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There are quite a number of strategies that can be used in the transfer of information to the students. In the educational sector, teachers tend to look at the available alternatives and choosing one which best fits the needs of the learners. Differentiated education is one of these strategies. The essay below looks at this strategy in greater detail.

Differentiated Instruction

Introduction

According to Hall et al (2011), all students have different needs. Just like the manner in which different people have different interests in life, so are many of the other needs that the people have. The different interests that individuals have determine the kind of educational strategies that they need. This calls for the need for differentiated education. Watson (2011) defines the differentiated instruction in education as the strategy through which the needs of different students are addressed within the same classroom.

Objectives and Differentiation of Instruction

The aim is to make sure that the academic needs of all the students are catered for and the individual talents and endowments of the individuals are equally taken care of. It is about making sure that the students are not given just any form of education, but the kind of education that addresses their specific needs. Hall (2011) further observes that the differentiation can be carried out in a number of ways. The first one is the content or the subject matter that has to be imparted into the students. Kingore (2005) posits that in relation to this factor, differentiated education should have content that is directly related to the interests of the learner. That is, the content should be

derived in line with the interest, abilities, and talents that the individual learners have. At times, this can be quite tricky since students in the same class can have different abilities, skills and interests. This can be a challenge to the teacher. This challenge is addressed later in this paper.

The second component is the process. That is, the process through which the talents of the students are gauged, and the method used to deliver to the best of their knowledge. This implies the derivation of strategies and methods which can help in making sure that the students are well catered for. Teaching Today (2005) observes that the process involves the teachers coming up with ways and strategies through which they can provide avenues or ways through which learners can get the information. It involves providing an array of options that can be adopted so as to make sure that the learners have the ability to take in information, make sense of it and apply the different skills and concepts learnt all through. It also involves deriving ways of delivering appropriate levels of challenge for all the students in the classroom including the top performers, the average as well as the under-performers. In other words, the process is responsible for making sure that no student is left behind. Rather, the needs of all are addressed in line with their abilities and talents.

Thirdly, the product has to be considered. Hall (2011) has it that the product is about making sure that the students have captured what they were intended to and can effectively apply it should they be required to. It is not just a matter of passing the information, but also involves assessing in order to make sure that the information has been effectively synthesized and

applied in real life situations. This step involves three minor steps. The first one is the initial as well as the on-going assessment. The initial assessment involves looking at whether the students are ready. It also looks at the different abilities that they have, leading to a situation where they can be put into the flexible, convenient groups that have students with similar interests and abilities (Ann, 2012). Differentiation Central (2011) argues that the small groups can be formulated depending on different factors. For instance, there can be small groups in relation to readiness, learning profile or interests. Other groups can be formulated depending on partners who have similar characteristics. At times, the groups can also be made of individuals, and also the groups can comprise of whole classes. It all depends on the method that the teacher decides to adopt. Another factor to consider in the products is that the learners should be actively involved. Since they are grouped in accordance to their interests and abilities, it is expected that the students should be in a position to explore more, rather than just wait on the teacher to give instructions. The extent to which the students are involved and the discoveries that they come up with can be a good way of fulfilling the product component of differentiated instructions. The product should also consider the ability of the students to respond to different issues in relation to their learning. Hall (2011) observes that a well formulated plan should make the students to be in a position where they can respond to different issues in different ways. In other words, it gives options through which different matters can be addressed by the students.

The last component is the environment. It is well known that talents need to be identified and then nurtured, as only then can they progress to maturity

and even fruition. According to Edutopia (2012), the environment within which the learning takes place should be conducive enough for the students to capture all they are taught. It is not just the academic environment but also the physical environment which makes sure that the students are well secured and can learn without any problems. These micro-environments can be formulated depending on the different groups that have been identified, the abilities and interests of the students. Once they are pooled in groups where they feel most comfortable, it is highly likely that they can create a niche for themselves and gain even more as compared to when they are pooled with people of varying interests.

In relation to the environment, CTE (2002) observes that different learning strategies can be applied. This has been seen in various school departments and faculties where people with a similar interest are put together and provided with what they need to realize their goals. Here, the main aim is to create a micro-environment where the students feel most comfortable and where they can learn more.

Strategies for Differentiated Instruction

After looking at the objectives and the component of the differentiated instruction, it is quite clear that there is the need to have proper strategies which can help in making such a program a success. Edutopia (2012) gives six strategies that can be applied. The first one involves having differentiation through teams. A team comprise of homogenous entities. In this case, the groups can have students who are very similar in likes and characteristics. This makes it easy to attend to their needs as a group rather

than looking at them independently. Another strategy should also be based on goal setting. Given that differentiated instruction is quite complex, it can be quite easy to run out of context if there is no clear roadmap as to what is supposed to be done and achieved. By having a clear set of defined goals and objectives, the strategy can easily work out. Mini lessons can also come in handy as they can help in catching up on something that the students did not get. It can also help in addressing particular needs of a given group, hence increasing the chances for the success of the differentiated instruction strategies. Other strategies include voice and choice in products, formative assessments and balance between team work and individual work (Edutopia, 1012, Teaching Today, 2005). These strategies can help in making sure that an institution that undertakes differentiated education actually fulfills its goals.

Plan Implementation

After the derivation of the strategies, the next step would be the implementation of the plan. Here, it is worth noting that there are quite a number of inputs that are required in order to enhance a successful implementation. For instance, there is the need to have the proper facilities to allow the student to experiment their ideas as well as the concept that have learnt. There should also be the facilities which make sure that all the groups that have been formulated are engaged and no one stays idle just because the teacher is involved with another group. In this case, proper planning is very necessary as it can make the difference between a chaotic program and a successful program.

Ann (2012) gives a plan through which this can be carried out. The first step is to make sure that the institution has decided to adopt the differentiated education program. It is then made clear that the teacher is responsible for making sure that the needs of the learners are effectively addressed. The strategy should then follow the basic guidelines of differentiation which include engaging the students in respectful tasks, ensuring an on-going assessment plan and having flexible groups. The differentiation should then be carried out depending on the different categories given earlier which include product, content and process. The method adopted should be the best for the class and one that considers all the needs of the learners, depending on their demographics. The process should then be carried out, which should comply with the interests, readiness and the learning profile of the individuals as discussed earlier. All through the implementation process, there should be proper management strategies which make sure that the objectives are referred to and all the activities are geared towards making sure that these objectives are realized. If such an implementation process is applied, Ann (2012) observes that the differentiated instruction process can be quite successful and fruitful as well.

Leadership Principles

Given the complex nature of the differentiated instruction program, it can be very hard to carry through if some leadership principles are not applied. Ann (2012) also gives these principles that should be closely observed. The first principle applies that the class should be flexible. As already indicated above, the differentiated instruction classes tend to address the needs of the different students based on the different characteristics they possess. This

implies that the teacher has to have the right strategies to make sure that the goals of the individuals as well as those of the classroom as a whole are addressed. The second principle has it that the instructions structure is derived from the continuous assessment of the needs of the individuals. Unless the lessons are designed in such a manner that they address the needs of the students, then there is no way that the differentiated instruction can be a success. However, the needs of the students have to be known so that the teacher can go on to try and address them. This is why the assessment comes in as a strong component that needs to be looked into quite seriously.

The principles also indicate that the activities that the students get involved in should be respectful activities which lead to learning. This implies that not just any activities should be assigned to the students. After all, the aim is not just to keep the students busy but to make sure that they are actually learning something. This is one of the principles that has to be observed closely in order to make sure that the program remains as objective as possible. Closely tied to this principle is the one that applies that the teachers and students should work as collaborators. This implies that everything they do should be coordination between the two; the teachers should design the lessons and activities in line with the interest and abilities of the students, while the students should look upon the teacher for instruction and guidance. In the long run, a symbiotic kind of relationship is fostered where the students and the instructor tend to be closely associated with each other.

Choice of Differentiation Instruments and Instruction

As already observed, there are different ways through which the differentiated instruction can be designed. As such, the methods chosen to deliver the content should be consistent with the design adopted for a given class. Kingore (2005) has it that the choice of the delivery method should be based on the objectives of the instructor, the method of differentiation adopted and the needs that need to be met. For this reason, the methods chosen by different instructors can vary, and the methods can also vary between classes. It is all a matter of what needs to be achieved and how best this can be achieved,

Key Players

It is well known that there are different parties who are quite important in the running of a learning institution. These parties are equally important when it comes to the designing of a differentiated instruction class. The parents are very significant figures in this case as they can help in identifying the various abilities and skills that their children can have. The teachers also come in because they are responsible for assessing the readiness of the students as well as identifying their learning profiles. It is also the teachers who are responsible for delivering the content to the students, hence there is no way that they can be left out of such a program. Teacher leaders are also key players as they collaborate with the teachers in assessing the students and designing the differentiated instruction programs. This makes them a very important component of the team. The school staff comes in because they can play the supportive role in the learning of the programs such as helping the students in their learning

activities. The students are at the core of the program as there is no way the program can be without the students. After all, they are the target group.

In conclusion, this essay has looked at the differentiated instruction and how it can be run in a learning environment. It has looked at the program in a wholesome manner, right from the definition to inception, strategizing, implementation and management. It has been derived that running a differentiated instruction program is quite a complex endeavor that needs proper planning and dedication.

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