

NEED FOR DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Classrooms today are filled with students who have differences in their culture, level of intelligence, learning styles, motivation, maturity, socio economic status, exposure and experiences, home life, personality interests, aptitudes etc. All the students must be favoured in the way the teacher teaches. Students learn in different ways and at different rates. So differentiated instruction module must be adopted in the classrooms to tailor the instructions according to the individual needs.

KEYWORDS: *Differentiated Instruction: Teaching the Students According to the Individual Differences*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

As classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, educational authorities and teachers are looking to teaching and learning strategies that cater for a variety of learning profiles. The inclusion of students from different backgrounds, like non English speaking students, students with disabilities, students from diverse cultural backgrounds and students on accelerated programs force educators to relook at their teaching and instructional practices. Differentiated instruction is directed by several issues, including current student's diversity, brain research, theories concerning learning styles and the multiple intelligences theory.

Differentiated instruction is guided by the general principles of differentiation like respectful tasks, flexible grouping, ongoing assessment and adjustment. Ways of differentiation done by the teacher includes content, process and product. Things taken into consideration for differentiation are readiness, interest, learning profile and affect or learning environment.

PROACTIVE PLANNING

Different learners have different needs. So the teacher plans lessons and learning experiences in advance according to the varied learner needs within the classroom. It needs greater effort and skill on part of the teacher. It is a time consuming process. A greater level of pedagogical knowledge is also essential. Differentiation make sure that all learners gain a powerful and strong understanding of all the concepts taught to them.

QUALITATIVE CURRICULUM

A good curriculum meets the needs of the individual and the society. It enables students to acquire and develop the knowledge, skills, value, capabilities and competencies to lead meaningful and productive lives. A good curriculum is not a rigid one. It allows room for flexibility, monitoring and evaluation. It should cultivate unique skills, interest, attitudes and appreciations. Quality curriculum is inclusive in nature and it ensures quality, equity, lifelong learning, and holistic development of the learner. To improve curriculum, innovations must be included, critical and current issues also must be included. It should help in developing the analytical knowledge of the learners. The quality of education is influenced by the teacher, teaching methods, educational content, learning environment, school managements and preconditions of the students. At the same time, it gives the proper instructional equipment and meeting places which are conducive to learning. By having a qualitative learning a person become a contributor to the society. Thus the focus is on learning outcomes like life skills, the ability to solve problems and taking correct decisions etc. It prepares the students for life. Quality education focuses on the social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive development of each student irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, socio economic status and geographic location. Differentiated instruction produces better understanding of concepts which in turn creates economically productive individuals. A quality curriculum includes a good student teacher relationship, guidance and counselling program, health services, school related work experience etc. It also provides with the continuity of experiences. It helps the learner to become the best that he can be and meets the demands of globalization and digital age.

CONTINUOUS COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS

What students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences is an important aspect of learning. Ongoing assessment is used as a teaching tool. Learning should be assessed carefully and continuously. Assessing the learning experiences of students then and there is an important aspect of teaching. Diagnosing routinely benefits both the teacher and the student by providing prompt feedback. It helps the teacher to modify her planning and instructions. The teacher will be able to give remedial help by using learners' common mistakes. Same way the learners come to know their strengths and weaknesses and help them focus on topics they have not yet mastered. Teachers can create enrichment activities for students who are above the expected grade level. Assessments are instruments used to achieve the ideals and objectives of curriculum. Continuous assessment should be cumulative, systematic, and comprehensive and guidance oriented. Short test, quizzes, home assignments, group exercise, and individual or group projects are some of the ways of formative assessments.

MULTIPLE APPROACHES TO CONTENT, PROCESS, AND PRODUCT

Content

Content consists of facts, principles, concepts, subject matter generalization etc. Differentiating content includes using various instructional method sand delivering formats such as audio, video, readings, assignments, lectures, demonstration, describing, dissecting, gaming etc.

In a differentiated classroom students access the core learning in so many ways. Using manipulatives and aids is one way. Inductive and deductive way of analysing the concept that is part-to-whole and whole to part is also used.

By differentiating the input methods, how students make ideas or process information and how students demonstrate what they have learned, teachers offer different approaches. The content can be differentiated by presenting

concepts through both auditory and visual means. Using reading buddies enhance the student's mastery level. Meeting with small groups to reteach an idea or skills for struggling learners or extend the thinking levels and skills of advanced learners are example for content differentiation. Computer programs, recordings, videos, projects and assignments are used as a way of delivering concepts to varied learners.

Process

The synonym for process is activity. An effective activity brings out all the essential skills, understanding of the learners and helps him attain the learning goal. A teacher can give varied options at differing levels of difficulty according to the interest of the learner. The teacher gives choices for the students to express what they have learnt. It can be adrawing, creating a cartoon, making a diagram, mind map, a project or a working model etc. Process is done by giving tiered activities, providing interest centres inside the classroom, offering manipulatives or other hands on supports and aids to learners, varying the length of time a student may take to complete the task etc.

Product

A product is what a student can demonstrate, understand or do after the period of study. A product can be a solution to a real world problem, an end-f –unit- project, a challenging paper-pencil-test etc. It makes the student rethink and apply what they have learnt. For the slow learner, the teacher should differentiate the product by shortening the assignments.Product can be differentiated by giving assignments according to students' varied skills. Individual or group projects are given which allows students to create products of their own.

FLEXIBLE GROUPING

It is giving an opportunity for the students to work with variety of students according to their preferences. Students get an opportunity to participate in many groups depending upon the activity. Initially whole group instruction is given. Then groups are divided for activities or practice or for enrichment. Grouping should not be a permanent one but it is changeable for every activity or for a day or for a week. Grouping gives the students a sense of belonging and stamping students as advanced or struggling is avoided.

INSTRUCION THAT RESPONDS TO STUDENT VARIANCE

Teachers provide appropriately challenging learning experiences for all their students. If a task lacks challenges or if it is over challenged, the learners may be frustrated. The best method of teaching is one in which content, instructional methods, and pace of learning are based upon the abilities and interest of everylearner. Students are talented in different ways. Some children are with special needs.

ENGAGING LEARNING EXPERIENCE

A fundamental tenet of the differentiated model is that teachers must engage students and the curricula should be designed to engage students and it should have the ability to connect to their lives and positively influence their levels of motivation. Engaging all learners in the learning activities is essential. Students must wholeheartedly participate in all the educational activities. So teachers must proactively plan the lessons in such a way to engage all the students in the class. There must be a balance between the teacher assigned and student selected tasks.Continuous and comprehensive evaluation engages students in reaching their full potential.Every learner benefits from an engaginglearning experience. So every learner must be provided with learning activities and aids according to their interests and needs. Every learner ought to be treated with

respect and every learner should have an opportunity to reach fullest of his or her potential.

INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

Some children are with special needs. Teaching should be differentiated and individualised in order to reach all the students. An inclusive classroom is influenced by a student's gender, their culture, previous experiences, aptitudes, interests and particular teaching approaches. Addressing student differences and interest appears to enhance their motivation to learn.

BRAIN RESEARCH

Tomlinson and Kalbfleisch (1998) had done a brain research and they suggest three broad, related concepts that necessitate a differentiated approach. First, the learning environment should be safe and non-threatening to encourage learning. Students who experience discomfort by rejection, failure, pressure and intimidation cannot not feel safe within the learning context. Second, students should be appropriately challenged, and the learner must be comfortable enough to accept the challenge that new learning offers, the content should not be too difficult or too easy. Third, the student should be able to make meaning of the concepts, ideas and skills through significant association. This association is possible when students link their everyday experiences with what they are learning.

CATERING FOR READINESS INTEREST AND LEARNING PROFILE

Differentiated instruction defines the classroom as a community, accommodating students with differences and sameness. It creates an environment in which all students can succeed and derive benefit. Students differ in three important ways – readiness, interests and learning profiles – in a differentiated classroom, the teacher addresses these differences in order to maximise the learning potential of each student in the classroom.

READINESS OF STUDENTS

Tomlinson and Imbeau define readiness as a student's current proximity to specified knowledge, understanding, and skills. The goal of readiness in differentiation is to make the task a little difficult for students at a given point in their growth, and then providing the support they need so that they succeed at the new level of challenge. Students are all unique learners with very different needs. Learning activities should always be just in advance of each student's current level of mastery. It is the responsibility of the teacher to create lessons and learning experiences that are within each student's zone of proximal development. Readiness is measured by the student's ability to accomplish a given task based on their current level of understanding. Readiness level for each student might vary across subjects or content areas. Readiness level of students can be understood by what a learner knows and does not know, and then plan teaching according to those needs. Some of the physical factors which affect the learners readiness are pain, fatigue etc. The psychological factors that affect readiness are anxiety, fear etc.

INTEREST OF STUDENTS

It is defined as things that which engages the attention, curiosity, and involvement of a student. When people are interested in something; their motivation to learn about it increases, enhancing learning outcomes as well. The goal of interest in differentiation is to help students engage with new information, knowledge, understanding, and skills by making connections with things they already find appealing, enjoyable, intriguing, relevant, and worthwhile. Such things are usually linked to a student's strengths, cultural context, personal experiences, aptitudes, questions and sense of need.

Teachers should offer students with choices in selecting the assignments, activities and projects in which they want to explore more deeply into. Students' interest can be focussed by Connecting the subjects or contents with their area of interests and fascinations.

STUDENTS LEARNING PROFILE

A student's learning profile is a preference for taking in, processing, exploring, or expressing content or the subject matter. Four factors help form a learning profile: 1) gender; 2) culture; 3) learning style, such as working alone or with the group, in a quiet and isolated atmosphere or when listening to music, when sitting still or moving around in a room; and 4) intelligence preference such as verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical-rhythmic, spatial, or naturalist preference for learning or thinking (Gardner's intelligences); or creative, analytical, and practical preference (Sternberg's intelligences). Identifying learning styles helps a teacher to capitalise on a student's strengths.

The goal of learning profile in differentiation is to teach in the ways students learn and acquire information best and to extend ways in which they can learn more effectively. Many experts suggest that learning styles surveys must be taken to assess students' preferred modes of learning. Learning profile gives the complete picture of a student's preferences, strengths, learning styles, intelligence, culture, gender and challenges. Educators have created questionnaire to give to students to identify and understand their own learning preferences. By understanding the learning profile of the students, the teacher acknowledges their strengths, needs, interests and other pertinent information. This in turn helps the teacher in giving best and most personalised access to high quality learning. Some words that describe the students profile are creative, artistic, friendly, leader, presenter, thinker, designer etc.

AFFECT AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The effect of students' emotions and feelings on their learning is an important element of differentiated instruction. One to one communication between the teacher and the student can motivate students to a greater extent to continue their educational activities and to work hard to achieve higher levels of mastery. Emotions and feelings, which are created by the students' past experiences and their reactions to current experiences, influence their self-concept, motivation to learn and ability to collaborate. These factors play a key role in the learning process. Thus it is very much important to modify the learning environment to meet student emotional needs. Providing extra attention to the learner who is struggling to complete the task is an example that we differentiate. Students' affective needs should be taken into consideration when planning instructions such as respectful tasks and flexible grouping. Some students don't work especially well in groups because they have emotional challenges, and teachers can help develop groups and help them develop mechanisms for working in those groups to be successful. For some students, modification of the learning environment is needed to ensure effective learning. Some students cannot sit still for an extended period of time, so they must be permitted to move around the room. Some students can't work with noise and disturbances so when such students are working in groups they are provided with ear plugs.

CONCLUSIONS

In a classroom where differentiated instruction is followed, all the students would feel welcomed. Mutual respect and sense of belonging and collaboration is achieved. Students would feel physical, mental and emotional safety. Students are assessed before, during and after their learning which in turn helps the teacher to get feedbacks about the position of the

students. Though students have choices in demonstrating their learning, teachers can use a common assessment tool so that all students learning are evaluated against the same assessment criteria. Thus differentiated instruction helps educators in creating and altering instructional plans in response to learners.

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