

Why is it Important to Know Your Students?

Some children's need for a particular style or condition is intense enough to be a matter of psychological health and positive self-esteem and can either block or slow learning.

Intrinsic motivation is more powerful than external rewards... and honoring a child's preference for communication style is deeply satisfying and motivating.

Starting with individualized knowledge of learners is fundamental to good instructional practice.

Commitment to a standards-based curriculum is not enough without skilled, professional instructional judgment to tailor it to individual learners.

-- Michigan Department of Education

Teachers can utilize learning style inventories to better understand students and their learning styles and preferences. Although some learning style inventories are copyright protected; several are shared for classroom use on the internet.

Key Principles of a Differentiated Classroom

- The teacher is **clear about** what matters in **subject matter**.
- The teacher understands, appreciates, and **builds upon student differences**.
- Assessment** and **instruction** are **inseparable**.
- The teacher adjusts **content, process, and product** in response to student **readiness, interests, and learning profile**.
- All students participate in **respectful work**.
- Students and teachers are **collaborators** in learning.
- Goals of a differentiated classroom are **maximum growth and individual success**.
- Flexibility** is the hallmark of a differentiated classroom.

Source: Tomlinson, C. (2000). *Differentiating Instruction for Academic Diversity*. San Antonio, TX: ASCD

Best Practices for Standards-based Instruction



Student Voice and Involvement

- Balanced with teacher-chosen and teacher-directed activities:
- Students often select inquiry topics, books, writing topics, etc.
- Students maintain their own records, set goals, and self-assess
- Some themes / inquiries are built from students' own questions
- Students assume responsibility and take roles in decision making

Best Practices for Standards-based Instruction

Physical Facilities

From:

- Set-up for teacher-centered instruction (separate desks)
- Rows of desks
- Bare, unadorned space
- Textbooks and handouts

To:

- Set-up for student-centered instruction (tables, U-shaped)
- Clusters, centers, etc.
- Student work, friendly
- Purposeful materials

Best Practices for Standards-based Instruction

Classroom Climate / Management

From:

- Punishment and rewards
- Teacher-created and enforced rules
- Passive learning
- Solely ability grouping
- Rigid schedule

To:

- Engagement and community
- Students help set and enforce norms
- Purposeful engagement
- Flexible grouping
- Flexible time based on activity

Best Practices for Standards-based Instruction

Activities and Assignments

From:

- Teacher presentation
- Whole-class instruction
- Uniform curriculum

- Short-term lessons
- Memorization and recall
- Short responses, fill-in-the-blank
- Same assignments

To:

- Students experiencing concepts
- Centers, groups, variety
- Topics by students' needs or choice
- Extended activities
- Application and problem solving
- Complex responses, evaluations and writing
- Multiple intelligences, cognitive styles

Best Practices for Standards-based Instruction

Language and Communication

From:

- Forced constant silence
- Short responses
- Teacher talk

- Focus on facts

To:

- Noise, conversation alternates with quiet
- Elaborated discussions
- Student-teacher, student-student

- Skills, concepts, synthesis, evaluation

Learning Environment

Examples of differentiating learning environment at the elementary level include:

- Making sure there are places in the room to work quietly and without distraction, as well as places that invite student collaboration;
- Providing materials that reflect a variety of cultures and home settings;
- Setting out clear guidelines for independent work that matches individual needs;
- Developing routines that allow students to get help when teachers are busy with other students and cannot help them immediately; and
- Helping students understand that some learners need to move around to learn, while others do better sitting quietly (Tomlinson, 1995, 1999; Winebrenner, 1992, 1996).

Content

Examples of differentiating content at the elementary level include the following:

- Using reading materials at varying readability levels;
- Putting text materials on tape;
- Using spelling or vocabulary lists at readiness levels of students;
- Presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means;
- Using reading buddies; and
- Meeting with small groups to re-teach an idea or skill for struggling learners, or to extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners.

Process

Examples of differentiating process or activities at the elementary level include the following:

- Using tiered activities through which all learners work with the same important understandings and skills, but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity;
- Providing interest centers that encourage students to explore subsets of the class topic of particular interest to them;

Process (continued)

- Developing personal agendas (task lists written by the teacher and containing both in-common work for the whole class and work that addresses individual needs of learners) to be completed either during specified agenda time or as students complete other work early;
- Offering manipulatives or other hands-on supports for students who need them; and
- Varying the length of time a student may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a struggling learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.

Products

Examples of differentiating products at the elementary level include the following:

- Giving students options of how to express required learning (e.g., create a puppet show, write a letter, or develop a mural with labels);
- Using rubrics that match and extend students' varied skills levels;
- Allowing students to work alone or in small groups on their products; and
- Encouraging students to create their own product assignments as long as the assignments contain required elements.

THINKING ABOUT **ON-GOING ASSESSMENT**

STUDENT DATA SOURCES

1. Journal entry
2. Short answer test
3. Open response test
4. Home learning
5. Notebook
6. Oral response
7. Portfolio entry
8. Exhibition
9. Culminating product
10. Question writing
11. Problem solving

TEACHER DATA MECHANISMS

1. Anecdotal records
2. Observation by checklist
3. Skills checklist
4. Class discussion
5. Small group interaction
6. Teacher – student conference
7. Assessment stations
8. Exit cards
9. Problem posing
10. Performance tasks and rubrics