

Using Differentiated Instruction Applying Cognitive Approaches and Strategies for Teaching Diverse Learners

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Abstract : Educational systems are tasked with preparing students for future success in academic or work environments. Schools strive to achieve this goal, but often it is challenging as conventional teaching approaches are often ineffective in increasingly diverse educational systems. In today's ever-increasing global society, educational systems become increasingly diverse in terms of cultural and linguistic differences, learning preferences and styles, ability and disability. Through increased understanding of disabilities and improved identification processes, students having some form of disabilities tend to be identified earlier than in the past, meaning that more students with identified disabilities are being supported in our classrooms. Also, a large majority of students with disabilities are educated in general education environments. Due to cognitive makeup and life experiences, students have varying learning styles and preferences impacting how they receive and express what they are learning. Many students come from bi or multilingual households and with varying proficiencies in the English language, further impacting their learning. All these factors need to be seriously considered when developing learning opportunities for student's. Educators try to adjust their teaching practices as they discover that conventional methods are often ineffective in reaching each student's potential. Many teachers do not have the necessary educational background or training to know how to teach students whose learning needs are more unique and may vary from the norm. This is further complicated by the fact that many classrooms lack consistent access to interventionists/coaches that are adequately trained in evidence-based approaches to meet the needs of all students, regardless of what their academic needs may be. One evidence-based way for providing successful education for all students is by incorporating cognitive approaches and strategies that tap into affective, recognition, and strategic networks in the student's brain. This can be done through Differentiated Instruction (DI). Differentiated Instruction is increasingly recognized model that is established on the basic principles of Universal Design for Learning. This form of support ensures that regardless of the students' learning preferences and cognitive learning profiles, they have opportunities to learn through approaches that are suitable to their needs. This approach improves the educational outcomes of students with special needs and it benefits other students as it accommodates learning styles as well as the scope of unique learning needs that are evident in the typical classroom setting. Differentiated Instruction also is recognized as an evidence-based best practice in education and is highly effective when it is implemented within the tiered system of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Recognition of DI becomes more common; however, there is still limited understanding of the effective implementation and use of strategies that can create unique learning environments for each student within the same setting. Through employing knowledge of a variety of instructional strategies, general and special education teachers can facilitate optimal learning for all students, with and without a disability. A desired byproduct of DI is that it can eliminate inaccurate perceptions about the students' learning abilities, unnecessary referrals for special education evaluations, and inaccurate decisions about the presence of a disability.

Keywords : differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, special education, diversity

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