The Theory and Practice of Differentiated Instruction in American Classrooms

Min-Tzu Tseng, Qing-Tan Elementary School

An Allegory

Adapted from Dr George H Reavis, Asst. Superintendent, Cincinnati Public Schools 1939-1948

Once upon a time the animals had a school.

The curriculum consisted of running, climbing, flying and swimming, and all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was good in swimming, better than his instructor, and he made passing grades in flying, but was very hopeless in running. He was made to stay after school and drop his swimming class in order to practice running. He kept this up until his feet were badly worn and so he was only average in swimming. But average is acceptable, so nobody worried about that but the duck.

The eagle was considered a problem pupil and was disciplined severely. He beat all the others to the top of the tree in the climbing class, but he had used his own way of getting there.

The rabbit started out at the top of his class in running, but had a nervous breakdown and had to drop out of school on account of so much catch-up work in swimming.

The squirrel led the climbing class, but his flying teacher made him start his flying lessons from the ground instead of the top of the tree, and he developed leg cramps from overexertion at the takeoff and began getting C's in climbing and D's in running.

The moles kept their children off school and brought in a badger to educate them from home when the school authorities refused to add digging to the curriculum.

At the end of the year, an abnormal lizard that could swim well, run, climb, and fly a little had the highest average overall and so was made top of the class.

What is fairness?

Fairness is not everyone getting the same thing. It is everyone getting what they need.

Why Do We Need to Differentiate?

When a teacher tries to teach something to the whole class at the same time, it could be that one-third of the kids already know it; one-third will get it; and one-third won't.

Differentiated Instruction Does Not Mean

- confining some students to low level, repetitive tasks while others work on higher thinking

- unlimited freedom for students to choose whatever they would like to do

- a chaotic classroom environment

Differentiated Instruction Means

- interesting tasks based on student learning preferences, interests and levels of readiness

- reasonable choices that meet needs of students

- routines, procedures, and classroom agreements are in order

Before DI-Knowing the Learners

- Students' readiness--the student's prior knowledge and experiences

- Students' interests--surveys, partner introductions, and asking questions

- Students' learning Preferences—silence v.s. sound; a structured, brightly lit environment v.s. a casual corner with subdued lighting environment

How to implement DI

- Content--what students learn about and where they begin learning
- Process--the ways we help students learn through instruction and assessment
- Products--the ways students demonstrate their learning through assessment and evaluation
- Learning Environment--conditions for learning

Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

▸ Choice Boards--a common differentiated structure used to provide students with choices. It is sometimes called a Tic-Tac-Toe assignment because of its design.

Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

▶ Cubing--Students roll a cube and do the activity on the side that comes up. We can differentiate a cube according to any of student readiness, learning preferences, or interests.
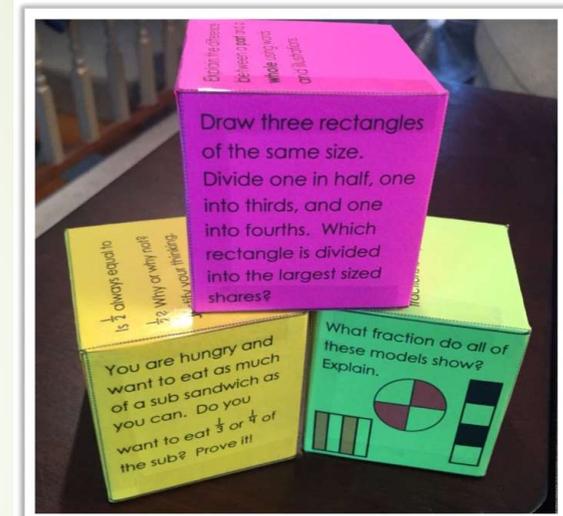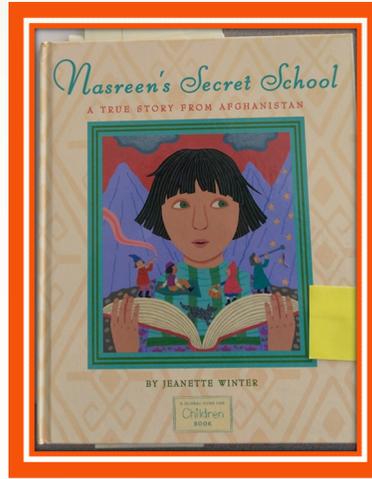
Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

▶ Learning Centers or Stations--Centers provide different activities at various places in the classroom

Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

- Learning Centers or Stations--Ms. O'Brien classroom at Quincy School

Nasreen's Secret School
A TRUE STORY FROM AFGHANISTAN

BY JEANETTE WINTER

Children BOOK

Guided Reading Groups

Red Group
Thomas
Kayla
Harrison
Jackie

Blue Group
Gisele
Divya
Jackie
Ariana
Eliza

Yellow Group
Maven
Halima
Anita

Green Group
Delpiero
Joshua
Lillyania

Reading Centers Schedule
Tuesday

Time	Meet with Ms. O'Brien	Technology Center	Fluency Center	Word work	Read to self
10:30 -10:50	Yellow	Green	Blue		Red
10:55 -11:15	Blue	Yellow	Red		Green

Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

■ Learning Centers or Stations--Ms. O'Brien classroom at Quincy School

Time	Meet with Ms. O'Brien	Technology Center	Fluency Center	Read to Self Center
10:30~10:50	Yellow	Green	Blue	Red
10:55~11:15	Blue	Yellow	Red	Green

Table 1. Learning Centers in Ms. O'Brien Classroom

Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

▶ Learning Centers or Stations--Ms. O'Brien classroom at Quincy School

Figure 8~12)

▲ Figure 8. Meet with Ms. O'Brien Center

▲ Figure 9. Technology Center

▲ Figure 10. Fluency Center

▲ Figure 11. Read to Self Center

▲ Figure 12. Change to Different Learning Centers

Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

▸Learning Contracts--

Teacher and student

make a written

agreement about a task

to be completed

Learning Contract –Sample

To demonstrate what I have learned about _____, I want to

_ Write a report   _ Design a mural
_ Put on a demonstration   _ Write a song
_ Set up an experiment   _ Make a movie
_ Develop a computer presentation   _ Create a graphic organizer or diagram
_ Build a model   _ Other_____

This will be a good way to demonstrate understanding of this concept because
_____

To do this project, I will need help with

_____

My Action Plan is_____

The criteria/rubric which will be used to assess my final product is _____
_____

My project will be completed by this date _____

Student signature:_____ Date ___/___/___
Teacher signature:_____ Date ___/___/___

Source: www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources

Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

▶RAFT--an

acronym for

Role, Audience,

Format, and

Topic

RAFT Activities

	Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Language Arts & Literature	Semicolon	Middle Schoolers	Diary entry	I Wish You Really Knew Where I Belong
	Huck Finn	Tom Sawyer	Note hidden in a tree knot	A Few Things You Should Know
	Rain Drop	Future Droplets	Advice Column	The Beauty of Cycles
Science	Lung	Cigarettes	Public Service Announcement	What you do to me!
	Reporter	Public	Obituary	Hitler is Dead
	Water	The Sun	A love letter	I think you are hot
History	Thomas Jefferson	Current Residents of Virginia	Full page Newspaper Ad	If I Could Talk to You Now
	Fractions	Whole Numbers	Petition	To Be Considered A Part of the Family
Math	A word problem	Students in your class	Set of Directions	How to Get to Know Me

Ways of Organizing for DI Structures

→ Tiering--creating more than one version of a task according to students' varied levels of readiness

Lesson Topic	Green-level tasks (foundational)	Blue-level tasks (intermediate)	Black-level tasks (advanced)
Problem solving with linear equations	The difference in the ages of two people is 8 years. The older person is 3 times the age of the younger. How old is each?	The length of a rectangle is 3 less than half the width. If the perimeter is 18, find the length and width.	When asked for the time, a problem-posing professor said, "if from the present time, you subtract one-sixth of the time from now until noon tomorrow, you get exactly one-third of the time from noon until now." What time was it?