth week of class is still focusing on word lists given out in the first and third week of class. The fifth week of class focuses on beginning reading techniques along with new word lists. Differentiating the content would be difficult. The content of the first week of class is very specific and necessary to build upon as the week’s progress.

**Differentiating Instructional Strategies**

The intended instructional strategy is under the big five instructions direct, indirect, interactive, individual study and experimental will be used helping students further build upon previous knowledge. The media used is Dolch word lists, comic strips form newspaper, flashcards, workbooks and beginning reading books.

To differentiate the instruction, a multimedia presentation could be prepared with PowerPoint and YouTube videos. Using a mix of the multimedia presentation and provide paper for students to right words down to study will address the needs of the audio, kinesthetic, and visual learners.

A strategy that could be use is to incorporate “soft skills”, e.g. effective writing, oral communications, presentations, and problem-solving, into curriculums to adapt to knowledge transformation and expose students to real-life settings (Pham, 2012). Pham (2012) maintains that the challenge for educators is to learn new knowledge, develop interdisciplinary awareness, react to educational policies, and fulfill demanding goals so as to provide learners with a variety of skills to cope with increase challenges in reality. Credibility is extremely important in this course. Changing the instructional strategy to one using the multimedia presentations with some inquiry-based learning, or sharing of experiences among the class would be the best strategy to employ.

**Vary the End Product Used to Demonstrate Mastery of the Required Content**

The two performance-based objectives for this class are:

1. Students will be able to demonstrate, understand and learn how to read basic words in a beginner book
2. By the end of the course, students will be able to recall important phonic sounds and be able to read at a fifth grade level or higher.

Going back to Blooms taxonomy, the first week of class is focused on the knowledge and introduction of reading and literacy. There are planned formative and summative assessments that will take place at the end of the five week course. Differentiated classrooms share several common principles. The teacher set clear learning goals and high expectations for all students. The concepts of individual growth and personal best are centered and instruction is driven by assessment; that is teacher’s base what they are teaching on what their students do and do not know. Differentiated instruction is proactive, not reactive. Teachers address learners’ different needs, rather than planning for everyone and trying to adjust it when it does not work for some students (Mitchell & Hobson, 2005). Tomlinson (2001) maintains that a differentiated classroom, the teacher proactively plans and carries out varied approaches to content, process, and product in anticipation of and response to student differences in readiness, interest, and learning needs.

**Vary or altering the environment to accommodate varied learning styles**

In this course, the students are in a regular educational setting that has white boards, projectors with the use of transparencies. The setup of the classroom will be setup like a conference room. It will be located in an urban area in Oklahoma. The school is accessible for students with disabilities and is also accessible by public transportation. It is an environment in which they are familiar and comfortable and personally, I believe it is the most preferred environment for this type of setting. Without differentiated instruction, advance learners can become mentally lazy because they are not challenged in school. Everything comes easily to them, so they do not develop a strong work ethic. Using differentiation allows students to challenge themselves and their abilities by working at higher levels. Students who struggle in a regular classroom received an exceptional boost from differentiation. Students remain motivate when they carry out pertinent, empowering task rather than being lost in a large class. They gain a sense of self-worth because they have accomplished something that they thought was too hard.

**Conclusion**

The perfect model of differentiated instruction rests upon an active, students centered approach to teaching and learning. Differentiated instruction is an enormous topic, ranging from the theoretical concepts that support creation of a differentiate classroom to the very practical techniques used to do so. While differentiated instruction is an excellent way to ensure all students are learning in a manner commensurate with their knowledge and skill levels, teachers must keep in mind that this a slow evolution, best undertaken with the support of colleagues, and administrators. Despite the inherent challenges, differentiation is a worthwhile endeavor. Implementation works best when teachers begin with applying simpler strategies, working their way down the continuum their skills and comfort levels increase. Being a good instructor allows you to develop the best plan you can based on the knowledge you know before the class starts but also being prepared to adapt, improvise and change the plan if necessary as the class progresses. As an instructor, we must always be quick to think on our feet, be able to adapt to changing situations and have the ability to go with the flow.

**References**

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