Reflection Tool for Teachers

Effective Differentiation in Teaching

This reflection tool is designed to prompt you to think critically about the way you implement differentiation in your teaching, providing ideas to help you develop an inclusive learning environment. You can complete this individually, or with your teaching team.

Please read the statements below and reflect on what you are already doing in your programming, and any changes you can make to strengthen your approach. Your reflections may include concrete changes to your current practices and processes, or suggestions to strengthen your school's policies. You may also want to identify knowledge or competence gaps you want to address with professional learning. Articulating why you do what you do as a teacher provides opportunities to engage in individual and collective critical reflection about work.

Effective differentiation in teaching requires you to consider your students' a) characteristics, b) voice and autonomy, and c) attention and learning styles. It also requires consideration to a) build meaningful peer relationships, b) scaffold students' learning, and c) create routine, repetition, and structure in your classroom. Several evidence-based strategies are outlined under each heading to help you reflect on your approach to differentiation in teaching. You can find more evidence-based strategies for students with disability <in the hub>.

Student characteristics (their capabilities, strengths, preferences, interests, readiness and learning profile)

1. How have I/we built on student capabilities, strengths, preferences, interests, readiness and learning profile?

2. What are the student characteristics that I/we may not have considered?

3. How can I/we strengthen my/our approach to student characteristics?

To read more about student readiness, interests and learning profile: Tomlinson, C. (2006). An Educator's Guide to Differentiating instruction. USA: Cengage Learning.

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Student Voice and Autonomy (their perspectives, choices and independence)

Think about a typical week in your classroom and select the adjustments that you or your teaching team would have in place.

I/we add student interests into the learning process	I/we provide choices	I/we include student voice when developing learning objectives, personalised learning and support plans, and supports.
I/we provide adjustments that support independent learning (for example, visual schedules, checklists)	I/we explicitly teach specific skills that facilitate independent learning	I/we explicitly teach study, time-management and organisation strategies
I/we support students to use their communication systems to seek assistance (for example, visuals, technology, raise hand)	I/we explicitly teach life skills related to daily living and self-care	I/we use strengths-based language when setting goals or communicating about student progress
I/we explicitly teach students how to express their wants and needs appropriately	I/we encourage students to develop, use and evaluate their own strategies	I/we encourage student success

Consider:

1. How have I/we created opportunities for all students to make choices, express their views, and develop their autonomy?

2. How have I/we engaged in critical thinking about my/our own attitudes and behaviours to ensure I/we hold high expectations for all students? How have I/we provided appropriate levels of challenge and interest through diverse learning opportunities?

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3. What barriers have I/we faced to embracing student voice and autonomy?

4. How can I/we strengthen my/our approach to supporting student voice and autonomy?

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Student attention and learning profiles (their attention and the ways they engage in learning)

Think about a typical week in your classroom and select the adjustments that you or your teaching team would have in place.

I/we provide concrete examples, simplified text and short and clear instructions.

I/we set reasonable limits to time or intensity of a task (e.g. fewer tasks with more opportunity to practice, reducing the number of items on a test, breaking tasks into manageable chunks)

I/we offer learning opportunities to engage students through multiple means such as visual, tactile and audio

I/we provide visual supports (e.g. visual schedule, graphs, social stories, graphic organisers, objects of reference, visual aids when speaking, modelling or demonstrating)

I/we check for student understanding (for example, ask students to reword or demonstrate their understanding, use exit slips)

I/we offer a range of supports so that students can meet key learning outcomes (for example, mnemonics, word banks, technology, checklists, calculators)

I/we provide alternate options for students to respond (including for assessments), and allocate time in alignment with agreed adjustments

I/we use task analysis by understanding and working through steps in a task one-by-one

I/we provide lesson instructions, outlines, or notes to all students which could be presented through technology, audio or use of images

I/we provide frequent opportunities to practice skills and role-play situations

I/we provide movement breaks and prompts or reminders to stay on task

I/we provide learning materials and instructions in multiple formats (for example, electronic, print, verbal, Braille)

I/we allow the use of technology (for example, speech to text software, digital platforms)

I/we keep distractions and transitions to a minimum

I/we explicitly teach specific skills (and avoid assumptions)

Consider:

1. How have I/we planned for multimodal instruction, learning activities and assessments that consider variations in how each student learns, communicates, and engages?

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2. If relevant, have I/we catered for a range of fine and gross motor abilities, or different communication styles?

3. What are the barriers to student participation and engagement for my/our students?

4. In what ways can I/we strengthen my/our approach to understanding and utilising students' attention and learning profiles in lessons?

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Building peer relationships (their connections with others in their class or school)

Think about a typical week in your classroom and select the adjustments that you or your teaching team would have in place.

I/we use cooperative learning groups for all students	I/we provide frequent opportunities for students to learn and socialise with peers	I/we use small group activities and provide opportunities for paired learning
I/we model understanding, thoughtfulness and acceptance	I/we explicitly teach students skills to include a peer who has a different communication or social interaction style	I/we assign roles within groups where student(s) are using differentiated instructions or learning materials

1. How have I/we provided opportunities for all students to communicate, connect and collaborate?

2. What are the barriers to student participation and engagement for my/our students?

3. In what ways have I/we adapted tasks to support paired activities such as peer tutoring to foster cooperative learning activities?

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4. How can I/we strengthen my/our approach towards building meaningful peer relationships?

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Scaffolding students' learning (supportive framework that facilitates learning)

Think about a typical week in your classroom and select the adjustments that you or your teaching team would have in place.

I/we explicitly teach specific skills when they are new (avoid assumptions)

I/we develop a procedure for students to ask for help (for example, a cue card, raise hand)

I/we systematically fade prompts to promote independence

I/we have consistency of expectations and communication among staff e.g. use of 'scripts' for specific targeted behaviour7

I/we provide lots of support when students are learning a new skill or task. This support is faded as students become more proficient.

I/we take steps provide support that does not separate a student from their peers

I/we provide age-appropriate supports that are rigorous, meaningful and dignified. They do not draw attention to a student (e.g. provided to the whole class, or presented in a format consistent with other materials)

I/we consider student preferences about how supports are provided

I/We regularly assess whether a student is receiving too little or too much support for specific tasks or in specific contexts

1. How have I/we scaffolded students' learning in my/our classroom(s)?

2. Where relevant, how have I/we considered how our teaching team (including SLSOs) can provide discreet, developmentally appropriate, and scaffolded support?

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3. What are the barriers to providing scaffolded support?

4. How can I/we strengthen my/our approach to scaffolding students' learning?

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Routine, repetition, and structure (classroom structures that provide predictability)

Think about a typical week in your classroom and select the adjustments that you or your teaching team would have in place.

I/we make time for students to practice in different settings and with different materials	I/we provide opportunities for students to practice for assessments (using similar questions and format)	I/we provide a visual daily schedule to all students
I/we create daily routines that are visually represented and stick to them	I/we model targeted skills and then provide practice opportunities	I/we provide many opportunities for students to apply the information they have learned
I/we provide frequent opportunities for students to practice skills in role-play situations, and by using video and social stories	I/we ensure consistency of rules and routine that are displayed, explained and consistently taught	I/we provide checklists and clear sequencing of a task

1. How have I/we embedded routine, repetition and structure within and across learning activities so that all students know what to expect and have opportunities to practice and apply their learning in different contexts?

2. How have I/we created learning environments that allow all students to focus and engage in learning?

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3. What are the barriers to adjusting routine, repetition, and structure that I/we have experienced?

4. In what ways can I/we strengthen my/our approach to create routine, repetition, and structure in the classroom?