



Caught in our butterfly net...

“When a butterfly flutters its wings in one part of the world, it can eventually cause a hurricane in another.”

Managing the Differentiated Classroom

Because we have so many students with different abilities in our classrooms, it is even more important to differentiate the instruction we deliver so each one can be successful. One myth about differentiated classrooms is that they are chaotic places that drive a teacher crazy. While a classroom that is meeting the needs of many students can be noisier than a traditional classroom, it doesn't have to be out of control. Students can be engaged in a variety of activities and a teacher can still keep his or her sanity intact.

Carol Ann Tomlinson (*How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms*) gives several key strategies for successful management of differentiated classrooms:

- 1) Time activities to support student success . When designing your tasks remember two things: time allotted for tasks should be a bit shorter than the attention span of the students who work on that task, and advanced learners often have extended attention spans. A goal to strive for, over time, is helping all students sustain group and independent tasks for longer than what was initially comfortable for them. The key to reaching that goal is their sense of success in those tasks.
- 2) Use an “anchor activity” to free yourself up to focus your attention on your students. **Suggestion:** Post a list of activities that will remind students who finish work early what they can automatically turn to while you are helping others. These might include reading their SSR book, working on their writing portfolio, practicing math concepts with manipulatives.
- 3) Create and deliver instructions carefully.
- 4) Assign students into groups or seating areas smoothly. **Suggestion:** Group by color coding, use wall charts or overhead transparencies. Practice moving into groups quickly).
- 5) Be sure students have a plan for getting help when you're busy with another student or group. **Suggestion:** A designated “expert of the day” could serve as a consultant and check answers, proofread, answer questions about directions or texts or help with art or construction tasks.
- 6) Minimize noise; teach your students how to balance the needs for conversation and concentration.
- 7) Make a plan for students to turn in work. When multiple tasks are going on, a variety of materials may be turned in within a short time period. **Suggestion:** use an “expert of the day” to check over work for completeness and quality. If it passes, it's turned in; if not, student continues working.

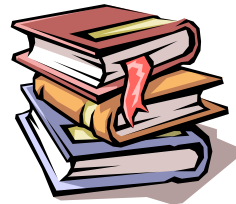
- 8) Minimize “stray” movement. **Suggestion:** Designate a “gopher” to pick up materials for each group.
- 9) Have a plan for “quick finishers.” **Suggestion:** To get students to reflect on the quality of their work and to impress upon them that you want their assignment to “knock your socks off,” ask them to tell you several indicators of superior thought and craftsmanship on a piece of work they are about to turn in. If they can’t, they need to keep improving it.
- 10) Make a plan for “calling a halt.” **Suggestion:** Let students help you figure out how they can complete unfinished work, even as the class moves on to the next activity.
- 11) Give your students as much responsibility for their learning as possible.
- 12) Engage your student in talking about classroom procedures and group processes.

One strategy that is useful for meeting the needs of a variety of students is to group students for learning or practicing skills.

FIRST, try a “getting to know you better” class activity. Hand out a sheet of paper that students will take around to a variety of students in the class asking students to find who

- loves to draw or is artistic...
- likes to talk in front of people...
- is good at finding information on the internet...
- is a good leader...
- has a talent for writing....(or any other quality that will be used on projects/group activities in class).

THEN, the next time you are grouping students for an activity, have them self-select the group according to the talents/qualities they need to successfully complete the activity. Hopefully, each member will feel more valued and more responsible for his/her part in the project because s/he is being selected for a talent s/he possesses.



The Reading Corner:

We want to thank all the teachers and classes that invited us to read scary stories before Halloween. The Butterfly Gals miss being in the classroom and interacting with students. Also, a big “Thanks” to Amy Potter’s Creative Writing students who dressed as their characters and read children’s stories to classes, as well.

Sharann, our amazing librarian, is back from her “relaxing vacation” and has already compiled a list of great resources for teachers to read aloud on Tuesdays and Thursdays, just in case you are running out of ideas. She has some copies of the Tintin comic books that introduce students to over 8,000 vocabulary words in each issue.