

Sharing responsibility with students

One of the ultimate goals of education is to gradually transfer responsibility for learning to students so that they become capable and motivated lifelong learners. In differentiated instruction, teachers actively work toward this goal by:

- scaffolding instruction so that all students can experience success
- building on student interests and skills to increase motivation
- providing opportunities for appropriate student choice and independent learning
- helping students to build a personalized repertoire of strategies to organize information, make sense of ideas, communicate clearly, and retain and retrieve information, concepts and ideas
- providing frequent opportunities for students to set goals, reflect on their own learning and develop self-monitoring and self-assessment skills.

The nature of students' involvement in their own learning and the degree of independence will vary depending on students' ages and development levels, and the demands of the curriculum.

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Taking a flexible and reflective approach

Putting this philosophy into practice requires proactive planning, in which teachers identify, from the beginning, multiple routes for students to succeed, rather than retrofitting one-size-fits-all approaches after the fact. At the same time, it is important to plan with flexibility in mind. This flexibility, in terms of both scheduling and attitude, allows you to respond as much as possible when new student needs or interests emerge in relation to a topic or concept of study.

In differentiated instruction, ongoing assessment of students drives and extends instruction and helps you to continually refine your efforts. Along with ongoing assessment, differentiated instruction also demands that teachers systematically reflect on their instructional practices and use this information to improve their practice. Consider the following self-assessment.

Does my instructional approach:

1. use assessment strategies at the beginning of the instructional cycle, to determine what students already know and understand?
 Yes Not yet
2. use varied instructional approaches including discussion, demonstration, guided reading and discovery activities?
 Yes Not yet
3. emphasize critical and creative thinking and the application of learning?
 Yes Not yet

4. use varied instructional groupings, including whole class, small groups, partners and individuals?
 Yes Not yet
5. provide opportunities for students to choose activities based on their interests and preferences?
 Yes Not yet
6. provide opportunities for guided and independent practice of new skills and concepts?
 Yes Not yet
7. incorporate ongoing assessment strategies to check student learning and understanding throughout instructional sequences?
 Yes Not yet
8. accommodate for learner differences by providing a variety of ways to show learning?
 Yes Not yet
9. use strategies for reteaching, which are different from those strategies used to teach the skills and concepts the first time?
 Yes Not yet
10. ensure those reteaching activities demand higher-level thinking skills while reinforcing basic skills and content?
 Yes Not yet
11. provide enrichment activities that demand critical and/or creative thinking and the production of new ideas, thoughts and perspectives?
 Yes Not yet
12. provide learning activities and ways of organizing that will scaffold student learning?
 Yes Not yet



Links to other instructional theories and practices

Differentiation is a compilation of many theories and practices. It is grounded in an understanding of effective pedagogy and learning theories, including current research and best practice in the areas of brain-compatible learning, multiple intelligences, Bloom's taxonomy of thinking, and universal design for learning.