

Inclusionary Practices and Systems:

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

WHAT IS DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION?

Differentiated instruction refers to teachers tailoring their instruction to meet the individual learning needs of all students in the classroom. By tailoring instruction, teachers support students to access the curriculum content and demonstrate their knowledge in various means. This requires no extra lesson planning from teachers as the lesson remains the same for all students. However, to ensure students learn, teachers can differentiate their instruction of the lesson. There are 4 main ways to differentiated instruction.

- 1 Content.** Ongoing assessments aid teachers to assess and determine what knowledge, understanding and skill students need to learn.
- 2 Process.** This is the process in which students learn and understand the content. Some examples of differentiating the process include working alone or in pairs, flexible groupings, working at different speeds or assistive technology.
- 3 Products.** Teachers can differentiate the ways students how their understanding by varying the product to match the learner.
- 4 Learning environment.** The environment can be modified to allow for optimal learning. This can be clearly defined work areas, minimizing distractions, providing for movement and sensory breaks. By optimizing the learning environment, students are prime for engaging meaningfully in the instruction and learning.

WHY IS DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IMPORTANT? WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

- Differentiated instruction moves away from a one-size-fits-most approach to teaching where students are all given the same instructional delivery and expected to have same product output.
- Teachers can differentiate what and how they are teaching to meet individual student needs.
- Unlike individualized instruction, which has a very specific plan for one student, differentiated instruction uses the same learning plan for all students. This allows for students to receive instruction in the general education setting.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Differentiated instruction does not require more lesson planning time from the teacher.
- Instruction is differentiated by content, process, product and learning environment of the lesson to meet students' differing needs.
- Differentiated instruction works well with UDL and RTI.

CASE STUDY: Mark Twain Elementary School

Grade-level PLC's at Mark Twain Elementary in the Lake Washington school district work diligently to create opportunities for all students to access core instruction. Through their "core plus more model," they aim to engage all students in core instruction by collaboratively planning and implementing differentiated access points to the general education curriculum. In addition to accessing core, all students engage in differentiated Power Groups, data-driven blocks of intervention, reteaching and/or extension.

Prior to implementing instruction, teachers plan collaboratively and intentionally to identify essential goals and to remove barriers that they anticipate students experiencing. During core-instruction, students have access to a variety of tools, assistive technology, and flexible options to show what they know. Additionally, teachers at Twain think creatively about creating work spaces and environments that maximize the engagement and learning of their diverse learners.

Teachers at Twain have been engaged in ongoing learning around the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). They are working hard to apply multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement for their students during core instruction and Power Groups. As their own professional learning continues in the area of differentiation and UDL, they plan apply these principles through intentional and reflective data analysis across grade-level teams to continue strengthening their differentiation practices and meeting the needs of all their students.

RESOURCES

1. **Jorgensen, Cheryl M. (2018)** AIM: Resources for Adapted Books and Other Accessible Text for Students with Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities.
2. **Kurth, Jennifer A. (2013)**. A Unit-Based Approach to Adaptations in Inclusive Classrooms. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, Vol. 46(2) 34-43.
3. **Subban, P. (2006)**. Differentiated instruction: A research basis. *International Education Journal*, Vol. 7(7), 935-947.
4. **Tomlinson, Carol A., Brighton, C., Hertberg, H. et. al. (2003)** Differentiating Instruction in Response to Student Readiness, Interest, and Learning Profile in Academically Diverse Classrooms: A Review of Literature. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. Vol. 27(2/3) 119-145.