

Lecture No. 05

Individual Differences

Students are all different. That is what makes students unique and interesting human beings. Obvious differences include hair color, height, size, and eye color. To identify individual differences, teachers may look at many different sources such as classroom observations, work samples, school records, standardized testing, and reports from other teachers. How can you provide an optimal learning environment for every student? Instead of asking whether you should teach to the top or to the middle, consider ways to meet the needs and build on the strengths of all your students. Here are some practical suggestions.

1. Get to Know Your Students

Nothing undermines misconceptions quicker than simply knowing your students. Learn something about their strengths, talents, and interests and draw upon those in your interactions with them.

2. Make Sure Your Students Know Why the Material Is Worth Learning

Students who are engaged and motivated will put more effort into your course.

3. Create A Classroom Where Student Input About Content and Pedagogy Is Welcome

No doubt you will feel uncomfortable when students criticize an aspect of your class or your teaching style. But if you are to reach them effectively, you need to encourage them to reflect critically on their own learning.

4. Vary Your Presentation Style

Because students have diverse learning styles, consider using a variety of instructional approaches: lectures, discussion, PowerPoint presentations, audio (including music), video, charts and graphs, simulations, and images.

5. Highlight Critical Concepts and Skills

Make sure that all students master key concepts and skills.

6. Approach the Material Interactively

Inquiry-based instruction, hands-on experiments, project and problem-based learning.

7. Integrate Small Group Learning into Your Teaching

Collaborative and team-based learning, including pairs and small group activities, allow students to learn from their peers.

8. Don't Get Locked Into "Lock-Step" Teaching

All students don't need to be doing exactly the same thing at the same time. You might adopt "differentiated instruction," where one group pursues one activity while you work closely with another group on particular skills or concepts.

9. Create A Support System

Some students need additional help if they are to succeed. You can refer them to student support services, but also holding special sessions or creating online tutorials to address struggling students' special needs.

Tips for teaching in a diverse classroom

Here are six types of knowledge you can develop to help your students succeed in your classroom.

1. Learn about your own culture

Become aware of how the influence of your own culture, language, social interests, goals, cognitions, and values could prevent you from learning how you could best teach your students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Also, understanding and respecting your own cultural roots can help you respect your students' cultural roots.

2. Learn about your students' culture

Understand how your students' cultures affect their perceptions, self-esteem, values, classroom behavior, and learning. Use that understanding to help your students feel welcomed, affirmed, respected, and valued.

3. Understand your students' linguistic traits

Learn how students' patterns of communication and various dialects affect their classroom learning and how second-language learning affects their acquisition of literacy.

4. Use this knowledge to inform your teaching

Let your knowledge of your students' diverse cultures inform your teaching. This, along with a sincerely caring attitude, increases student participation and engagement.

5. Use multicultural books and materials to foster cross-cultural understanding

Sensitively use multicultural literature, especially children's literature, to honor students' culture and foster cross-cultural understanding. Be open to a variety of instructional strategies as students' cultures may make certain strategies (such as competitive games or getting students to volunteer information) uncomfortable for them.

6. Know about your students' home and school relationships

Collaborate with parents and caregivers on children's literacy development and don't rely on preconceived notions of the importance of literacy within your students' families.