



Rifka Schönfeld
STRATEGIES

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

What is Differentiated Instruction?

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter addresses a question on the topic of learning how to spell when we are in an age of computers and spell-check...

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QUESTION:

What is differentiated instruction?

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ANSWER:

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GET ANXIOUS
OR HAVE A
DIFFICULT TIME
MAKING FRIENDS?



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In their book, *Differentiated Instruction in the English Classroom*, Barbara King-Shaver and Alyce Hunter explain that teachers can choose to differentiate their curriculum in three areas of modification: content, process, and product. Content is what a student is to learn; process is how the student will learn the content; and product is how the student is to display what s/he learned.

Content

If the curriculum is flexible, the teacher may modify what texts and concepts the students will study.

Process

Children can be involved in listening, writing, movement, musical, or reading activities. They can then discuss their separate activities in a whole class discussion.

Product

Upon completion of the unit of study, the teacher must determine the parameters for the final product. The teacher may choose to have the students write an essay, create a diorama, write a poem, or various other appropriate projects.

How Do You Decide to Modify?

Carol Ann Tomlinson, a pioneer of differentiated instruction and a professor at the University of Virginia, explains that teachers should look at student readiness, interest, and learning styles when deciding how to formulate their classrooms and curriculum. Student readiness represents how prepared or skilled the student is; interest is what a student likes, wants, or loves to do; learning style is how a student learns best.

Starting to assess student readiness, interests, and learning styles at the very start of the school year will enable teachers to better educate their students in the manner that is appropriate for individual students. Pre-assessment, or diagnostic testing, is a wonderful tool for understanding what a student knows before the year begins. While some students might have mastered some of the sophisticated understandings that are planned for the year, others might be deficient in precursor skills necessary to become proficient later in the year. A teacher who intends to support success for each learner needs a sense of learners' starting points as a unit begins.

Simple back to school pre-assessments could include questions such as, "Do you need quiet when you study? What did you do over the summer? What is your favorite subject in school? Would you rather read a book or listen to a tape? Do you prefer Judaic subjects or secular subjects? How much time to you spend on homework each night?"

Using these pre-assessments will give teachers an idea of where they are starting with their students at the beginning of the year. In *The New York Times*, Dr. Susan Demirsky Allan, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in Michigan, explains, "Nothing is a magic bullet, but if you start from where the student is, looking at his or her potential, then the likelihood of meeting that student's academic needs increases enormously."

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