

**PERSONALIZED EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES FOR VARIED LEARNING
LEVELS**

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is using differentiated lesson plans for students at different learning levels in the process of teaching a foreign language. This article will first explain the differentiated learning meaning, list the multiple ways of differentiated lesson plans, along with relevant lesson plan examples. Then it will illustrate the importance of differentiated lesson plans in education.

KEYWORD: differentiated learning, interactive method, advanced, lesson plan, project-based methods, PowerPoint presentations, educational, formative assessments, summative assessments.

Within the first few days of school, it will become abundantly clear that some students are more advanced than others. In your classroom, you will have to teach students who enjoy chapter books alongside their peers who still sound out words. You will have to provide basic math instruction next to students who know the order of operations. How do you prevent some students from getting bored while helping others catch up — and not wear yourself out?

It is possible to create differentiated lesson plans without tripling your work. Follow this guide to learn multiple ways to differentiate work based on student needs.

How to Differentiate

There are multiple ways to practice differentiated learning, but teachers are increasingly seeing the benefits of sorting students by learning levels. This might seem revolutionary, but it's nothing new.

Back in the days of one-room schoolhouses, teachers had to differentiate and personalize, because they literally had every grade in their class. Somewhere along the line, we got the idea that kids of similar ages would have similar skills and abilities. However, standardized testing proved us wrong and showed major gaps in knowledge.

These gaps are likely more pronounced after a year or two of remote learning. Some students returned to the in-person classroom significantly ahead of their peers while others missed entire chapters and concepts. This is why the most common way to organize students through differentiation is to focus on their learning levels.

Another way to differentiate students is through their learning styles. Some students are visual learners while others are kinesthetic. Additionally, some students love group work while others prefer to work alone. We recommend giving students multiple project options that play on their strengths. For example, one student might want to write a song using key vocabulary while another can create a visual chart defining terms.

Along with using project-based methods where students can choose how to learn, you can also build differentiated learning into your lesson plans. Jackson Best, a former high school teacher, encourages teachers to share the same content in multiple formats. This is why educators often use images and PowerPoint presentations while talking through the material. Asking students to watch a video and read a section of text related to the same concept can present the information

in two different ways. This increases the chances that students will engage with the concept while reinforcing the material a second time.

Use Student-Driven Differentiation

One of the best ways to differentiate students is to allow them to call the shots on what they learn and how. When possible, give students the opportunity to take control of their education. Kids often feel like they don't have much say in what goes on, so this is a chance to pass on a little independence.

Students who are allowed to have a say in their own learning experience develop essential skills such as self-advocacy. When given the chance to take part in goal setting within the classroom, students are also more motivated to reach those goals.

To achieve this for language students set up periodic language conferences with them to review how confident they are in the material and what they need to learn. This is a time for students to communicate their needs and work through problems individually. Each conference will be unique to the learning goals of the student.

While there is no golden rule for length of conferences, we've found that a meaningful conference ranges between five and seven minutes, and it's helpful to think of each conference in three components: research, praise, and instruction.

The student walks away with a clearer understanding of their strengths but also with goals for improvement.

Create Shame-Free Learning

At face value, differentiation can feel isolating. Many educators worry that students will feel called out by completing less-advanced work or by using more time to understand concepts. As a teacher, your challenge is to create shame-free differentiation.

"When students feel shame, it renders them incapable of learning and may likely lead to other adverse behaviors," writes former teacher Lisa Westman, author of "Student-Driven Differentiation." Instead of pulling students out of class for additional instruction, she says, "we can structure our lessons to provide additional instruction and practice to students at their readiness level." This also exposes them to grade-level content so they're not left behind.

Students can feel shame when they are behind, but also when they are ahead. Many students don't want to be called out as different or perceived as better than the rest of the class. This is why some educators are working to find ways for advanced learners to quietly move ahead while they help other students.

Tricia Proffitt, a dual-language English teacher in Illinois, has students with varying levels of knowledge. She creates tailored plans for different abilities that map the same skills. She also has an understanding with her students that those who know what they are doing can work ahead if they want to. This clear understanding prevents more advanced learners from getting bored and allows them to feel challenged.

It's possible to have students participate in differentiated learning without calling them out or pulling them into separate classrooms. In fact, students can benefit from being around peers at different levels.

Take Advantage of Technology

With more than a year of remote learning under your belt, you are likely an expert at various digital tools and online assessment options. You can use these to your advantage to create time for yourself.

Personalized learning often makes use of technology to improve classroom learning. Tech also allows educators to give feedback to students more often and more immediately, by using personal assessments and tailored quizzes for each student.

Technology cuts down on grading time too, so teachers can spend more time evaluating and developing strategies for different learners.

Group Students Together

Groups allow students to help each other and offer support where they can. They also can protect your sanity as you will know which groups need help and which ones likely understand the material.

High school teacher Kristen Cole says there are different ways to group students. For instance, you can group students by ability level and then work one-on-one with each group based on their understanding. This way each group gets the help they need. You can also intermingle groups so more advanced students can help their peers. This allows advanced students to reinforce the material they know by teaching it to others.

Bri Stauffer at Applied Educational Systems takes this idea one step further with the creation of captain-led pods. Students can work in groups, with each pod having a student captain. When one student has a question, they are encouraged to ask their captain for help before the teacher. This is another instance where varying student skill sets can shine. One student might have a hard time in reading comprehension but can lead as a captain in speaking class.

Test different group styles throughout the year and to achieve different goals. You can evaluate what group-learning styles work best for your students.

Look for Multiple Assessment Options

While many educators are able to differentiate learning levels, they have a harder time changing how students are assessed. Look for multiple ways to assess what students know, including the use of different test styles and class projects.

Differentiated assessment involves offering choices on how students show their knowledge and collecting data throughout the learning. By favoring formative assessments over summative assessments, educators create small, low-stakes checkpoints throughout the unit to see how well students are learning the material.

These small checkpoints can also help you catch students when they miss concepts, so you can go back and review them before moving forward.

Use Differentiated Learning Resources

As more teachers embrace differentiated learning, they are sharing their experiences with others. There are plenty of resources online to guide your lesson plan creation.

Cathy Weselby at Resilient Educator has a valuable resource that includes a list of several books on differentiated instruction and several reference materials for continued learning. This is a great page to save if you are committed to offering a differentiated classroom.

By learning what works well for other educators, you can reduce the amount of trial and error in your own classroom.

It's understandable that differentiated learning would seem overwhelming when you first start out. How can you teach the same concepts to students who work at different levels? However, once you get systems in place, you can move forward with confidence and your students can know their educational needs are being met.

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