Differentiated Instruction Product
(Overview)
Waterloo Region District School Board

Overview

As part of the Ministry's Differentiated Instruction (DI) Project, the Woodland Park Team explored the DI framework by making connections to current classroom practice with the assistance of a Learning Support Teacher (LST) who facilitated co-planning, co-teaching, teacher moderation of student work, and capacity building with regards to application of the DI framework with comprehension strategies. Specifically, the team examined student use of comprehension strategies and meta-cognition in order to improve student learning.

The project involved the implementation of 4 learning cycles using the DI Framework within a structure similar to the Teaching Learning Critical Pathway (TLCP) model. These cycles focused on the comprehension strategies of visualization, making connections, main idea, and synthesizing. Linkages to the DI framework included data collection and analysis with a variety of assessment tools in order to build student and class profiles (e.g., determine student readiness, interests and preference). As well the linkages included use of student exemplars (e.g., vary product/process), planning lessons using the framework (e.g., vary process/content) and the collection and analysis of teacher survey data to determine next steps.

The learning cycles for teaching comprehension strategies using the DI framework were part of comprehensive literacy instruction, and could be implemented by an individual teacher, or by a team of teachers.

Summary Reflections

The reflections below provide insight into the implementation of a DI framework for the various stakeholders.

Teacher Reflections Regarding DI Project

• Teachers discovered that providing choice of text, and how to demonstrate learning, was a motivator for students, increased student engagement, and often increased achievement, when they compared pre-assessment and summative assessment results.

• Teachers used the CASI assessment as the summative task for a particular comprehension strategy and as pre-assessment data for the upcoming comprehension strategy. However, it appeared that
many students were not necessarily engaged or motivated by the CASI selections (e.g., limited choice of texts), so it may be the case that student achievement results were not indicative of student capability or learning.

• Using class profiles provided teachers with a “visual starting point” for where students were at, and could easily be used for grouping students according to readiness. Class profiles also provided a starting point for conversations between classroom teachers, same grade teachers, and Learning Support Teacher regarding readiness, resource selection, and “where to go next”.

• The data wall allowed teachers to see the results of their instruction and provided a “teacher friendly visual tool” for decision making regarding differentiation and flexible groupings. When examined at the collaborative planning meetings, it provided the opportunity for teachers to discuss observations, patterns, and next steps.

• Teacher moderation was a successful and necessary process for building common understanding of criteria, “look fors” in student work, development of rubrics, and alignment of assessment practices.

• Getting to know students’ learning styles, interests and pre-assessments were the keys to knowing where to begin and planning next steps.

Learning Support Teacher Reflections Regarding DI Project

• Teacher observation lessons and co-teaching were effective support strategies for building teacher confidence and capacity regarding comprehension strategies, differentiation, small group instruction, assessment, and explicit instruction.

• LST support was effective in building teacher background knowledge of: comprehension strategies, resources, ideas for differentiation, and assessment tools.

• Similar to the approach to “start where students are”, it is also essential in that the LST “start where the teachers are”. Experienced teachers accessed the LST support primarily for professional dialogue, examining student work samples, development of exemplars, and resource selection. Less experienced teachers accessed the LST support for planning, co-teaching, observation lessons, teacher moderation, professional dialogue, strategies for differentiation, development of exemplars, and co-creation and implementation of assessment tools.

• The DI project was focused on one component of a comprehensive literacy program – comprehension strategies. This precision was a key to the success of the project because it provided a more “narrow” starting point for the school DI team to work through the process of developing and continuing a learning community.
The Learning Cycle process provided a routine and framework for the DI project and supported classroom instruction. The LST provided flexible support throughout the various stages of the cycle as per requests by teachers. Having an LST at the school site each day allowed for teachers to obtain daily support.

Time for teachers and an LST was a significant factor in the project success and contributed to the implementation of a Learning Cycle in the following ways:
- timetabling by the administrator provided for regularly scheduled monthly collaborative planning meetings
- teachers used planning time to plan/discuss DI initiatives
- scheduling a common physical/nutritional break time where project teachers could meet with the LST was initiated mid-year to facilitate more professional learning time
- LST provided two half-days of support as well as participating in additional teacher meeting times (e.g., nutrition break time, monthly collaborative planning meetings)

**Learning Cycle – Products**

The following Learning Cycles provide artifacts that demonstrate implementation of the DI Framework.

1) Visualization Learning Cycle (filename: Visualization Learning Cycle.doc)

2) Main Idea Learning Cycle (filename: Main Idea Learning Cycle.doc)

3) Synthesizing Learning Cycle (filename: Synthesizing Learning Cycle.doc)

4) Making Connections Learning Cycle (filename: Making Connections Learning Cycle.doc)