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Differentiating for Student Readiness and Interest

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Student

EDU382: Meeting the Need of Diverse Learners

(CXF1522A)

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2015

## Differentiating for Student Readiness and Interest

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There are three differentiable elements that impact curriculum. These three elements are content, process, and product. When considering student readiness these elements can be differentiated to support growth (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011). The following contents of this paper will be used to examine two specific students, at different levels of readiness, and how content, process, and product impacts the learning experience.

Content can be considered as the “meat and potatoes” of a lesson plan. Content is ultimately the knowledge, understanding, and abilities (KUD’s) that is being taught. The content can be differentiated in two ways. The “meat and potatoes” can, itself, be modified. (Meat and carrots or tofu and potatoes) This means that the actual materials being taught can change. Or, a second way to differentiate is for the teacher to modify the means by which the material is shared. Some ways to differentiate content include:

- Use of video images to supplement text
- Offering demonstrations to provide an example of application of abstract ideas
- Bookmark a university website so advanced learners so they may take advantage of expert level discussion regarding the topic of interest (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011).

The process can also be referred to as “sense making activities”. This occurs after the student has stopped receiving the information and begins to practice the information. Activities help students to make the information their own and promote critical and abstract thinking. Process is when the students integrate the knowledge, understanding, and skills into providing solution and conceptualization. Some examples of differentiation in process include:

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- Providing other models or scaffolding to make tasks accessible
- Increase or decrease the number of facets in the task
- Ask students to work with partners to solve a problem versus working alone

Finally the product element of the curriculum is a way in which the student exhibits understanding and comprehension of the lesson unit. The product may also be referred to as the summative assessment. Products are basically how a teacher knows if the student has successfully learned the content. Some ways to differentiate product include:

- Provide more check in dates
- Ask students to set personal goals for their products
- Use community mentors to support or extend student understanding (Sousa & Tomlinson, 2011)

There are a few objectives when developing lesson plans. Knowledge and skills are obvious objectives. A third kind of objective is attitude. “Good attitudes toward learning always assist pupils to achieve more optimally” (Marlow, 2004). This fact supports greatly the need to account for, not only readiness but also student interests. A student who is interested in the subject and topic is more likely to have a good attitude towards the lesson.

As it is with the cases of Mary and Davion, the students differ greatly in readiness and interests. Mary loves science and already has a foundational knowledge for the content of matter, specifically the structure of an atom. Davion is not a huge fan of science and knows very little about the desired content. It will be profoundly important to find ways to differentiate the three elements to accommodate each learner and ensure that they are challenged properly to promote growth.

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Let's first consider how to optimize Mary's learning experience. Considering Mary enjoys the subject and is advanced in her base knowledge, it will be important to challenge her appropriately. Providing Mary with internet resources (content) will help her to explore the subject on her own and provide access to a more advanced discussion outside of grade-level text. In order to differentiate the process for Mary, the teacher will instruct her to buddy up with Davion. Since Mary enjoys the subject and already has developed KUD's regarding the topic, it will be beneficial for her to be in a position to share her enthusiasm and act as a peer mentor. Finally, in keeping in line with the content, Mary will be provided with more complex resources to meet her reading levels.

To differentiate these elements for Davion, the teacher will need to consider his lack of interest as well as his lack of motivation. Davion is an average student and so his KUD's are within in normative ranges. The content will not need to be altered greatly however will need to account for lack of interest/motivation. One way to do this is to augment the more complex text with video images. Keeping in mind that Davion has an interest in comics; a video with illustration may play to his interests and stimulate cognitive involvement. To modify for process for Davion, he would buddy up with Mary. Working as a team will allow Davion to explore common and varied interests with Mary as well as play an intricate part. The assignment for the pair would be to develop a poster illustrating and narrating the structure of an atom. This partnership will allow Davion to express his KUD's of the lesson through artistic representation and allow Mary to share her advanced perspective. Finally to differentiate for product, the teacher can check in more often with Davion. Checking in will ensure that Davion is staying engaged and on task as well as assessing his progress within the lesson plan.

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These three elements have a variety of options for differentiation. In order to ensure that the students are challenged and therefore growing academically, it is important to interpret pre-assessments for curriculum building. As illustrated within this paper, two students at different levels of readiness and with different interests can work cohesively for a common goal. Creative lesson development can ensure that students, such as Mary and Davion meet lesson goals, participate in their education, and become part of a community.

## References

Marlow, E 2004. *Psychology of Lesson Plans and Unit Development*. Reading Improvement. (EJ709532), Database: ERIC

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