

School Administrators Want to Know

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A tip sheet for school administrators to support instructional leadership practice that focuses on practical issues faced in schools.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

The question:

How do I incorporate differentiated instruction into our school?

The answer:

Follow these five Tips for Success:

1. Learn about DI
2. Discover the benefits of differentiating
3. Respond by differentiating
4. Identify key features of DI
5. Five questions to ask in the classroom

1. WHAT IS DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION?

- Effective instruction that is responsive to the learning preferences, interests and readiness of individual learners.
- An organizing structure or framework for thinking about teaching and learning.
- Not individualized instruction rather, a response to varying student needs by providing a balance of modelled, shared, guided, and independent instructional strategies.

“(Differentiated instruction) is understanding that there are many ways to learn, recognizing that some students learn differently than others, and providing those students with opportunities to learn in ways that work best for them.”

Karen Hume, 2008

2. WHY DIFFERENTIATE?

- **To help all students learn.** Differentiating our instruction allows us as teachers to grow in our ability to “read our students” and then to adapt our practice so we effectively teach all students.
- **To increase student motivation and achievement.** When our students receive the appropriate levels of challenge and support, they are engaged, motivated and their achievement improves.
- **To connect with adolescent learners.** We can forge strong connections between our subject and our students, and that improves student learning.
- **To help adolescents become independent learners:** When students find out about themselves as learners, they become more independent, and when they work as responsible members of a community, respecting and affirming the diversity of others, discipline problems decrease.
- **To increase teacher satisfaction and efficacy.** Some of the enthusiasm and pleasure we feel in teaching is renewed when we are working creatively and efficiently.

3. RESPOND BY DIFFERENTIATING

- Examining data/evidence to

“The heart of school improvement rests in improving daily teaching and learning practices in schools, including engaging students and their families.” **Ben Levin, 2008**

determine area of need related to student achievement and/or engagement

- Select a learning focus that addresses the area of student need; select expectations; “unpack” to acquire a common understanding of expected student learning
- Use appropriate, evidence-based strategies for instruction, assessment and evaluation;
- Use structures or ways of organizing that facilitate student learning; and
- Providing choice, respectful tasks, and a shared responsibility for learning and flexible learning groups (key features of differentiated instruction).

4. KEY FEATURES

1. **Flexible Learning Groups:** Provide students with opportunities to work in a variety of groups that vary over time based on student readiness, interests and learning preferences.

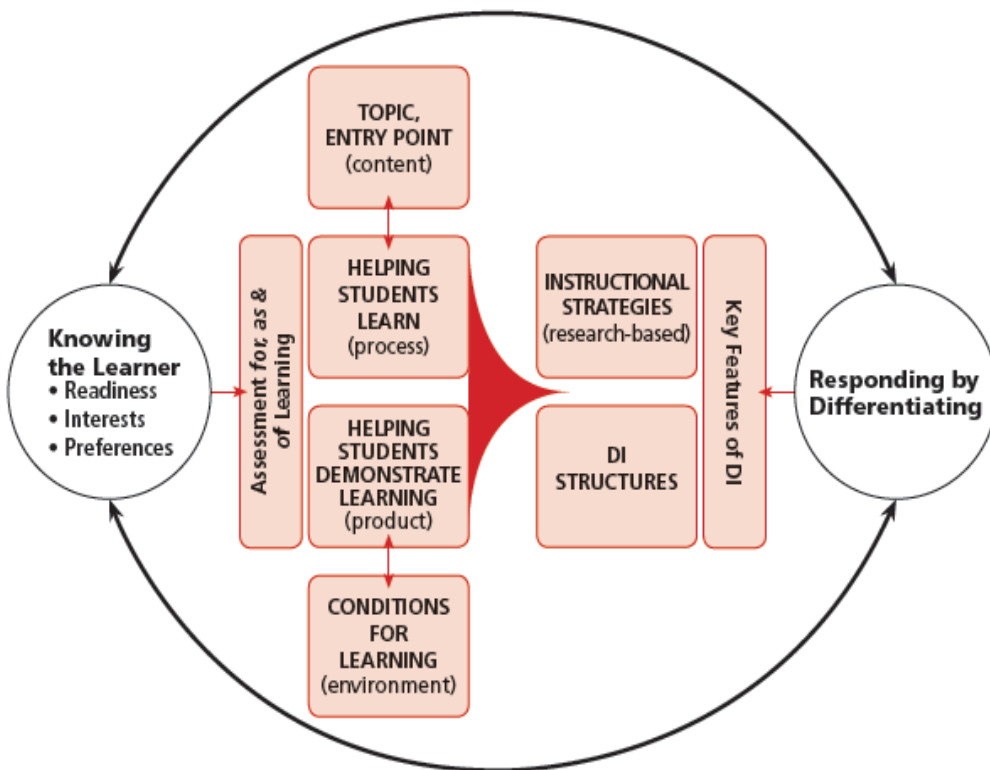
2. **Choice:** Provides students with personalized opportunities to connect with their prior knowledge, interests and learning preferences, allowing for a sense of ownership, self-motivation and a commitment to their own learning.
3. **Respectful Tasks:** Are equally engaging, promote high expectations and optimal achievement for all students and are assessed using the same assessment criteria.
4. **Shared Responsibility for Learning:** Develops when students are supported in developing the knowledge and skills required for them to self-assess and learn independently.

5. FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK IN THE CLASSROOM

The following questions guide decision-making as we plan instruction to meet the learning needs of our students. Ask these questions with your teachers.

1. How can the classroom be set up for differentiated instruction?
2. What elements of the learning environment can be differentiated to help all students learn?
3. How can we differentiate the ways we can help students learn new concepts?
4. How can we differentiate the ways we assess student progress towards their learning goals?
5. How can we differentiate the ways that students demonstrate what they understand and can do?

These questions serve to focus your thinking when planning a differentiated approach—for a single instructional activity, a lesson or an entire unit.



DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION RESOURCES

Ministry resources can be order through Service Ontario Publications (www.publications.serviceontario.ca) or found online on the EDU GAINS website (www.edugains.ca)

Student Success Differentiated Instruction Professional Learning Strategy Resources, Grades 7-12, include:

Reach Every Student through Differentiated Instruction Brochures

Student Success Grades 7 & 8 Differentiated Instruction Educator's Package (2007)

Differentiated Instruction Grades 7 & 8 Educator's Package Enhancements

Student Success Differentiated Instruction Educator's Package (2010)

Secondary Differentiated Instruction DVD and Facilitator's Guide (2010)

Differentiated Instruction Teaching/Learning Examples

The Differentiated Instruction Framework for Teaching and Learning (see left) captures the variety of elements, including strategies and structures that constitute a differentiated approach to instruction, assessment and evaluation.

REFERENCES

Hume, Karen (2008). *Start Where They Are: Differentiating for Success with the Young Adolescent*, Pearson Education Canada: Toronto, ON.

Ben Levin (2008). *How to Change 5000 Schools*, Harvard Education Press: Cambridge, Mass.