

Differentiated Classroom Scenario

Miss Daniels's 3rd-period Algebra I class has 30 students. Of the 30, 20 are average performers and grasp algebraic concepts with guided instruction. Three students are high performers and need little teacher intervention to understand concepts. Two students are repeaters who consistently exhibit behavioral disruptions, while five of the students are ELL Spanish-speaking students with some exposure to pre-algebra concepts. After the first chapter quiz, Miss Daniels realizes that her one-size-fits-all lectures are not addressing student learning needs. She decides to differentiate instruction to ensure each student masters the concepts.

The next day she divides her students into groups by quiz grades. Students that scored either an A or B on the quiz complete an extension exercise in groups of three. Students who earned a C or lower participate in a mini-lesson at the board with Miss Daniels. In the mini-lesson group, as students display mastery, she assigns them to cooperative learning groups to complete a skill review exercise. Students needing additional support remain in the mini-lesson group with Miss Daniels for further skill reinforcement. At the end of the period, Miss Daniels asks students needing additional support to participate in a lunch tutorial session.

The following day, Miss Daniels begins with a review of the previous lesson by engaging students in whole-group instruction and guided practice. She carefully assesses student progress by asking comprehension, application and analysis questions. As soon as students begin to struggle with concepts, Miss Daniels convenes a skill refinement mini-lesson group to address questions. Noticing that her high performing students are distracted because they are not in the mini-lessons and they finish assignments quickly, Miss Daniels creates a learning station with advanced materials to move students exhibiting mastery ahead in the unit. This differentiated strategy will ensure that challenging activities are available to all students.

As the semester progresses, Miss Daniels recognizes that her ELL students look confused during whole-class lectures, cooperative learning groups, and mini-lesson discussions. There is clearly a language barrier. She sets up a permanent learning station in the corner of the room that includes several Algebra books written in Spanish, a computer with textbook CDs of translated lessons, and a notepad for students to write out specific questions in Spanish. She

informs the ELL students that they can work in the learning station when language fluency limits their understanding. She also establishes a partnership with the Spanish teacher, who agrees to translate student-submitted questions. With Miss Daniels's input, she also will write reply to students in Spanish to correct misunderstandings.

Miss Daniels takes every opportunity to vary instructional methods to benefit her students. If two or three students seem to struggle with a concept, she organizes a mini-lesson group immediately. If five to 10 students stumble on a concept, she assigns them to learning stations with activities that re-teach or refine skills, while the rest of the class works on extension exercises that expand their understanding of the concept. When the entire class struggles, she reconfigures her instructional approach and re-teaches the concept using different strategies and questioning techniques.

Students are assigned to learning stations, cooperative learning groups, or mini-lesson groups based on the following considerations: by grades on assignments when re-teaching is needed; by career interests when work-place examples facilitate learning or capture student interest; or alphabetically when heterogeneous groups are suitable.

Each differentiated decision depends on what will increase student comprehension, what Miss Daniels determines is a beneficial structure, and what will keep students engaged and motivated. No two days in her classroom are ever the same.