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EDPC 610 – Foundations II
Assignment Five

Journal Reflection – Differentiated Instruction

Today's classroom is full of diverse learners. A typical classroom today could have students with all types of special needs including physical disabilities to Attention Deficit Disorder to students with Learning Disabilities. In addition teachers must accommodate their classroom to welcome all students regardless of racial, culture, ethnicity or socio-economic background. Teachers today cannot conduct their classroom the same way a teacher 20 years ago would have run his/her classroom. Classroom instruction must be differentiated in order to adapt to the individual needs of today's students. Salend suggests five ways in which educators can differentiate instruction: *content* (what they teach,) *process* (how they teach,) *product* (how students demonstrate mastery,) *affect* (how students connect their thinking and feelings) and *learning environment* (how the classroom is designed and what instructional groupings they use.)

When developing content to be taught in the classroom teachers must keep in mind the individual strengths and weaknesses of their particular students. It is important to assess the pre-requisite knowledge of that group of students. Once this pre-requisite knowledge is established, only then, can the teacher individualize and tailor the curriculum to that particular group of students. In addition to this personalization of curriculum, a teacher may choose to modify the curriculum for an individual student as well. By adding or reducing material, altering the pace of instruction or focusing on fewer objectives, students may be able to better grasp a subject matter. In developing curriculum, a teacher may also solicit information from the class in order to give students choices of what is taught in the classroom. For example, finding out the student's interest and incorporating those interests into the curriculum can be extremely motivational. Motivation is an essential part of instructing diverse

learners. Keeping motivation and enthusiasm for learning is key to differentiated instruction. Teachers can also keep the motivation level high in their classroom by providing high interest hands-on learning activities.

Not only do teachers have to differentiate what they teach, but they also must adapt how they teach it. According to Salend, teachers must "change the way information is presented." This is true for all types of students. Teachers must make individualized teaching accommodations based upon the individual students and their needs. For example, students with visual impairments will benefit from their material being translated into Braille, while a student for whom English is a second language will benefit from the use of a bilingual dictionary. However, some accommodations, while an excellent way to instruct diverse learners, will benefit all students. By varying the format used in each lesson, teachers will reach students with all different types of learning styles. Students will benefit from the use of items such as charts, graphs and semantic maps. Another quite different way to vary the format is by providing students with the same information at a lower readability level. In addition to adapting how educators teach, it is important to look at how students learn. Teachers must ensure that they highlight essential information, give clear and concise direction, as well as give students the skills they need to be an effective learner. Teachers can help students learn how to take notes and study by showing them how to write outlines and use study guides. In addition, teachers must encourage and enhance each student's ability to listen. This can be done by providing the class with a listening guide and encouraging students to ask questions.

As always, curriculum goals should always relate to the assessment of the students' level of mastery. In order for students to demonstrate mastery, teachers may use non-conventional methods of assessment. And while overall assessment is important, it is also important to check for students' levels of understanding throughout the course of the lesson and unit. Teachers may do this by providing effective questioning techniques. Students can also be involved in the assessment process. Teachers may choose to meet periodically with

students to set goals which they later will be evaluated on. Student portfolios can also be created, which can also be evaluated at this student conference. Instructional rubrics can be created for each assignment that is to be submitted. These rubrics will act as guides for students as they complete each task. With regards to diverse learners and assessment, teachers must also be mindful of students with IEP and special testing accommodations. Some students may receive additional time on tests or have test materials read to them.

Another important aspect of differentiating instruction is making a connection to material that the students learn. One way is by making the curriculum more multicultural. Teachers can relate to student's cultures by using multicultural curriculum and materials in instruction. And while the ultimate goal of multicultural education is to help students appreciate the cultural and bring awareness of other cultures, multicultural education also helps relate the curriculum to the "real world." Relating material to real life situation helps to develop meaning for students. A teacher may want to use a Project Based Learning activity as a method of achieving a learning outcome. By doing so, the students will learning how they can contribute to society. Teacher can present a topic to the students while creating meaning and purpose for the student. Mrs. Susan Silverman's site <http://www.kids-learn.org/> provides classes with many different Project-Based Learning activities. [The Global Schoolhouse](#) "is the original virtual meeting place where educators, students, parents and community members can collaborate, interact, develop, publish and discover learning resources" and provides teachers with many activities for students to help make the connection between learning and real life.

With all of these teaching modifications in place, teacher must then take a look at their classroom learning environment. In addition to adapting student's curriculum, teaching methods and materials, teacher must also adapt the environment surrounding these diverse learners. One way to do this is by applying the theory of Universal Design for Learning. Salend offers a seven step approach to UDL. First, make equitable use by making material useful to all students.

Second, offer options and choice for flexible use. Third, make material easy, simple and intuitive for everyone. Fourth, communicate essential information to all students. Fifth, there is not tolerance for errors. Sixth, maximize materials for low physical error and make it comfortable for everyone. And lastly, make the size and space appropriate for everyone regardless of body type, size or mobility. While these rules are important to apply to all students, teacher may use Assistive Technologies that may apply to other students. Just like all other aspects of differentiated instruction, teachers must look at each student as an individual. Some assistive devices can range from text to speech devices to supplemental resources to instructional software. For some learners, adapting the environment may include keeping noise distractions at a minimal or rearrange the desks and/or classroom.

Each of these pieces to differentiated instruction is so important to the success of a diverse learner. Content, process, product, affect and learning environment should all be personalized to the individual needs to the students in your class. In addition, teachers have access to a multitude of resources whether it is via the Internet for Project-Based Learning activities or Assistive Technology. Not only must teachers adapt what material is taught, they must change the way the information is presented as well as the environment in which it is given.

Works Cited

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