

Differentiated Instruction

You may notice that at times the students in this classroom are not doing the same homework or class work. Students may have homework that is labeled 'Challenge Math' or 'Challenge Spelling'; or they may have several choices for a book report or class project. Responding to the individual differences among students is a hallmark of differentiated instruction.

What is differentiated instruction? It is instruction that is based on the fact that students are most excited and engaged when curriculum is modified in response to students' varied readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles.

How does differentiated instruction take place in the classroom? With each new lesson or unit of study students will be assessed to see if they have already mastered the skill or standard being addressed. If mastery is demonstrated, they will receive an 'A' for that unit of study and will then be given assignments that are rich in 'depth' or 'complexity', or 'accelerated' to reflect new learning. Remember, students will not always receive differentiated instruction in every unit of study or in every subject. Modifications are based on what they already have mastered for that particular chapter, lesson, or standard.

What exactly does this mean for students in the classroom? Students may take a spelling pretest and those who show mastery will be given an alternative list of 'challenge' spelling words. The homework assignments for that week might require that students use more complex spelling skills, or practice more in-depth thinking than the original spelling homework. In class all students will participate in the grammar activities; however, on Friday they will be tested on the 'challenge' list. In math, those students demonstrating mastery of the content of a chapter about to be taught will be 'accelerated' (sometimes called 'compacting') into the next chapter or they may work on more advanced skills in the same skill area. They will meet with the teacher, along with other students working at the same level, each day for instruction. These students will have differentiated class work and 'challenge' homework. At the end of a unit students receiving differentiated instruction will be assessed on the content of what they have learned. For a book report, students who read

above grade level may be asked to choose from a 'menu' of assignments that require more depth of understanding in reading comprehension. These are just a few of many examples of differentiated instruction in the classroom.

Does this mean advanced students will have more work to do? No. Adjustments should be qualitative in nature, rather than quantitative. The goal of differentiated instruction is to meet students at their academic level and keep them challenged and excited about learning by offering them instruction that keeps them actively engaged in what they are studying.

Is differentiated instruction only for the advanced learners? No. All students will be given the opportunity to participate in more challenging activities if they demonstrate mastery of the content of the unit. A student may have 'challenge' spelling but not 'challenge' math. They may be doing accelerated math but need extra help in reading comprehension or fluency. Differentiated instruction also applies to students who need a bit more individual help from the teacher in an area of need. The curriculum can be differentiated to allow students who need to spend more time on a given area of study to do so. The idea is to tailor the classroom experience to meet the individual needs of all students.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about differentiated instruction please feel free to contact me.