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differentiated instruction in the classroom. Taking advantage of these invaluable tools as an ideal opportunity for teachers to continue developing their practice, ultimately resulting in positive outcomes and success for students. ConclusionProviding differentiated instruction strategies, teachers can create an engaging learning experience and give students the opportunity to fulfill their academic potential. Through thoughtful planning, implementation of diverse strategies, and access to resources that support individual needs, educators are well-equipped with the tools necessary for success in fostering student achievement. Ultimately enabling learners to reach heights they never thought possible! Just as everyone has a unique fingerprint, every student has an individual learning style. Chances are, not all of your students grasp a subject in the same way or share the same level of ability. So how can you better deliver your lessons to reach everyone in class? Consider differentiated instruction—a method you may have heard about but haven't explored, which is why you're here. In this article, learn exactly what it means, how it works, and the pros and cons. Carol Ann Tomlinson is a leader in the area of differentiated learning and professor of educational leadership, foundations, and policy at the University of Virginia. Tomlinson describes differentiated instruction as factoring students' individual learning styles and levels of readiness first before designing a lesson plan. Research on the effectiveness of differentiation shows this method benefits a wide range of students, from those with learning disabilities to those who are considered high ability. Differentiating instruction may mean teaching the same material to all students using a variety of instructional strategies, or it may require the teacher to deliver lessons at varying levels of difficulty based on the ability of each student. Teachers who practice differentiation in the classroom may: Design lessons based on students' learning styles.Group students by shared interest, topic, or ability for assignments.Assess students' learning using formative assessment.Manage the classroom to create a safe and supportive environment.Continually assess and adjust lesson content to meet students' needs. The roots of differentiated instruction go all the way back to the days of the one-room schoolhouse, where one teacher had students of all ages in one classroom. As the educational system transitioned to grading schools, it was assumed that children of the same age learned similarly. However in 1912, achievement tests were introduced, and the scores revealed the gaps in student's abilities within grade levels. In 1975, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), ensuring that children with disabilities had equal access to public education. To reach this student population, many educators used differentiated instruction strategies. Then came the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2000, which further encouraged differentiated and skill-based instruction—and that's because it works. Research by educator Leslie Owen Wilson supports differentiating instruction within the classroom, finding that lecture is the least effective instructional strategy, with only 5 to 10 percent retention after 24 hours. Engaging in a discussion, practicing after exposure to content, and teaching others are much more effective ways to ensure learning retention. According to Tomlinson, teachers can differentiate instruction through four ways: 1) content, 2) process, 3) product, and 4) learning environment. As you already know, fundamental lesson content should cover the standards of learning set by the school district or state educational standards. But some students in your class may be completely unfamiliar with the concepts in a lesson, some students may have partial mastery, and some students may already be familiar with the content before the lesson begins. What you could do is differentiate the content by designing activities for groups of students that cover various levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (a classification of levels of intellectual behavior going from lower-order thinking skills to higher-order thinking skills). The six levels are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Students who are unfamiliar with a lesson could be required to complete tasks on the lower levels: remembering and understanding. Students with some mastery could be asked to apply and analyze the content, and students who have high levels of mastery could be asked to complete tasks in the areas of evaluating and creating. Match vocabulary words to definitions.Read a passage of text and answer related questions.Think of a situation that happened to a character in the story and a different outcome.Differentiate fact from opinion in the story.Identify an author's position and provide evidence to support this viewpoint.Create a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the lesson. Each student has a preferred learning style, and successful differentiation includes delivering the material to each style: visual, auditory and kinesthetic, and through words. This process-related method also addresses the fact that not all students require the same amount of support from the teacher, and students could choose to work in pairs, small groups, or individually. And while some students may benefit from one-on-one interaction with you or the classroom aide, others may be able to progress by themselves. Teachers can enhance student learning by offering support based on individual needs. Provide textbooks for visual and word learners.Allow auditory learners to listen to audio books.Give kinesthetic learners the opportunity to complete an interactive assignment online. The product is what the student creates at the end of the lesson to demonstrate the mastery of the content. This can be in the form of tests, projects, reports, or other activities. You could assign students to complete activities that show mastery of an educational concept in a way the student prefers, based on learning style. Read and write learners write a book report.Visual learners create a graphic organizer of the story.Auditory learners give an oral report.Kinesthetic learners build a diorama illustrating the story. The conditions for optimal learning include both physical and psychological elements. A flexible classroom layout is key, incorporating various types of furniture and arrangements to support both individual and group work. Psychologically speaking, teachers should use classroom management techniques that support a safe and supportive learning environment. Break some students into reading groups to discuss the assignment.Allow students to read individually if preferred.Create quiet spaces where there are no distractions. The benefits of differentiation in the classroom are often accompanied by the drawback of an ever-increasing workload. Here are a few factors to keep in mind: Research shows differentiated instruction is effective for high-ability students as well as students with mild to severe disabilities.When students are given more options on how they can learn material, they take on more responsibility for their own learning.Students appear to be more engaged in learning, and there are reportedly fewer discipline problems in classrooms where teachers provide differentiated lessons. Differentiated instruction requires more work during lesson planning, and many teachers struggle to find the extra time in their schedule.The learning curve can be steep and some schools lack professional development resources.Critics argue there isn't enough research to support the benefits of differentiated instruction outweighing the added prep time. What differentiated instructional strategies can you use in your classroom? There are a set of methods that can be tailored and used across the different subjects. According to Kathy Perez (2019) and the Access Center those strategies are tiered assignments, choice boards, compacting, interest centers/groups, flexible grouping, and learning contracts. Tiered assignments are designed to teach the same skill but have the students create a different product to display their knowledge based on their comprehension skills. Choice boards allow students to choose what activity they would like to work on for a skill that the teacher chooses. On the board are usually options for the different learning styles: kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and tactile. Compacting allows the teacher to help students reach the next level in their learning when they have already mastered what is being taught to the class. To compact the teacher assesses the student's level of knowledge, creates a plan for what they need to learn, excuses them from studying what they already know, and creates free time for them to practice an accelerated skill. Interest centers or groups are a way to provide autonomy in student learning. Flexible grouping allows the groups to be more fluid based on the activity or topic. Finally, learning contracts are made between a student and teacher, laying out the teacher's expectations for the necessary skills to be demonstrated and the assignments required components with the student putting down the methods they would like to use to complete the assignment. These contracts can allow students to use their preferred learning style, work at an ideal pace and encourages independence and planning skills. The following are strategies for some of the core subject based on these methods. Provide students with a choice board. They could have the options to learn about probability by playing a game with a peer, watching a video, reading the textbook, or working out problems on a worksheet.Teach mini lessons to individuals or groups of students who didn't grasp the concept you were teaching during the large group lesson. This also lends time for compacting activities for those who have mastered the subject.Use manipulatives, especially with students that have more difficulty grasping a concept.Have students that have already mastered the subject matter create notes for students that are still learning.For students that have mastered the lesson being taught, require them to give in-depth, step-by-step explanation of their solution process, while not being rigid about the process with students who are still learning the basics of a concept if they arrive at the correct answer. Emma McCrea (2019) suggests setting up "Help Stations," where peers assist each other. Those that have more knowledge of the subject will be able to teach those that are struggling as an extension activity and those that are struggling will receive. Set up a "question and answer" session during which learners can ask the teacher or their peers questions, in order to fill in knowledge gaps before attempting the experiment.Create a visual word wall. Use pictures and corresponding labels to help students remember terms.Set up interest centers. When learning about dinosaurs you might have an "excavation" center, a reading center, a dinosaur art project that focuses on their anatomy, and a video center.Provide content learning in various formats such as showing a video about dinosaurs, handing out a worksheet with pictures of dinosaurs and labels, and providing a fill-in-the-blank work sheet with interesting dinosaur facts. ASCD (2012) writes that all teachers need to become language teachers so that the content they are teaching the classroom can be conveyed to the students whose first language is not English.Start by providing the information in the language that the student speaks then pairing it with a limited amount of the corresponding vocabulary in English. Although ELL need a limited amount of new vocabulary to memorize, they need to be exposed to as much of the English language as possible. This means that when teaching, the teacher needs to focus on verbs and adjectives related to the topic as well.Group work is important. This way they are exposed to more of the language. They should, however, be grouped with other ELL if possible as well as given tasks within the group that are within their reach such as drawing or researching. Tiered assignments can be used in reading to allow the students to show what they have learned at a level that suites them. One student might create a visual story board while another student might write a book report. Reading groups can pick a book based on interest or be assigned based on reading levelErin Lynch (2020) suggest that teachers scaffold instruction by giving clear explicit explanations with visuals. Verbally and visually explain the topic. Use anchor charts, drawings, diagrams, and reference guides to foster a clearer understanding. If applicable, provide a video clip for students to watch.Utilize flexible grouping. Students might be in one group for phonics based on their assessed level but choose to be in another group for reading because they are more interested in that book. Hold writing conferences with your students either individually or in small groups. Talk with them throughout the writing process starting with their topic and moving through grammar, composition, and editing.Allow students to choose their writing topics. When the topic is of interest, they will likely put more effort into the assignment and therefore learn more.Keep track of and assess student's writing progress continually throughout the year. You can do this using a journal or a checklist. This will allow you to give individualized instruction.Hand out graphic organizers to help students outline their writing. Try fill-in-the-blank notes that guide the students through each step of the writing process for those who need additional assistance.For primary grades give out lined paper instead of a journal. You can also give out differing amounts of lines based on ability level. For those who are excelling at writing give them more lines or pages to encourage them to write more. For those that are still in the beginning stages of writing, give them less lines so that they do not feel overwhelmed. Use a multi-sensory approach. Get all five senses involved in your lessons, including taste and smell!Use flexible grouping to create partnerships and teach students how to work collaboratively on tasks. Create partnerships where the students are of equal ability, partnerships where once the student will be challenged by their partner and another time they will be pushing and challenging their partner.Assistive technology is often an important component of differential instruction in special education. Provide the students that need them with screen readers, personal tablets for communication, and voice recognition software.The article Differentiation & LR Information for SAS Teachers suggests teachers be flexible when giving assessments "Posters, models, performances, and drawings can show what they have learned in a way that reflects their personal strengths". You can test for knowledge using rubrics instead of multiple-choice questions, or even build a portfolio of student work. You could also have them answer questions orally.Utilize explicit modeling. Whether its notetaking, problem solving in math, or making a sandwich in home living, special needs students often require a step-by-step guide to make connections. The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners, 2nd EditionLeading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom - Carol Ann Tomlinson and Marcia B. ImbeauThe Differentiated School: Making Revolutionary Changes in Teaching and Learning - Carol Ann Tomlinson, Kay Brimjoin, and Lane NarvaezIntegrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design: Connecting Content and Kids - Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTigheDifferentiation in Practice Grades K-5: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum - Carol Ann Tomlinson and Caroline Cunningham EidsonDifferentiation in Practice Grades 9-12: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum - Carol Ann Tomlinson and Cindy A. 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