
QAHS NEWS BULLETIN

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Differentiated Instruction

I (Derek) was reading this article “Defining Differentiated Instruction” by The George Lucas Education Foundation and thought this would be an interesting article to share with our learning community based on several conversations I’ve had with teachers regarding differentiation.

Defining Differentiated Instruction

by

The George Lucas Education Foundation

When I lesson plan with teachers, out of earshot from their fellow teachers and their principals, I can’t tell you how often I’m asked, “what exactly does it look like?” when it comes to differentiated instruction.

In the education world, differentiated instruction is talked a lot about as a policy or as a solution, but rarely do educators get opportunities to roll up their sleeves and talk about what it looks like in practice.

The definition begins with this: *Equal education is not all students getting the same, but all students getting what they need. Approaching all learners the same academically doesn't work.* We have to start where each child is in his learning process in order to authentically meet his academic needs and help him grow. With a classroom full of children at different stages of learning, this certainly sounds overwhelming, I know. So I'd like to suggest a place to begin and provide some examples.

Start with the Student

If a child in your class is really struggling with reading, writing, organization, time management, social skills or all of the above, the first step is to find out as much as you can about her educational history and anything else. This includes learning about her interests, cultural background, learning style, and something about her home life (The youngest? Foster care? Single parent home?)

The fact is we are mainstreaming a larger number of our students to general education classes, who, 15 years ago, may have instead been assigned to a special education class. That's good news in so many ways but makes a teacher's job more challenging. This is also one of the reasons why differentiated instruction has become such a hot topic.

Several years ago, in one of the general education language arts class I was teaching, 8 of the 34 students enrolled had an Individualized Education Program (IEP). When a child has an IEP, it is required that all teachers provide accommodations and modifications to assignments and instruction for that student.

Speaking of overwhelmed. I definitely was, to say the least. So, I learned. I spent many of my conference periods combing through student files. It's amazing what you can discover about a child from doing this.

For instance, I had a student with perplexing behaviors then I learned he suffered from schizophrenia. How did I find out? Looking at his file. I was a much better teacher for him after gaining this information. Of course, he had an IEP, and someone should have told me in the beginning of the year, but we all know how things -- and children -- fall through the cracks of large public schools in enormous school districts.

A Classroom Example

Making an assignment, task, or objective different for one student than the rest of the class is meeting that child where they are in their learning journey. It's okay, you don't have to feel bad or feel as if you are being unfair, or lowering the bar. You are the child's teacher and you spend enough time with her to understand what she needs. And remember, equality is about meeting the needs of the individual.

Here's an example from my teaching:

It's a high school language arts class, and students are reading a novel. The daily objective is practicing inference and application of this skill. They are writing a brief essay predicting what the character Crooks from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* might do next. They must pull textual evidence from the book to support their predictions and claims.

But Diana is seated over there, frustrated. She is struggling with the concept of inference, partly because she is reading below her grade level. Knowing this about her reading abilities, and other challenges indicated on her IEP, do I expect her to stay the course, or do I admit that success for her with this assignment as it stands is not likely? I decide to give Diana the task of listing five adjectives to describe the character Crooks. She has to find one quote from the character in the book to prove one or more of the words she has chosen. There are similarities to these two assignments, but different enough to ensure a higher probability of success -- and learning -- for her.

SIDEBAR

This week Flushing will kick off the Extracurricular Activities Pilot Program. Jamaica will begin next week – see Shaun, Marguerite or Pooran for details. Thank you to all teachers for volunteered to be a part of this pilot.

Monday, April 19th

- We have been afforded the opportunity to participate in a Conflict Resolution Training for our students. Both campuses will partake starting with Jamaica.
- Bus Drill in Flushing
- Faculty Meeting (Extended time for those who signed up for UbD)-Flushing

Tuesday, April 20th

- School Improvement Team-Jamaica Campus
- Don't forget to make "Good News" phone calls. A parent made a note of telling me how good these calls made her feel and that our staff was terrific about making these calls. See how many you can make this week.

Wednesday, April 21st

- **Secretaries Day!**
- Credit recovery orientation at both campuses.
- Wacky Wednesday – Flushing
- School Leadership /Parent Association Meeting

Thursday, April 22nd

- School Leadership Training

Friday, April 23rd

- Festive Friday-Jamaica
- Training for Science Labs - Jamaica – for those of you who may not know, Jamaica's science labs have been under construction from the beginning of the school year. Construction has finally been completed and teachers will be trained on how to use the new labs.

Saturday, April 24th

- QAHS First Annual Community Parenting Conference in Jamaica.
- 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. - English Teachers – Literature Circles –Flushing Campus

Tuesday, April 27th

- Start date for 2nd cycle of credit recovery

Saturday, May 1st

- QAHS First Annual Community Parenting Conference -Flushing

Remember:

Quality Review – May 17th and 18th

A Matter of Fairness

Differentiated instruction for Diana, and for other struggling students, may mean providing a handout with sentence starters or a graphic organizer to help them with constructing meaning. It may mean providing extra time to complete an assignment, giving directions again, reducing the length of an assignment, or offering alternate assignments or projects altogether. You can also provide struggling students with leveled text -- less difficult reading that contains the same content.

Do I pre-plan variations of an assignment? Not always, but when I know my struggling students and their challenges well enough to predict road bumps ahead for them, I'm ready.

One way to be ready? Create file folders filled with various graphic organizers, visual aides, and sentence starters for different types of thinking (cause and effect, chronological, compare and contrast, to name a few). You can quickly pull out one of these in a pinch. If a student finishes a differentiated assignment with time left, then assess if it was too easy, and add a step. If a differentiated assignment is too difficult, break down the directions even more, give them one-on-one time with you, or remove a step.

I've heard teachers suggest that making an assignment less difficult for one student is not fair to the others. But I ask: Is it a matter of what is fair, or what is right?

What are ways you differentiate instruction for the grade level and content you teach? We look forward to hearing from you!

Credit Recovery

The first cycle of the Credit Recovery Program will be ending on Thursday, April 22, 2010. Credit Recovery is an alternative pathway for students to master learning outcomes in an accelerated time frame after they have failed a course or courses.

The Credit Recovery Team is estimating that 21 students who received an NC are now in a position to turn those No Credits into a credit. The second cycle of Credit Recovery is scheduled to start on April 27th with orientation on Wednesday, April, 21st.

QAHS hosting First Annual Community Parenting Conference

The conference will take place at both campuses. The workshops in Jamaica will be Saturday, April 24th from 12:00 p.m. -3:00 p.m. and the workshops in Flushing will be on Saturday, May 1st from 12:00 p.m. -3:00 p.m. The conference will consist of parenting workshops on health, finance, healthcare, education and parenting tips. All are welcomed to attend.