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CHAPTER 10

10 *Diversity and Differentiation*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Throughout this text we have discussed the importance of recognizing students' individual differences and using various approaches to instruction for students with a variety of learning styles, interests, and abilities. This chapter takes another look at strategies that will be useful as you work to differentiate the curriculum for a variety of learners. We offer information and techniques to help you make decisions regarding the particular needs of students with educational disabilities, gifted and talented students, culturally diverse and bilingual students, and students in urban schools. Each of the chapter sections focuses on the characteristics and needs of students discussed, describes teaching strategies appropriate for such students, and explains how these strategies may sometimes be useful for all students.

Opening Activity

Hannah Lewis, a first-year teacher, sits at her desk at the end of a long October day. So far, she has found her eleventh-grade English classes to be extremely hectic but rewarding. Hannah has enjoyed the diversity in her large urban school. Her carefully prepared management system has proved valuable in creating a classroom atmosphere that is warm but businesslike. Although much of the material so far has been review, Hannah is pleased that most of her students are completing their assignments successfully. Best of all, Hannah feels as if she is beginning to really know her students—their likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Today, however, that knowledge is starting to cause her some concern.

The students are all so different. It is easiest to worry about John. Although he is the oldest child in his class, his reading is slow and laborious, and he has not mastered basic writing skills. So far he has not caused any trouble, but last year's teacher said he used to argue with her and would not participate in class.

Diedra, on the other hand, has caused some problems already. Her ready wit sends the class into fits of laughter, often at the teacher's expense. She is a leader in class and out, devising creative sets for drama club productions and elaborate pranks at the expense of rival schools and local faculty. Her work is erratic. While her creative writing is outstanding, her grammar and spelling are average at best, and she frequently hands in late or incomplete assignments. Hannah often wonders if Diedra is really listening to her.

Practice Point

Rosa is another story. Raised in a Spanish-speaking home, Rosa spent her first two years in school in bilingual program. While she speaks English fairly well, her grammar is weak and her reading is not much better than John's. Rosa never volunteers in class, and Hannah is seldom sure whether she understands the lesson.

Tony is the star of the class. Whenever a lesson is lagging or a point seems unclear, Hannah can count on Tony to come up with the correct answer. His assignments are always complete and accurate. If a topic is mentioned in class, Tony frequently finds a newspaper article or book from home that can serve as an additional resource. Hannah has heard other teachers reminiscing about how much they enjoyed Tony in previous years. Hannah enjoys him, too, but she continues to have nagging doubts about the work he is doing in class. Is Tony really learning anything?

As she thinks about John, Diedra, Rosa, and Tony and her carefully prepared unit on mythic heroes and heroines, Hannah wonders how she can ever teach the subject in a way that will reach all her students.

Think for a moment about John, Diedra, Rosa, and Tony. What characteristics of each student may have an impact on his or her learning in Hannah's class?

Hannah is facing a common dilemma. Although teachers learn important principles of planning and instruction, those principles are always put into practice on a particular day, in a particular lesson, and with a particular group of students. The artistry in teaching consists of knowing how to take into account the context of the lesson—that is, which principles and strategies are most important to emphasize in each set of circumstances.

This chapter will help you differentiate your planning and instruction for learners like John, Diedra, Rosa, and Tony. As you read, remember that none of the special needs addressed are mutually exclusive. A student may be gifted and bilingual; another may come from a cultural background that affects school performance. Many other combinations exist as well. It is important to consider each student first as an individual. Only then is it helpful to think about the special needs often found in particular groups of young people.

SECTION 1. DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Section 1 Objective

When you have completed this section, you will have the ability to explain several strategies for differentiating instruction to meet students' needs.

As we discussed in Chapter 6, differentiated instruction flexes to meet the varying needs of students within a class. If you intend for all students to learn, you must plan instruction that can accommodate many types of learners with widely varied backgrounds. Now that you know more about different types of lessons and instructional strategies, you can better reflect on how differentiation can (and must) occur. This section describes principles and characteristics of differentiated instruction.

Tomlinson (1999) outlines eight guidelines for differentiated classrooms. Think about how each of these principles already guides your planning.

1. The teacher focuses on the essentials. Teachers in differentiated classrooms focus instruction around core concepts, principles, and skills of a discipline. (See Tomlinson, 2000, for a discussion of standards-based instruction and differentiation.)
2. The teacher attends to student differences. Teachers in differentiated classrooms are aware of individual differences and of their responsibility to all the students in their classrooms.
3. Assessment and instruction are inseparable. In these classrooms assessment is ongoing and diagnostic. Instructional decisions are based on assessment, not on what is found on the next page of a teacher's guide.
4. The teacher modifies content, process, and products. Modifying *content* may mean skipping practice of already mastered skills, or additional practice activities on content some students should have learned in previous years. It also can mean variation by interest or prior knowledge. Modifying *process* may require that some students work with the teacher in a small group while others work independently on similar material. It could mean that some students receive a homework assignment to read about key terms before they are introduced in class, or others are given resource materials that are too complex for most of the class to analyze. Modifying *products* could entail choice among different products or variations on a product assigned to different students. For example, if all students are writing historical fiction, some students may be challenged to write a new ending for an already familiar story, some to recount a major event in story form, and still others to write in first person—a task requiring greater abstraction and flexible thinking. All three are higher level tasks at varying levels of difficulty.
5. All students participate in respectful work. A differentiated classroom is not a room in which some students learn important content or engage in challenging higher level thinking and others do not. All of the children work toward essential goals. Teachers in these classrooms understand that you cannot show respect for student differences by ignoring them. Respectful teaching entails acknowledging the readiness level of each student, expecting each student to grow, offering escalating challenges as students develop understanding, and providing all students with equally interesting, important, and engaging work. The writing example above represents an

effort to provide all students with interesting, creative work while still allowing differing levels of challenge.

6. The teacher and students collaborate in learning, The teacher in a differentiated classroom is the leader, with students as the important participants in the community. Students help the teacher identify appropriate goals, monitor progress, analyze successes and failures, and learn from experience. As they do this, they become active participants in their own learning.

7. The teacher balances group and individual norms. Differentiated instruction requires attention to group goals (often outlined as state standards and benchmarks) and individual goals. If a student enters a grade without having mastered a key part of earlier curriculum, the teacher will need to balance targeted activities designed to teach earlier skills with supported appropriate instruction in grade-level content. Both sets of goals are essential. In a parallel fashion, students who enter a grade well above the expected skill level will need both group and individual goals to learn.

8. The teacher and students work together flexibly. As described in earlier chapters, good teaching entails great variety in strategy, group structure, and amount of choice. Differentiated instruction requires a large and varied repertoire of teaching strategies and the flexibility to use them in diverse combinations as they meet students' needs.

Many of the strategies already discussed can be used to facilitate differentiation. Differentiated classrooms do not make these modifications all day long, but only when they make sense. Tomlinson (1999) recommends:

> Modify a curricular element only when (1) you see a student need and (2) you are convinced that modification increases the likelihood that the learner will understand important ideas and use important skills more thoroughly as a result. (p. 11)

Contracts also can facilitate differentiation. They can be used for individual assignments or as a class activity with two or three possible contracts, each with challenging options appropriate to a particular level. Figure 10.1 shows the beginning of two possible contracts that might be used in a unit on insects.

Agendas, another similar structure, also provides students with an individualized list of tasks to be completed in a specified amount of time. Generally, students determine the order in which they work on the tasks, often while the teacher circulates, providing coaching and monitoring. Agendas can work well in conjunction with centers. Figure 10.2 is an example of a personal agenda.

Tiered activities can ensure that students all work on key skills or essential ideas while they address varied learning needs. For example, a student who struggles with reading or abstract thinking still needs to be able to understand the dilemmas of a character in a particular story. A student who reads several years above grade level still needs to learn from the character's choices. If both students are given identical assignments, at least one is likely to be frustrated and experience limited learning.

A tiered activity could be used to provide multiple avenues to the same key learning, with varied levels of difficulty. Students could discuss the plot and the influences on the character in a whole-class discussion or in heterogeneous groups with guide

Contract 1

Insect Study

Name _____

1. Draw a diagram of an insect, illustrating all the major body parts.
2. Choose one insect and create a flip book illustrating its life cycle. Attach a written description of the life cycle to the flip book. Explain how this insect's life cycle is like or unlike that of other insects.
3. Using your science notebook, observe at least five insects in your environment. Sketch or describe each insect. Note when and where you observed it, what the insect was doing, and what you observed about the insect's environment.

Contract 2

Name _____

Science Choose an insect that interests you. Draw a diagram of your insect, labeling all important body parts.	**Science** Investigate your insect's environment. Write a description of the environment and how your insect is suited for the environment(s) in which it lives.	**Science/Technology** Use a search engine to locate three sites that describe your insect. Using the rating form, rate the sites for information, ease of use, and potential bias.
Music Create a work of music inspired by your insect. You may use the collection of percussion instruments or other instruments of choice.	**Language Arts** Write your autobiography as if you were your chosen insect. Create at least three illustrations for your story.	**Math** Calculate how much space would be needed to hold 10,000 of your insect. If you want, calculate the space for 1 million insects.

Figure 10.1 Sample Contract Segments
From *Teaching as Decision Making: Successful Practices for the Elementary Teacher* (3rd Ed.) (p. 291), by A.J. Starko, et al., 2003, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall. Copyright 2003 by Pearson Education, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

questions. Some students (including the first student) might create a collage illustrating the influences they felt were most important in the character's choices. Others might write a dialogue in which one character explains the choice to another. Still other students (perhaps including the more advanced student) could write about an original character who responded to similar influences in a different way.

Schniedewind and Davidson (2000) describe several strategies for *differentiating within cooperative learning.* One strategy entails varying the complexity of tasks within heterogeneous groups. For example, in a jigsaw activity students can each become expert on key pieces of information, but they do not have to work from resources of equal

Personal Agenda for _____

Starting Date _____

Completion Goal _____

Teacher and Student Initials	Task	Special Instructions
	Complete first-person descriptions of Boston Massacre.	Be sure that at least one of your descriptions is from someone not involved in the combat.
	Read your historical novel.	Keep track of new vocabulary in your reading log. Make notes of areas in which you identify historical consistency or inaccuracies.
	Complete problem-solving activities 26–30.	Try to find at least three ways to solve problem 28.
	Write a rough draft of your plan for your demonstration project using simple machines. After the draft has been reviewed, complete the plan according to the directions.	Do not begin your final draft of your project until the rough draft has been reviewed. Remember that the final report must be word processed.

Figure 10.2 Personal Agenda
From *Teaching as Decision Making: Successful Practices for the Elementary Teacher* (3rd Ed.) (p. 292), by A.J. Starko, et al., 2003, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall. Copyright 2003 by Pearson Education, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

length or complexity. Cooperative groups also can enhance individualized work. For example, students can help partners study individualized spelling lists or help each other stick to time lines on long-term projects.

Many students can benefit from carefully planned peer tutoring activities. Keep in mind, however, that pairing students from the two extremes of your class—those who learn most easily and quickly with those who have the most learning difficulties—may not be the best strategy. Students learn best from a model they perceive is similar to themselves. If the perceived differences are too great, modeling may be less effective. In any peer tutoring structure it is important to also make sure that tutoring represents only a limited portion of the school day, particularly if the tutor is already highly skilled in the content being taught. For the majority of their day, tutors, too, should be learning content that is new to them.

We have found that a matter-of-fact *acknowledgement of differences* among students—in the context of a classroom in which it is clear that all are valued—merely recognizes what students already know. Different students are good at different things. Discussing and appreciating those differences, rather than acting as if difference is something to hide, can be the basis of an accepting community that genuinely celebrates differing accomplishments.

In their article, Schniedewind and Davidson (2000) respond to an important question about differentiated instruction.

> Do students feel awkward or resentful about such differentiated assignments? We have found that students know one another's capabilities quite well although they don't necessarily talk about them. One teacher explained to her students that differentiated assignments help her fulfill her job of challenging each student. We've found that students feel more comfortable when teachers acknowledge and engage them in discussion about the tension-producing subject of academic difference. Afterward, students can focus on learning with less anxiety. (p. 25)

Whatever the strategy, the key to successful planning for your classes is to remember this: *Classes never learn anything; only individual students learn, one at a time.* As you look at your lesson plans and think about the challenge of meeting so many students' needs, you probably are feeling a little overwhelmed. Sometimes good teaching can feel like a daunting task to even the most experienced professionals. Few teachers with typical sized classes can differentiate for every student or for every lesson. It is important to begin to prioritize your lessons to determine when differentiation is most important.

First, consider the *content.* Content that focuses on basic skills or is primarily a review from previous years is most likely to be strengthened through differentiation for able learners. Content that requires numerous prerequisite skills or complex abstract thinking may pose enough of a challenge that some students will need extra levels of support. Next, consider the *students* themselves, particularly those with the most extreme individual needs. If you have students whose current levels of achievement are a year or more above or below grade level, work with those students' most clear-cut needs in order to provide a place to start.

Finally, in planning for a day or a week, consider each student's experience over that period of time. A reasonable rule of thumb is that all students—even those whose needs are significantly different from the norm—should spend at least part of every day engaging in activities that specifically target their needs. The following sections discuss the students with particularly diverse needs for whom differentiation will be most crucial.

SECTION 2. STUDENTS WITH EDUCATIONAL DISABILITIES

Section 2 Objectives

After you have completed this section, you will have the ability to:

1. describe characteristics of students with educational disabilities;