

Embracing Diverse Learners: A Way Towards Effective Learning

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Abstract : Teaching a class of diverse learners poses a great challenge not only for foreign and second language teachers, but also for teachers in different disciplines as well as for curriculum designers. Thus, to contribute to previous research tackling language diversity, the current paper shares the experience of teaching a reading, writing and vocabulary building course to diverse Arabic as a Foreign Language learners in their advanced language proficiency level. Diversity is represented in students' motivation, their prior knowledge, their various needs and interests, their level of anxiety, and their different learning styles and skills. While teaching this course the researcher adopted the universal design for learning (UDL) framework, which is a means to meet the various needs of diverse learners. UDL stresses the importance of enabling the entire diverse students to gain skills, knowledge, and enthusiasm to learn through the employment of teaching methods that respond to students' individual differences. Accordingly, the educational curriculum developed for this course and the teaching methods employed is modified. First, the researcher made the language curriculum vivid and attractive to inspire students' learning and to keep them engaged in their learning process. The researcher encouraged the entire students, from the first day, to suggest topics of their interest; political, social, cultural, etc. The authentic Arabic texts chosen are those that best meet students' needs, interests, lives, and sociolinguistic issues, together with the linguistic and cultural components. In class and under the researcher's guidance, students dig into these topics to find solutions for the tackled issues while working with their peers. Second, to gain equal opportunities to demonstrate learning, role-playing was encouraged to give students the opportunity to perform different linguistic tasks, to reflect and share their diverse interests and cultural backgrounds with their peers. Third, to bring the UDL into the classroom, students were encouraged to work on interactive, collaborative activities through technology to improve their reading and writing skills and reinforce their mastery of the accumulated vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and collocations. These interactive, collaborative activities help to facilitate student-student communication and student-teacher communication and to increase comfort in this class of diverse learners. Detailed samples of the educational curriculum and interactive, collaborative activities developed, accompanied by methods of teaching employed to teach these diverse learners, are presented for illustration. Results revealed that students are responsive to the educational materials which are developed for this course. Therefore, they engaged in the learning process and classroom activities and discussions effectively. They also appreciated their instructor's willingness to differentiate the teaching methods to suit students of diverse background knowledge, learning styles, level of anxiety, etc. Finally, the researcher believes that sharing this experience in teaching diverse learners will help both language teachers and teachers in other disciplines to develop a better understanding to meet their students' diverse needs. Results will also pave the way for curriculum designers to develop educational material that meets the needs of diverse learners.

Keywords : teaching, language, diverse, learners

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