

Differentiated Instruction and Anchor Activities

Differentiated instruction is a technique of creating multiple paths of learning so that students with different abilities, interests, or learning needs experience equally appropriate ways to absorb, apply, develop, and understand concepts as a part of the daily learning process. It allows students to assume greater responsibility and ownership for their own learning, and provides opportunities for peer teaching and cooperative learning.

Differentiated instruction is a highly-integrated process relating to a specific group of students and their assessed needs. While space prohibits a discussion of the entire differentiation process, **read on for a differentiating strategy that you can take back to your classroom and use with your students.**

TIPS: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION AND ANCHOR ACTIVITIES

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where some students have finished work before their classmates? Maybe they were better prepared for the assignment, or maybe their learning styles were particularly suited to that type of assignment. Whatever the reason, we know that not all students learn at the same pace. When some students are ready to move on, a differentiated instruction strategy called Anchors can offer enrichment and deeper meaning to their learning.

Anchors are purposeful, worthwhile activities that deepen student understanding of content and enrich the skills students need to acquire. Anchor activities are not busy work, which is designed to keep students quiet while others students finish their work. Anchors offer meaningful, self-directed activities for students to work on when they have free time (e.g., at the beginning of class or when they finish work early).

Anchors meet varying student learning profiles and interests. A logical extension of learning, Anchors may include extended content, related content, additional practice activities, or new applications of material that students have learned. They are usually designed for individuals to complete alone, but can be created for pairs or other small, self-selected groupings.

Anchor Activities for Your Classroom

Anchors should be engaging, relatively short, and easy to pick up or put down throughout the day, week, or semester.

Did you know?



Research shows that students perceive "flexibility" in thinking as an important factor in helping them learn to think more effectively (Kim, Grabowski, & Sharma, 2004). Students believe teachers exhibit such flexibility when they allow different answers, give sufficient time to think, and permit them to explore a variety of topics in class.

Research shows that providing students with choices in learning activities increased students' achievement, engagement, perceived competence, and levels of aspiration (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Westberg & Archambault, 2004).

Research shows that excellent teachers rely on a variety of instructional strategies rather than relying exclusively on one method (Langer, 2004).

"In differentiated classrooms, teachers provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible, without assuming one student's road map for learning is identical to anyone else's." –Carol Ann Tomlinson, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*

Examples of Anchor activities:

- A worksheet with open- or closed-ended questions.
- Learning centers.
- Journal writing.
- Creating games or books.
- Playing games that reinforce concepts/skills.

Below are some subject-specific Anchor activities that you can adapt and use with your students.

SUBJECT: LANGUAGE ARTS

Primary Students

When students are learning to print words and construct correct sentences on paper, use worksheets with fill-in-the-blanks as an Anchor Activity.

For instance:

The _____ sat on the log and ate _____.

Depending on readiness levels, you can provide words for students to copy into each blank (e.g. bear, honey), or students can come up with their own words and print them in the blanks.

Middle School Students

Provide sentences (or have students fill in the blanks) and have students identify parts of speech in each sentence. As an added challenge or a separate anchor activity (depending on readiness), have them define each part of speech.

Junior High School Students

Provide a sentence or two and have students come up with a creative story that begins with the sentence(s) provided. Add a challenge by encouraging students to use active verbs or complex sentences in the story.

High School Students

Have high school students write reflection journals sharing what they have learned. Ask questions that ask students to probe their feelings and personalize the material, such as "How do you feel about what you have read?" or "What was most interesting to you about what you read and why?"

SUBJECT: SCIENCE

Primary Students

Draw a picture of their favorite animal in its natural habitat. Older primary students can write a paragraph to accompany the picture, discussing what would be found in the animal's habitat.

Middle School Students

Play a game like Clue that reveals certain details about an animal they are studying. Details are hidden around the room. Students locate details and jot down notes, reinforcing their learning.

Junior High School Students

Search the Internet for an article related to the unit, and write a brief summary about it.

High School Students

Create a card game for their classmates to play that reinforces something they have learned, such as the layman versus scientific names of human bones (e.g., femur/thigh bone). Other students can then use the card game for review during another anchor activity.

Source: The above tips are based on PLS's graduate course *Differentiated Instruction for Today's Classroom*™. For more information see "Related Graduate Course" to the right.

Reference:

Cordova, D. I. & Lepper, M. R. (1996). The implementation of cooperative learning in an elementary physical education program.. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, , 88(4), 715-730.

Kim, K. Grabowski, B. L. & Sharma, P. (2004). *Designing a classroom as a learner-centered learning environment prompting students' reflective thinking in K-12.*: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology. Chicago, IL: (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED485059).

Langer, J. A. (2004). *Getting to excellent: How to create better schools*. New York: College Press.

Westberg, K. L. & Archambault, F. X. (2004). *Differentiation for gifted and talented students (pp. 59-76)*: A multi-site case study of successful classroom practices for high ability students. In C. A. Tomlinson (Ed.) . Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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