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DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES IN THE ELEMENTARY ART
CLASSROOM

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

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This thesis provides elementary art teachers strategies for teaching lessons in a method called “differentiation.” The purpose of differentiation is to tailor lesson plans to try and meet unique needs of the students. Lessons can be differentiated through content, process, or product. A teacher may choose one of these three areas and provide different approaches to the lesson to meet different learning needs of the students. To meet different learning needs in an efficient way, students are grouped for lessons based on their readiness, interests, or their learning styles. This thesis provides greater detail on content, process, product, readiness, interests, and learning profiles related to differentiation in the art classroom. It also provides practical strategies and lesson ideas for elementary art teachers who want to apply the differentiation teaching method in their classrooms.

Challenge: Many students and many ways of learning

According to Lilian Katz, when a teacher tries to teach something to an entire class at the same time, “chances are one third of kids already know it, one third will get it, and the remaining one third won’t. So two thirds are wasting their time.” The challenge is to get the one third of kids who already know it to learn something new and the ones who may not understand to understand.

As an elementary art teacher, I am faced with the daily dilemma of teaching over 625 students a week. In the state of Virginia, students in public school attend school 180 days a year. If an elementary student attends art class once a week for 45 minutes, then the average elementary school student will spend just 27 hours in the art class room during the entire school year. For a teacher, 27 hours is a short amount of time, but when you factor in school field trips, holidays, and other events that cause students to miss class time, there is even less time. Therefore, every minute in the art classroom must be a valuable learning experience. But how can we be sure every lesson is valuable to every student? After all, an art teacher will almost always teach classes of mixed-ability students and usually without the help of a paraprofessional (teacher assistant) in the classroom. There must be a new strategy for meeting the unique needs of all of the students.

In my undergraduate program, I had training on special education students and had ideas for how to modify lessons for those students, but I felt uncertain how to best meet the needs of gifted learners. I decided to take a class offered by Virginia State University about teaching strategies to use with gifted students. The instructor, Joyce Spencer, was full of excellent ideas. She was a long time middle school teacher of gifted students and she used a method called “differentiation” that was new to me. Differentiation is a term that refers to providing more tailored instruction to a variety of learning needs. Spencer used this method with her middle school students every day of the school year. Not only did she teach us about differentiated strategies, she taught our graduate class with differentiated

strategies. The class was exciting, motivating, and inspiring. Best of all, Spencer said that differentiation is not limited to just gifted students; it works for all students.

A video we watched in class showed teachers using differentiation in their classrooms. One of the teachers in the video was a high school art teacher who differentiated an art project for her students. From that moment I knew it was possible to use these differentiation strategies with my art students. I kept careful notes from the class because this was something I thought I may want to incorporate into my own teaching.

After the class ended that summer, it was time to start my third year of teaching elementary art. I was pleasantly surprised when my school did a presentation about differentiation at one of our August meetings. Now that I had two credible sources telling me about his new teaching method. I decided to use it in my classroom, but when I researched differentiation in the art classroom, I found no literature on the specific topic. Feeling discouraged, I set aside my ambitions for using differentiation.

As September rolled around and the school year started, I quickly remembered how challenging it is to teach so many different students. My school mailbox was flooded with Individualized Education Plans, or IEPs, about special education students. The high achieving students would ask me many questions about what lessons I had planned for the year and wait with high expectations for my answer. And then there were the countless other students who fit into an “average” range of learning abilities. I knew I had to revisit the idea of differentiation.

Rationale

Instead of trying to teach all of the students the same way at the same time, differentiation means tailoring instruction to student needs. Tomlinson (2004) note,

“In most elementary classrooms, some students struggle with learning, others perform well beyond grade-level expectations, and the rest fit somewhere in

between. Within each of these categories of students, individuals also learn in a variety of ways and have different interests. To meet the needs of a diverse student population, many teachers differentiate instruction,” (online). Most elementary art teachers teach hundreds of students and dozens of classes with a small amount of time scheduled for each class. Each moment counts in the classroom and must be meaningful.

In the 28 different classes that I teach, I have students who have been identified as mildly mentally disabled, some with learning disabilities, some who are working at grade level, some students who are high achievers, and some students who are identified as gifted. With so many learning levels, it is not appropriate to think of any lesson as “one size fits all.” Variations need to be created to accommodate all learners. Differentiation is the most practical, efficient strategy I have come across to date that provides flexibility for a variety of learning, for a variety of students.

The difficulty for art teachers in using differentiation is that there are few lessons available specifically targeted at using differentiation in the art classroom. In fact I found no lessons for art teachers in my research. While there are many general books being published on this topic, we have not gotten to a point where an educator can easily access information for a particular subject and how it relates to differentiation. With this thesis, I am attempting to offer art educators a means by looking at the strategies and lesson ideas I created and adapt them for their own needs.

What is Differentiation?

The late Dr. Virgil S. Ward, a gifted education professor from the University of Virginia, coined the term “differentiation.” One of his former students, Dr. Maurice Fisher, who is now the editor of the Gifted Press Quarterly Report, gave me insight into Dr. Ward’s passion for gifted education and how it led Dr. Ward to write books and articles on the topic including *Educating the Gifted: An Axiomatic Approach* (1961). Dr. Ward presented his ideas through twelve axioms and his intent was twofold. The first purpose was to give

insight into essential qualities which enriched curricula must possess for the classroom teachers, supervisory personnel, and administrators. The second intention is that the principles serve as an extensive check-list for instructional provisions already in effect. Again, the intention is to determine whether the modifications of the regular school program do indeed possess potential for a higher quality of educational experience for the gifted learner.

Over time, a few of Dr. Ward's students, including Joseph Renzulli and Carol Ann Tomlinson, have further developed differentiation and brought it into the mainstream of educational texts. Differentiation is becoming increasingly popular with a great deal of literature on the topic presently being published. Instead of it being thought of as just for gifted student, differentiation is now appropriate for all students.

The concept of differentiation is straightforward and logical. It is simply "our best professional understanding of skilled and flexible instruction." (Tomlinson, 2006, p. vi). It is not about individualizing instruction for every single student the way an Individualized Education Program is set up for each special education student. Instead, it is about having a variety of learning paths for students to take so that the classrooms of mixed-ability students (almost always the case in the art classroom) can have various learning options to best meet their needs without hindering the instruction of others.

The students in a classroom have many differences. According to Gregory:

"differentiating for the diversity of learning styles, intelligences, and thinking in your classroom does not mean that you have to know every detail of every theory and individualize for every student. Simply becoming conscious of the collective needs of students is a way to get to know them better, tap into their preferences through intentional planning, explore the diversity that they bring to the classroom, and make the right choices for your classroom" (p. 3).

The Marshall County School System in West Virginia stated that

"setting up a classroom based on differentiation creates a personalized and responsive classroom environment, maximizes student growth and individual

success while honoring and celebrating the unique qualities of each student, offers a variety of learning options within a student centered classroom, and blends whole group, small group, and individualized instruction utilizing a standards-based curriculum” (2007, online).

Essentially, a differentiated classroom is a classroom geared to helping meet the needs of all students.

The table below is from Carol Ann Tomlinson (2000) that compares a traditional classroom to a differentiated classroom.

Traditional Classroom	Differentiated Classroom
<p>“1. Assessment at the end of a unit of study.”</p> <p>For an elementary art teacher this usually means that one assessment occurs at the end of a project.</p>	<p>“1. Assessment is ongoing, diagnoses and influences instructions. “</p> <p>For an elementary art teacher this means that assessment occurs weekly and based on the results of the assessment, the teacher modifies the upcoming lessons.</p>
<p>“2. Dominance of whole class instruction.”</p> <p>For an elementary art teacher this means that the teacher traditionally teaches the lesson to all of the students at one time.</p>	<p>“2. Variety of instructional strategies used within a classroom.”</p> <p>For an elementary art teacher using differentiated lessons, this can mean teaching students in small groups or individuals.</p>
<p>“3. Adapted textbooks are the main instructional resource.”</p> <p>In an elementary art classroom, textbooks are traditionally not used; however an art teacher may get overly comfortable only using poster prints of famous works of art.</p>	<p>“3. Multiple types of materials are utilized as resources.”</p> <p>In an elementary art classroom, the differentiation strategy encourages teachers to use a variety of materials which for an art teacher may include real artifacts or reproductions that may be attained from a</p>

	<p>museum that will loan materials. Also the computer, specifically the internet can connect students to a variety of virtual materials almost unimaginable just a few decades ago.</p>
<p>“4. The teacher is the main problem solver.”</p> <p>In an art classroom, students take part in problem solving in their work on art projects, but there is room for improvement.</p>	<p>“4. Students are actually engaged in solving problems.”</p> <p>In the elementary art classroom, teachers who differentiate instruction can provide more open-ended project opportunities so that students can use problem solving skills.</p>
<p>“5. Quantitative focus to assignments”</p> <p>In the elementary art classroom, a quantitative focus to assignments means that students create many, sometimes “cookie-cutter” lessons, meaning they lack originality from one student to the next.</p>	<p>“5. Qualitative focus to assignments”</p> <p>For a qualitative focus in the elementary art classroom, teachers should focus on students actively participating in all facets of an art lesson including brainstorming ideas, learning in depth art history relative to the lesson, exploring aesthesis and criticism, creating a quality studio project, and finally exhibit their art.</p>

(Tomlinson, 2000)

In a 2004 article about differentiation, Carol Ann Tomlinson notes that

“there is ample evidence that students are more successful in school and find it more satisfying if they are taught in ways that are responsive to their readiness levels (e.g., Vygotsky, 1986), interests (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and learning profiles (e.g., Sternberg, Torff, & Grigorenko, 1998). Another reason for differentiating instruction relates to teacher professionalism. Expert teachers are attentive to students' varied learning needs (Danielson, 1996); to differentiate

instruction, then, is to become a more competent, creative, and professional educator.”

Now the task at hand for teachers is to take the information students need to learn and differentiate the material.

How to Differentiate Instruction

Differentiating instruction can be as simple or as complex as the teacher deems necessary. For example, “whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction” (Tomlinson, 2004, online). Throughout my studies on the topic, the same underlying concepts arise among all authors on the subject. There are three ways to differentiate instruction: **content**, **process**, and **product** by grouping students by readiness, interest, or learning profile.

Differentiation utilizes a blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction. As Tomlinson (2001) states, “in a differentiated classroom, the teacher proactively plans and carries out varied approaches to content, process, and product in anticipation of and response to student differences in readiness, interest, and learning needs” (pp. 5-7). There should be a balance of teacher selected and student selected assignments. All assignments should be engaging, and emphasize critical thinking skills.

What can the teacher differentiate?

Differentiate in one of these areas:		
Content	Process	Product
By grouping students in one of these areas of flexible grouping :		
Readiness	Interest	Learning Styles

Content

Content focuses on what students do or are expected to know. The differentiation of content is what the teacher plans for students to learn and how the student gains access to the desired knowledge, understanding, and skills. In an elementary art room the content might be about art history, techniques, or aesthetics but the content depth or focus is modified by the teacher to best suit student needs.

Process

Process focuses on how the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content. To differentiate process involves using an essential skill for understanding an idea, and being clearly focused on a learning goal. Process gives students options of activities to achieve individual success. In the elementary art classroom the lesson may be about art history, but the process piece of differentiation states that the teacher may allow students to arrive at the knowledge through different paths. Perhaps some students read art history books while others listen to a lesson from the teacher.

Product

Product focuses on what the student has learned, can demonstrate, and can extend knowledge or skills to other lessons or projects. In the elementary art room the product will most likely involve the work of art the students complete. One project assigned by the teacher may have three different approaches and students would complete a different work of art based on their individual needs.

Content, Process, and Product in Art Education

In Discipline Based Art Education, teachers must consider studio production, aesthetics, criticism, and art history in relation to content, process, and product. For example, if a teacher takes the area of studio production, then the content would be media, design, and subject matter. The process is the techniques used to manipulate materials to make art. And finally the product is the art work produced.

Flexible Grouping

When a teacher differentiates by content, process, or product, she must have different groups based on variations of the lesson. But how many groups? Should the groups always be the same? How does the teacher decide who is in each group? If the groups always stayed the same, students would soon realize the pattern for why the teacher put him or her in the group. Perhaps if the groups were always chosen by learning level, the students in the struggling learning group may soon feel ashamed of themselves.

Differentiation values flexible grouping, or changing ways of choosing a group for each student. There are three ways to choose groups based on one of three areas: **readiness**, **interests**, and **learning style/profile**.

Readiness

The teacher constructs tasks and activities at different levels of difficulty to address student readiness. Readiness promotes growth if tasks are a close match to the student's skills. In the elementary art classroom, readiness involves both a mental and physical component. If a teacher groups students by mental readiness, areas such as background knowledge of students, in other words what students already know, is considered or what complexity level of a concept they may be able to handle. If the teacher groups students by a physical readiness then she may consider if a student has the fine motor control to work with a particular medium or perform a particular skill. Because there are so many students, many of which may have transferred from a different school system, the students in one classroom may be at a variety of readiness levels. Grouping art students by readiness allows students who already know material to learn new information, while giving students who are new to the information more time to understand the basics.

Interest

The teacher aligns learning concepts with student interests to increase learning. Interest can promote motivation if the task ignites curiosity or passion and this extends beyond just the motivation in a lesson. In the elementary art classroom, students have a variety of interests both about art and about other topics. A lesson in a differentiated style in which students are grouped by interest may have students complete a project with an interest outside of the art education world. It can also mean that the teacher groups students by their interest in a certain art material, perhaps three groups of students: those who want to work with paint, those who want to work with oil pastel, and those who want to work in colored pencil. It could be based on their interests in the subject matter of the project. For example a lesson in Greek architecture may give the students the option to be in one of two groups: those who want to explore more about Greek architecture and those who want to look at how Greek architecture influenced American architecture. Allowing students to tailor their learning to something they are already interested in will motivate them to be active in the learning and be more motivated for future lessons.

Learning Style/Profile

The teacher addresses student learning, talents, and intelligence in order to individualize and maximize learning. Learning style promotes efficiency if the assignment encourages students to work in their preferred manner. In the elementary art classroom, teachers often speak and write the directions for the lesson which covers auditory and visual learners. However, according to Howard Gardner, there are seven intelligences to consider: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, mathematical/logical, musical/rhythmic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and existentialist (Ecole Whitehouse Elementary, 2007, online). For example, when studying the color wheel, visual learners may want to see the paint colors mixed in front of them, verbal learners may want the pattern of the color wheel explained by the teacher speaking the words out loud, while bodily/kinesthetic learners may need to stand up and hold a colored object and become part of a color wheel. Mathematical/logical learners may want to see a logically sequenced series of directions to

mixing colors, while musical/rhythmic learners may want to hear a song explaining the color wheel. Intrapersonal learners who are in touch with their own feelings and ideas may want to learn about how the color wheel relates to them and their life while interpersonal learners may want to talk to other students in a group setting about how to mix the colors. A naturalist may want to identify the colors and relate them to items or objects found outdoors and may be particularly interested in how pigments can be found in nature. And finally an existentialist may want the “big picture” of how the color wheel relates to the world and why it is important to learn.

Learning style and profile can extend beyond Howard Gardener’s Multiple Intelligences. According to Gregory,

“successful differentiation looks at everything that can affect learning. Many different things can be adjusted to improve learning.

- ◇ Creating a classroom environment to match students’ preferences
- ◇ Including instruction that appeals to all the senses
- ◇ Facilitating social interactions
- ◇ Differentiating levels of challenge and engagement
- ◇ Presenting material to appeal to auditory, visual, and kinesthetic modalities”
(2005, p. 23)

Determining Groups

For flexible grouping to work, students must be placed into appropriate groups. But how should the teacher go about determining groups? After all a teacher may have hundreds of students to consider. In my classroom, I use multiple approaches. At the beginning of the school year, students complete a pre-assessment. This could be as simple or as complex as necessary. This year I divided my curriculum into four main topics: personal identity, culture, imagination and interpretation. The pre-assessment was a simple drawing activity completed on the first day of school. Students folded a piece of paper into four sections. In the first section, they drew a picture that told something about them, in the second block I instructed them to draw picture of something they know about a different culture. In the third block they drew something from their imaginations, and in the fourth block the

students drew a picture that told a story. From that assessment, I could tell many things: their drawing ability based on controlling the pencil to make smooth lines and amount of detail in the drawings, their ability to follow directions and create the four drawings as instructed, and how they solved the problem for each of the four blocks. I save the drawings all school year and refer back to them as necessary. At the end of the school year I will do the same assessment and students will be able to compare the progress they have made.

I have been working in my current school for four years and one of my top priorities is to get to know all of my students. While new students arrive and other students move to other schools, there is a strong core of students who remain the same year after year. I learn all of my students' names and find out who are in special needs classes. I remember how the students performed in the previous school years and what they are capable. I soon learn those who have a strong interest in art and those who do not. Unlike a classroom teacher who has a student for one year, elementary art teachers can watch students grow year after year. For example, I had a student in fourth grade that bumped against the side of a table and cried uncontrollably. When the classroom teacher learned of this incident, she stated that the child was always acting like "a baby." I asked her if she knew the child had been in a terrible automobile accident during the second grade, broke many ribs among other physical injuries and was in the hospital for months. I knew that this student cried so loudly at a seemingly simple bump because he still suffered pain from his injuries two years earlier. This type of information is invaluable and is something that only a teacher who remains at one school for a period of years will learn about her students. She will become familiar with students' family life and their various successes and failures at school which often help explain the student's physical and emotional states. This type of information will help a teacher make more informed decisions about group placements.

For new teachers, there are still opportunities to group students without taking too much time. Grouping students by interest could be as simple as having students raise their hand

and vote on what interests them the most or a short written interest poll. If an assignment involves a great deal of reading, in other words readiness level in regards to reading, an art teacher can ask the classroom teacher how to group students based on their reading level. And if a teacher decides to group students by learning profile/style, she can let students be part of choosing the groups. They are often more aware of what works best for them than any diagnostic test or insight from any educator.

Strategies: Ways to Differentiate in an Elementary Art Classroom

When I decided to use differentiation in my classroom, I first had to grasp the idea of choosing content, process, or product to differentiate. Then I spent time thinking about ways to use flexible grouping in the areas of readiness, interest, and learning profile as a way of choosing the students who would be in each group.

Strategy: Tiered Assignment

Description:

Tiered assignments are at the heart of all differentiated curriculums. “Tiered assignments” means that assignments can have various levels. According to Kingore, usually three levels are necessary for a tiered assignment: basic, intermediate, and advanced. Having levels is a way to alter the depth of the material. In my classroom, some students enter already knowing certain information or have certain skills. Instead of holding back some students or pushing others beyond their capacity, I can assign tiered assignments. Below are factors influencing the complexity of tiered learning experiences from Kingore’s 2005 article:

Degree of assistance and support:

Teacher directs instruction

Teacher facilitates

Small group support

Individual autonomy

Degree of structure:

Clearly defined parameters

Open-ended criteria and parameters

Required background knowledge and skills:

Minimal, basic information

Grade-level information

More extensive information and understanding is required

Concrete or more abstract:

Process and product are concrete

Process and product involve abstract thinking and interpretation

For art teachers, a concrete process and product carefully spells out exactly what a student is supposed to do. This would be most appropriate for struggling learners because they may not be ready for something abstract in which they have to think “outside of the box.” If the process and product involve abstract thinking and interpretation, then more talented or advanced students would most benefit because it would be an appropriate challenge for their ability level.

Quantity of resources:

Single resource is provided

Multiple and varied resources are employed

Complexity of resources:

Grade-level resources

Resources require above grade-level ability

Resources are concept dense

Sophisticated technology applications are required

Complexity of process:

Pacing

- Repetition and guided practice are paced at rate typical for grade level
- Minimum repetition and practice allow acceleration

Number and complexity of steps

- Process is simple and short-term
- Multiple steps and an extended period of time are required

Simple to high-levels of thinking

Sophisticated research skills are required

Complexity of product:

Simple, correct answers

Varied and complex responses

Integration of advanced skills and concepts is required

Why it is important:

According to Norlund, tiered assignments provide varied levels of activities, and build on prior knowledge while using a variety of methods of exploration. The use of open-ended activities allows flexibility in learning. Tiered assignments also help with a wide variety of learning abilities within a single lesson (2003, p.64). Tiered assignments are considered the essence of differentiation. A teacher can design the lesson for one level of student readiness, content area, or learning profile and then adjust the lesson according to the needs of the other levels of students in the class.

How to use it in the art classroom:

In my classroom I take a lesson and reduce some of its elements for students who need more learning assistance but can take the same basic lesson and advance elements of it to make it more stimulating for high achievers. Tiered assignments can be differentiated based on content, readiness, or learning profile. Art teachers should consider that some

students are talented and exhibit self-confidence in art, other make art to meet the teachers minimum requirements, while others do not demonstrate understanding of the concepts they are supposed to be learning.

Lesson example:

In third grade, Virginia SOL 3.19 states that the student will describe the problem-solving process involved in producing personal works of art, using appropriate art vocabulary. To turn this into a tiered assignment, I group students into one of three groups based on their learning profile that can be determined by answers students gave to a learning profile quiz. Most teachers have some version of a learning profile quiz or can find one from a colleague or even on the internet. One group of visual learners write answers out in a storyboard style with captions that include appropriate vocabulary listed underneath. A second group of auditory learners verbally respond to questions I ask them. And a third group of kinesthetic learners reenact a problem they faced in making their art and demonstrate how they overcame the problem.

Strategy: Learning Contracts

Description:

Students help develop their own assignments within teacher guidelines and both the student and teacher agree on the assignment and in effect “sign off” on the assignment to signal agreement in what the student must do.

Why it is important:

Learning contracts give students freedom to plan their time and yet provide guidelines for completing work responsibly. Students are self-directed in this process which means they look for ways to increase and be responsible for their own learning.

How to use it in the art classroom:

Because of the complexity of this concept, learning contracts are best for students beginning in the third grade. A learning contract may initially take more work on the teacher's part, but the learning contract may cover learning for an entire grading period and a teacher may only want to use it with one grade level at a time. According to Himestra's 2005 online article, teachers need to follow various steps to help students develop learning contracts.

Step 1: Diagnose the student learning needs.

A learning need is the gap between where you are now and where you want to be in regard to a particular set of competencies.

Step 2: Specify your learning objectives.

Each of the learning needs diagnosed in Step 1 should be translated into a learning objective. Be sure that your objectives describe what you will learn, not what you will do. State them in terms that are most meaningful to you--Content acquisition, terminal behaviors, or direction of growth.

Step 3: Specify learning resources and strategies.

When you have finished listing your objectives, describe how you propose to go about accomplishing each objective. Identify the resources you plan to use in your various learning experiences and the strategies you will employ in making use of them.

Step 4: Specify target dates for completion.

Set realistic dates.

Step 5: Specify evidence of accomplishment.

Describe what evidence you will collect to indicate the degree to which you have achieved each objective.

Step 6: Specify how the evidence will be validated.

For each objective, first specify the criteria by which you propose the evidence will be judged. The criteria will vary according to the type of objective.

Step 7: Review your contract with [your teacher].

- Are the learning objectives clear, understandable, and realistic? Do they describe what you propose to learn?
- Can they think of other objectives you might consider?
- Do the learning strategies and resources seem reasonable, appropriate, and efficient?
- Can they think of other resources and strategies you might consider?
- Does the evidence seem relevant to the various objectives, and would it convince them?
- Can they suggest other evidence you might consider?
- Are the criteria and means for validating the evidence clear, relevant, and convincing?
- Can they think of other ways to validate the evidence that you might consider?

Step 8: Carry out the contract.

You now simply do what the contract calls for. But keep in mind that as you work on it you may find that your notions about what you want to learn and how you want to learn are changing. So do not hesitate to revise or renegotiate your contract as you go along.

Step 9: Evaluation of your learning.

When you have completed your contract you will want to get some assurance that you have in fact learned what you set out to learn. Perhaps the simplest way to do this is to ask the consultants you used in Step 7 to examine your evidence and validation data and provide you their judgment about adequacy.

Lesson Idea:

Based on fourth grade visual art SOL 4.16, the students investigate artists and their work, using research tools and procedures. To incorporate this into an elementary classroom, students can design their own research project which can be a written paper, a presentation to the class, or a work of art. For elementary students, a simplified version of Himestra's steps to complete a learning contract works best.

First, each student talks to the teacher about what he or she would like to know more about, comes up with an artist to investigate and what he will learn by researching this artist. Second, the student and teacher must decide what resources are available to investigate the particular artist. Third, the student decides on a strategy. If one of the student's learning goals is to find out more about how the artist Paul Klee mixed the unique shades and tints in his paintings, the student's strategy may include mixing some colors of his own. Fourth, the student and teacher must agree upon deadlines. Fifth, the student must document that he has met his objectives. This could be written evidence through notes, pictures he collected from the artist, the content from his final project. Finally the teacher evaluates the material. A self-evaluation for students can be helpful in self-directed projects like these.

Strategy: Choice Boards

Description:

Choice Boards, offer a grid, usually 3x3 squares with various assignments in each square. To make it like a game, teachers will call this activity "tic-tac-toe" and tell students to choose three of the nine activities on the grid, but must choose three in a row: across, down, or diagonal. Because of this set pattern, the teacher can carefully choose which activities go into each square on the grid so that various objects can be met no matter which three activities a student chooses.

Why it is important:

Students can choose learning opportunities that most appeal to their interests or curiosities which keeps students motivated to learn.

How to use it in the art classroom:

Tic-tac-toe, or choice boards, can be ongoing in an art classroom. Teachers can print out copies of the choice boards for each student. Then a larger choice board can hang in the room. I use folders on a bulletin board for my choice board. Each block on the choice board corresponds to a folder on the bulletin board. I place hand-outs, worksheets, paper, and other materials into each folder so students can access easily and independently. It is also easy to begin, pause, and pick up again on an assignment like this, which makes it ideal during some lessons.

Lesson Idea:

Often in a lesson there are not enough materials, or students need to be supervised by the teacher during a portion of the activity. While the other students are waiting for their turn or have finished the activity, they can do the tic-tac-toe assignment. To further advance a lesson on Japanese wood block printing, students can complete a tic-tac-toe assignment based around an Asian art theme. One activity can be to read an article about Hokusai, a famous Japanese woodblock printer, and write down facts they have learned from the article. A second activity may be to go onto the computer and use an interactive website about printmaking. Additional activities for the Asian art themed unit may include creating an Ikebana flower arrangement (traditional Japanese flower arranging), origami, Chinese paper cutting, create a nature scroll, read an article about the artist Hokusai and write down five interesting facts, or watch a video clip about Chinese calligraphy and try some on their own.

Strategy: Compacting**Description:**

According to Reis & Renzulli, 2007, “curriculum compacting is an instructional technique that is specifically designed to make appropriate curricular adjustments for students in any curricular area and at any grade level” (online article). The procedure involves first defining the goals and outcomes of a particular unit or segment of instruction, next determining and documenting which students have already mastered most or all of a specified set of learning outcomes, and finally providing replacement strategies for material already mastered through the use of instructional options that enable a more challenging and productive use of the student's time.

Why it is important:

Instead of students who have already mastered the content essentially wasting their time by covering the material again, let those students move side-ways, not ahead or behind, by exploring a topic in greater depth. While the advanced students are working independently to gain more depth, the struggling students can work in smaller groups and with more teacher assistance to improve their learning. Norlund states, “why spend time ‘learning’ what you already know? Use written plan for learning and timelines. It also help eliminate boredom” (2003, p. 64).

How to use it in the art classroom:

Teachers will need to pre-assess students to determine their instructional level. If students have already mastered content, teachers can offer alternatives such as omitting the mastered content or offer alternative lessons to students who already know the content. To students who are struggling with the material, teachers can offer more support by breaking down the material into smaller pieces and giving students more aid in their particular learning style.

Strategy: Small group direct instruction

Description:

Instead of giving instruction to the entire class at the same time, there are times when small group direction would be more beneficial to the students. The teacher would work with just a few students who are working at a similar level or on the same step of a project.

Why it is important:

With smaller groups to instruct, teachers can get better feedback if the students understand the material, the students can ask more individualized questions, and the teacher can tailor what he or she says to the needs of the students.

How to use it in the art classroom:

If one third of a class is finished with a project, another third is working on the last steps, and the remaining third have many more steps until the end, the teacher can work with each group individually, while the other groups are working, to give them directions that will help each group get to their next step and beyond more efficiently.

Lesson Idea:

In my classroom I have a potter's wheel which is unusual for an elementary classroom. Other art teachers may have a unique piece of equipment such as a weaving loom or slab roller. Since not all of the students can use the special equipment at the same time, students can visit in groups. While one group works with the teacher learning about the equipment, other groups can work on a different aspect of the lesson with their group or independently.

Strategy: Acceleration/Deceleration

Description:

If a teacher increases or decreases the rate of material presented to the students based on readiness, the teacher is practicing acceleration or deceleration. Teachers must do assessments throughout the learning process, not just at the end of the project or unit, to see if acceleration or deceleration needs to take place.

Why it is important:

If material is not being presented at the correct rate, students will be either overwhelmed or face boredom and not be able to learn to the best of their ability.

How to use it in the art classroom:

It has been my experience that not all classes at a grade level are the same. In fact no two classes of students, even from the same grade level, will perform the same. Elementary art teachers must consistently accelerate or decelerate sometimes for an entire class, and within each class they may need to make more adjustments. While some students are moving at a slower rate are still working on an assignment or work of art, the students who work more quickly can be given the next step to move toward. After some students are finished, they can go onto an anchoring activity while the other students finish their assignment or work of art. Students who finish earlier will often be glad to move on to a new assignment and will not see it as a punishment. In fact they will most likely be eager to be engaged in a new activity.

Strategy: Anchoring Activities

Description:

An anchoring activity is one that students can do independently, without teacher assistance, and can be started, paused, and picked back up again easily. Generally this type of ongoing activity is used when the teacher needs to divide the class into two or three groups based on one of the grouping methods: readiness, learning style, or interest. Half or

one third of the class work on the anchoring activity while the other half or two thirds of the class get direct instruction from teacher or do a different activity. Anchoring activities may also be used for students who finish more quickly than other students.

Why it is important:

When the teacher has students working at different stages of the same lesson, the teacher has more management responsibilities and needs to have meaningful activities that students can always go to and begin work quickly and independently. The result is that the teacher is able to focus on giving direct instruction to another group or can work one-on-one with a student who needs extra help.

How to use it in the art classroom:

Often in the art classroom, students will finish their assignment at a different pace than other students. With hundreds of students to consider, an art teacher needs to have a “just in case” assignment ready for students who have completed everything else and anchoring activities work well for this.

Lesson Ideas:

- ◇ Making journal entries- Students can have simple journals made of lined sheets of paper stapled together to use as their journal where they can respond to a question or statement the teacher presents. Journal entries could be factual or creative in nature. Questions and thought provoking statements could relate to an artist, work of art, vocabulary word, or aesthetics. Students could be asked to compare and contrast two works of art, encouraged to create a story about a work of art, write about their feelings elicited from looking at a work of art, or write about their own works of art.
- ◇ Sketchbooks entries- Students could have simple sketchbooks of unlined drawing paper stapled together and could be part of their journal. Students would use their sketchbook like a traditional artist sketchbook, as a place to record ideas, notes,

drawing assignments, photographs or magazine and newspaper clippings related to their art.

- ◇ Reading centers- Teacher could provide books about the current topic of study or related topics for students to read more on what part of the lesson most interests them. Fiction and non-fiction could be provided to appeal to all students. For example, after a clay lesson, the teacher could provide informational books about how clay is processed, how other cultures have used clay, ceramic art, storybooks and biographies related to clay production such as the book *The Pot that Juan Built* by Nancy Andrew-Goebel.
- ◇ Computer centers – If art related software is available, students could have access to it. A list of meaningful, age appropriate art websites could also be available. The teacher could have a list of assignments related to the computer work at the station or could make it clear that all computer work should be followed up with a journal entry about what the student learned the computer activity.
- ◇ Research questions or projects

Strategy: Cubing

Description:

Teachers use actual cubes with various questions written on each side of the cube. Each lesson should have more than one cube and can be differentiated by readiness, learning profile, or interest. Each side of the cube should have a different command and can be developed from Bloom's taxonomy. Gayle Gregory and Carolyn Chapman (2002, p. 9) say that "cubing is a technique for considering a subject from six points of view" and that cubes can be "constructed with a particular area of the multiple intelligences such as verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, or intrapersonal intelligence." They also give this example of what may go on a cube:

First side: Describe subject

Second side: Compare subject

Third side: Associate subject

Fourth side: Analyze subject

Fifth side: Apply subject

Sixth side: Argue for or against subject

An example with three specific readiness levels is described below under the heading of “how to use it in the art classroom.”

Why it is important:

Cubing is a strategy that requires students to think on multiple levels. Since each of the six sides relates to a different idea related to the main topic, students are meant to see various points of view or ideas about the subject.

How to use it in the art classroom:

To achieve thorough and deep thinking about art, particularly aesthetics, teachers could set up cubes about works of art, styles of art, or time periods in art. Cubes with dry-erase boards on each side are available so questions can be changed for each lesson or some teachers use a cube template on a piece of paper, cut it out and assemble it into a cube.

Lesson Idea:

Fifth grade art SOL 5.24 has students compare and contrast art from various cultures and periods with emphasis on Pre-Columbian, African-American, Colonial American, and European. This type of lesson is excellent for cubing. The teacher should create three versions of the cube, one for each group. Groups could be based on readiness, interest, or learning profile. Each side of the cube would have an activity for the students to complete based on art from a certain culture or time period.

High Achievers Example Cube:

First side: Describe common characteristics about art from Colonial America

Second side: Compare and contrast the art of Colonial American to European art of the same time period.

Third side: After looking at Colonial American art, what associations can you find with it and things in modern American art.

Fourth side: Choose a work of art and analyze its aesthetic qualities.

Fifth side: Research about the importance of portraits during Colonial America period and apply those ideas to today's society.

Sixth side: Argue for or against subject.

Average Achievers Example Cube:

First side: Describe the subject matter in Pre-Columbian art.

Second side: What is similar about Pre-Columbian art and modern Central American art?

Third side: What does Pre-Columbian art remind you of?

Fourth side: Why is so much of Pre-Columbian art made of gold?

Fifth side: Create a sketch of a statue you would like to make out of gold. The statue should have some characteristics of the Pre-Columbian art style.

Sixth side: Create an advertisement that promotes going to see Pre-Columbian art. Convince people why they should see the art in the ad.

Struggling Achievers Cube Example:

One side: Describe the use of color in African-American quilt examples (works of art provided to students).

Second side: How are quilts made during civil war time similar to the art work of Faith Ringgold?

Third side: What do quilts make you think of?

Fourth side: How are quilts made?

Fifth side: Create a piece of art work that has quilt elements in it.

Sixth side: Choose a piece of art that you like the most from the examples provided. What are three things that you like about it the most? What is something you would change if you were the artist?

Strategy: Think-Pair-Share

Description:

According to Lyman, “Think-Pair-Share is a cooperative discussion strategy developed by Frank Lyman and his colleagues in Maryland. It gets its name from the three stages of student action, with emphasis on what students are to be doing at each of those stages.

1) Think. The teacher provokes students' thinking with a question, prompt, or observation. The students should take a few moments (probably not minutes) just to THINK about the question.

2) Pair. Using designated partners, nearby neighbors, or a desk mate, students PAIR up to talk about the answer each came up with. They compare their mental or written notes and identify the answers they think are best, most convincing, or most unique.

3) Share. After students talk in pairs for a few moments (again, usually not minutes), the teacher calls for pairs to SHARE their thinking with the rest of the class. She can do this by going around in round-robin fashion, calling on each pair; or she can take answers as they are called out (or as hands are raised). Often, the teacher or a designated helper will record these responses on the board or on the overhead,” (1981, online).

How to use it in the art classroom:

This strategy works well for discussing criticism or aesthetics. The art teacher may put up a work of art for students to look at and respond. Students would pair up and discuss their responses with others and then share their answers with the rest of the class. But it does not just have to be a response to one work of art. It could be a response to multiple pieces of art, writing prompt about something previously discussed in a lesson, or an opinion about an art topic.

Strategy: Learning Time Lines

Description:

Students use a roll of paper, for example adding machine tape, to create their own learning time line. They unroll the tape at the end of each class and write down the date and something they have learned that day. After many entries the roll of paper becomes a time line of facts they have learned and projects completed. (Forsten, Grant, Hollas, 2002, p. 95)

Why it is important:

Because elementary students are only in art class once a week it is critical to find ways for students to review their learning. This also reinforces what a time line is and how it works. Elementary students can struggle with the concept of past, present, and future and this roll of paper would reinforce those vocabulary words for them.

How to use it in the art classroom:

During the last 3-5 minutes of class, students could record their learning from the day. An alternative to every class would be at the end of a special activity or art project, students could record what they created, vocabulary words they learned, artists' names and interesting facts. A second alternative would be to have just a class time line roll in which different students are responsible for it each day. An addition to the roll of paper timeline could be that the timeline is saved year to year so that students could see the learning that took place from their first day at the school (most likely in Kindergarten) through their last day at the school (most likely fifth grade).

Assessment

It is critical for differentiation to be successful for the teacher to continually assess student learning. Assessment is not just for grading purposes, but finding what learning style, interests, and readiness levels students have.

There are a number of ways to assess students including the following:

1. Pre-tests – at the beginning of the school year or the beginning of a lesson a teacher can ask questions or pose challenges to see how students respond.
2. Post-tests – at the end of a school year or at the end of a lesson a teacher can ask questions or pose challenges to see how much learning took place and what areas need to be reinforced.
3. Rubrics – creating a rubric to assess an art project are already a common practice among art educators and are supported in the differentiated education.
4. Checklists – a list of skills or concepts the student should have mastered that an art teacher can use to record what progress a student has made. This can be particularly beneficial for younger grade levels that need to master skills like using scissors and tracing.
5. Random checks by asking questions to students – this can be useful to art teachers because it can be done quickly which is a necessity in an elementary art room.
6. Observing on task behaviors – an art teacher can walk around the room while students are working and give students a simple “check” for being on task or “check minus” for being off task.
7. Portfolios – portfolios may work best for fourth and fifth grade students but may be impractical for younger grade levels.
8. Teacher/Student conferences – due to time constraints, teacher/student conferences may need to be limited but can be useful and can be informal so they can be completed when time permits and just last a few minutes while other students are working independently at their tables.

9. Peer Review – students can be self-conscious of what other students think of their work so this must be approached carefully. It is often helpful for students to give each other constructive criticism because they often use language that is more understandable to another student than a teacher can.
10. Student self-assessments – extremely beneficial for students to use especially when students are not working up to their ability and a teacher needs to point it out to the student in a delicate way. It can also be something to show to parents who may not agree with a grade a child receives.

Forsten, Grant, and Hollas (2002) developed other differentiated ways of assessment detailed below.

“What’s your response” (Forsten, 2002, p. 91)

Each student has three index cards: one marked “yes,” another with “no,” and one with a question mark. The teacher asks a question and students hold up the card in front of them. The teacher can quickly look around the room and see if students need more work on the topic or are ready to move along to the next topic.

“I was confused by...” (Forsten, 2002, p. 17)

Students can write down a note to the teacher about what confused them in the lesson and put it in a private box. The teacher can read the notes and get a feel for what the students are thinking but may have been too shy to think or ask in front of other students.

Dueling Charts (Forsten, 2002, p. 101)

Divide students into two groups (could also work with more groups) and each group has a chart with the topic written at the top. When the game starts, each student goes up and writes a fact about the topic. When time runs out, the team with the most correct facts

wins. To add another level of difficulty, the first letter of each fact phrase must start with the first letter of the phrase the teacher wrote across the top of the chart.

Conclusion

A relatively new teaching method, differentiation allows a teacher to have a lesson with modified parts to meet the different learning needs of students. Lessons can be differentiated by content, process, or product, and flexible learning groups can be chosen based on readiness of students, interests of students, or their learning profiles. Because of its flexible nature, differentiation can be adapted to meet any teacher's needs for her students and I propose it can be particularly beneficial to art teachers.

Many art teachers already do some differentiating in their teaching and may not even know it. It can be as simple as working with individual groups to as complex as having a variety of lesson alternatives for different learners. In the field of art education we need to embrace it as a way of enhancing our teaching for our many students by trying some of these differentiation methods in the classroom.

Differentiation does not have to be used all the time nor for every lesson. There are times when whole group instruction is the best, most efficient way to convey a message to the students. Other times, it is most beneficial to adapt lessons to meet a variety of student needs. From my experience, students are more motivated to learn when assignments are differentiated rather than a "one assignment fits all" approach because their learning needs are being met. Either their style/profile of learning is being addressed, or their interests are being taken into account, or they are being taught to their readiness level. When all of the ways are addressed, the whole child is being considered and can thrive in this environment.

While differentiation is now in the mainstream of educational literature, we still have challenges to face in developing differentiation for the art education field. In preparation for this report, I found no books, journal articles, nor information from the internet on differentiation targeted specifically for the art classroom. The more art teachers who become familiar with differentiation and try it in their own classroom, the more information we can have to share with each other and come together as a whole field to decide how the differentiation teaching method works best for all art teachers.

Another challenge we face is that anytime we try something new, there is a learning curve meaning there will be an adjustment time to getting to a point of success and confidence. I found myself frustrated and thinking hard many times to come up with the lesson ideas I have used. But good ideas breed more good ideas and if other art teachers work together the job of using differentiation will become easier for all of us. For now I am going to continue finding new ways to incorporate differentiation into my classroom.

Differentiation holds great potential as a key to reaching all students.

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