3. DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

> "There is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of students of unequal ability."
>
> —Blanchard et al. (33)

Individual students come to the Manitoba classroom with varying interests, experiences, developmental maturity, background knowledge, and abilities. Therefore, teachers are constantly challenged to make learning activities flexible enough to engage each and every student. Accommodating these differences does not mean attempting to offer a different course to each student, but students do need choices as well as varying instructional and assessment methods.

For some students, difficulty engaging in academic work can lead to challenging behaviour. Their behaviour interferes with successful learning. To be successful and engaged learners, many of these students will need positive learning experiences that are personalized to their own learning preferences, interests, and needs. Many Manitoba schools are using class profiles to assist with meeting the needs of diverse learners.

For more information on class profiles/reviews, see **Chapter 8, Implementing Class Reviews, Tool 1**, in *Learning in Safe Schools: Creating Classrooms Where All Students Belong* (Brownlie and King, 2009).

Tool 1: Class Review Recording Form provides a blank template.

At the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) website, *Teaching Every Student* has a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Class Profile Maker, which includes a tutorial.
www.cast.org/learningtools/index.html

Appendix: Class Learning Profile in *Teaching Every Student in the Digital Age: Universal Design for Learning* (Rose et al., 2002).
www.cast.org/learningtools/index.html

BLM 87: *Listening and Speaking: First Steps into Literacy* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2008).
www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/list_speak/listening_speaking.pdf

In *Brain-based Learning with Class*, Politano and Paquin describe an effective approach for accommodating student differences that they call "shared experience, individual response." Instruction begins with a whole-group activity and then students choose from a variety of activities designed to process their thinking and represent their learning. Students can work together on the same concept but in ways that best suit their learning strengths and developmental stages. Younger students need more variety in instruction and fewer choices for responses, while older students need less variety in instruction and more choices for responses.

Plan for Differentiation

Planning for the diverse learning needs of Manitoba students involves making informed decisions about content, materials and resources, instructional strategies, and assessment and evaluation procedures.

For more information on assessment and evaluation, see *Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006). www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/wncp/rethinking_assess_mb.pdf

Learning Environment

- What steps will I take to create a supportive learning environment?
- What classroom management procedures do I need to introduce?

Grouping

- What learning activities are best done individually, in pairs, in small groups, or by the whole class?
- How will I determine the pairings and groupings?
- What transitions will ensure a smooth flow from one activity to the next?

Teaching for Learning

- How will I plan my instruction to ensure students are learning?
- How will I provide lesson overviews?
- Which graphic organizers will I use?
- What strategies will I use to activate, clarify, and extend prior knowledge?

- How will students make connections between what they know and what they will be learning?
- What key words and concepts are essential?
- Which strategies will introduce and reinforce these words and concepts?
- What are the critical questions students need to think about?
- How will students apply their learning?
- What extension activities will reinforce and extend learning?
- Do these learning activities offer a variety of ways to demonstrate learning?
- How will I reinforce instructions (e.g., key words on board, printed instructions, labelled diagrams on board)?
- How will students use handouts and other materials?
- Does this learning activity allow for a frequent change of pace?
- Are there opportunities for discussion, writing, drawing, and viewing?
- What alternative activities can I use if students need a change of pace or need to refocus their attention?

See **Tool 2: Anchor Lesson/Task** for sample tools useful in lesson planning.

Unit Planning Form: (p. 2.18) in *Success for All Learners: A Handbook on Differentiating Instruction* (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996).

Increase Student Engagement

Students are more likely to concentrate and make an effort when their schoolwork is personally meaningful and engaging. Students tend to respond positively to clarity, structure, predictability, and positive reinforcement. They also need clear and concise directions and ongoing monitoring to encourage them to complete assignments and activities.

Section 3 of *Middle Years Assessment Grade 7 Student Engagement: Support Document for Teacher*s (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2007).
www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/index.html

Sample Strategies for Structuring Activities and Assignments

- *Break long tasks into shorter, easier-to-manage steps.*

  Students vary in their ability to attend to, process, and remember concepts and content.

  To keep instruction and assignments brief, teachers can

  - cut the assignment pages into small segments and give out one at a time
  - fold under part of the page or cover it partially to block or mask some parts of the assignment; encourage the student to use a "window" to show one problem or piece of information at a time

- *Introduce students to general information before working on specific information.*

  Some students need to see the big picture first; for them, all details carry the same degree of importance. Some students also need explicit instruction about how to identify the overarching idea and supporting details.

- *Design learning activities that require a high response rate from students.*

  For example,

  - ask students to fill in a graphic organizer or partial outline of information as the class proceeds
  - in large-group instruction, provide individual white boards, chalkboards, or cards for individual student responses to whole-class questions
  - vary questioning to accommodate responses from the whole class, partners, and individuals
  - structure partner activities so that students can read aloud to each other, discuss and confirm understanding, as well as encourage each other to remain on task

  See **Tool 3: Making Individual White Boards**.

- *Incorporate student interests into assignments.*

  For example,

  - Encourage students to make individual choices of
    — topics for their activities
    — the order in which they complete tasks
    — the materials they use

- *Incorporate attention-getting devices into assignments.*

  For example,

  - vary the texture, shape, and colour of materials
  - provide students with a variety of coloured pens, pencils, and markers
  - turn tasks into activities or games (e.g., playing Jeopardy when reviewing material for a test)

- *Have students demonstrate their understanding of learning outcomes in a variety of ways.*

  For example, when assessing students' knowledge of factual information, allow them to choose to give an oral presentation, use technology to present information in an audio or visual format, prepare a news report, or present a dramatization.

Teach for Task Completion

Some students need explicit instruction and support in order to work more independently and complete tasks.

Sample Strategies for Teaching Task Completion

- *Break learning tasks into manageable chunks.*

  Set short time limits for completing each portion of the task. When possible, involve students in setting the time frame to help them develop a sense of the amount of time particular kinds of tasks will likely take.

- *Give feedback on assignments as soon as possible.*

  For example, ask students to signal when they've completed a certain number of questions so you can quickly scan their work and let them know if they are on track.

Adapt Instruction

Adaptation is a change made in the teaching process, materials, assignments, or pupil products to help a pupil achieve the expected outcomes.

Sample Strategies to Adapt Instruction to Better Meet Student Needs

- *Teaching process*
  - provide auditory and visual presentation of instruction
  - pre-teach and activate prior knowledge
  - provide opportunities for movement
  - shorten whole-class instruction, providing for small-group instruction for further support

- *Materials*
  - adapt the reading level of the materials
  - provide additional supports such as calculators, dictionary, and glossary
  - provide written outlines, notes, and summaries

- *Products*
    - vary the length and/or type of the assignments
    - break the assignment into smaller chunks
    - vary the time allotted for completion

For more information on how to reduce readability levels, see
<www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-assessment.php>.

When choosing adaptations for individual students, consider these types of questions:

- Will this adaptation enhance the student's level of class participation?

- Is this adaptation the least intrusive (i.e., least interfering or restrictive) option?

- Will this adaptation give the student a variety of options, or will the same adaptation be used for all or most activities (e.g., always do fewer tasks or work at a different level of difficulty)?

- How does this adaptation ensure an appropriate level of difficulty and challenge for the student?

- How can the student use this adaptation in other classes or activities?

- How will this adaptation lead to more independent effort?

Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky developed the concept of the "zone of proximal development," which is the optimum level of challenge for a student. The zone of proximal development is defined as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with capable peers." (Vygotsky 86)

Use a Problem-Solving Approach

Challenging behaviour may occur when the instruction is too difficult, too easy, or the learning activities and/or materials do not engage the student. Effective teachers adjust instruction using a problem-solving approach that involves

- identifying the issue (what is causing the problem for the student)

- generating alternative solutions

- trying one or two solutions at a time to see if there is a difference in learning

Trying and testing simple instructional adaptations for at least 21 days to ensure that a new behaviour has been learned can increase success and participation for students.

> It takes at least 21 days to form a habit, according to the research of Dr. Maxwell Maltz, MD, renowned author in the field of psychology over the past 50 years.