

Join me as we talk about differentiation. Have you ever noticed students in your classroom getting frustrated, seem bored, find the work unchallenging or challenging, or even students whose learning styles or strengths are not engaged? Do you get frustrated because you feel you aren't reaching every student? If this sounds familiar, you might consider differentiating your instruction. You may discover that you can better meet the diverse needs of your students.

Carol Ann Tomlinson, noted differentiation expert, says that differentiating instruction means that the teacher anticipates the differences in students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles and, as a result, creates different learning paths so that students have the opportunity to learn as much as they can, as deeply as they can, without undue anxiety because the assignments are too taxing or boredom because they are not challenging enough. Teachers can differentiate through content, which is the information and ideas students need to interact with in order to reach their learning goals. Process, which is how students take in and make sense of the content. Product, how students show what they know, understand, and can do. And environment, which is the climate or tone of the classroom.

The differentiation occurs according to student's readiness, which is a student's entry point relative to a particular concept or skill interests, and learning profiles, which are students preferred approaches to learning. Differentiation occurs through a variety of instructional strategies, which may include the use of text and images through graphic organizers, allowing flexibility in grouping students, assigning peers as tutors to help facilitate learning, tiered assignments, different learning stations to promote active learning, and many, many more.

Even with evidence that indicates the effectiveness of differentiated instruction, there are still some misconceptions about what differentiation is and isn't. 1. Differentiation isn't just an instructional strategy; it's a way of thinking about teaching and learning. 2. Effective differentiation requires rethinking one's classroom practice and outcomes through ongoing trial, reflection, and adjustment in the classroom itself. It isn't adequate to just show or tell teachers how to differentiate. 3. Most experienced teachers do pay attention to student variation and respond to it in some way, especially with students who can disrupt the classroom. However, few teachers proactively plan instruction to consistently address student differences. While instruction is a crucial component, differentiation involves tailoring various aspects of the learning environment to address individual learning styles, preferences, and readiness levels.

Back to the original question, why differentiate? Students often have different levels of academic abilities. Differentiation allows you to provide additional challenges for those who need it and offer additional support for those who require extra assistance. Students have different interests and passions. By differentiating instruction, teachers can incorporate topics and activities that align with students' interests, making learning more engaging and relevant to their lives.

Inclusive education is about meeting the needs of all students, including those with diverse learning abilities or special needs. Differentiation helps create a more inclusive environment where every student feels valued and supported. Students have varied learning styles. Some may learn better through visual aids, while others may prefer hands-on activities. Differentiating instruction allows you to address these diverse learning styles, ensuring that each student has an opportunity to grasp the material.

Thanks for joining to learn about differentiation.