Differentiating Instruction by Readiness, Interests, Learning Profiles

1. 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 goal*. In most classrooms, whatever the learning 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 organizers to support note-taking

- add student-specific goals to checklists for success.

2. Interests

- When students are interested in what they are learning, the **act of learning issatisfying.**

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

- 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 particularinterests

- 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 analyzing its music

To differentiate for student interests:

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

- provide broad access to a wide range of materials andtechnologies

- offer a choice of tasks and products, including student-designedoptions

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

- connect content with students' cultures, experiences, andtalents

- use interest centers, interest groups, specialty groups or expertgroups

- use jigsaw groups

- offer choice in topics for reading materials

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

3. 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*: (1) learning style (2) gender (3) culture (4) 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 kinesthetic modes

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

State of New South Wales, Department of Education and Communities, 2015.

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