

The Big Idea

Differentiated Instruction

Why do we need differentiated instruction?

The wide range of academic diversity present in schools today presents both a challenge and an opportunity to all teachers. Because the challenge is so great and the need to accommodate all students so urgent, we need to think about the problem of planning and teaching to include all learners in a new way.

Diversity is the norm

Thinking about diversity among students as the norm rather than as something out of the ordinary is important as a first step in building inclusive teaching practices. Diane Ferguson (1995) has noted that “Meaningful change will require nothing less than a joint effort to reinvent schools to be more accommodating to all dimensions of human diversity.” She argues that we must change our view of the school’s role from one of providing educational services, to one of providing educational support for learning:

Valuing diversity and difference, rather than trying to change or diminish it so that everyone fits some ideal of similarity, leads to the realization that we can support students in their efforts to become active members of their communities...Perhaps the most important feature of support as a concept for schooling is that is it grounded in the perspective of the person receiving it, not the person providing it.

This is not to say, however, that differences should be ignored. It is important to respect the differences and acknowledge them by incorporating them into the life of the classroom, as well as the curriculum, so that learning is grounded in what is familiar to students.



Don Deshler, Ph.D.

Don Deshler, Ph.D., is the Director of the Center for Research on Learning (CRL) at the University of Kansas. Dr. Deshler’s expertise centers on adolescent literacy, learning strategic instruction, and instructional strategies for teaching content-area classes to academically diverse classes. He is the author of *Teaching Content to All: Evidence-Based Inclusive Practices in Middle and Secondary Schools*, a text which presents the instructional practices that have been tested and validated through his research at CRL.



How do we provide inclusive instruction?

Exploring recurring concepts allows students to make meaningful connections.
Prentice Hall
World History ▼

Make Connections

What does it mean to make connections? It means that as a teacher you need to be as concerned about understanding your students and what is important and meaningful to them as you are about understanding your content and how to teach it. Making connections means that students need to believe that what you want to teach is important and relevant to them and that you can and will help them learn. Every good teacher aspires to these goals and many teachers

successfully realize them. But as academic diversity among students grows in secondary schools, teachers need more support and more tools to be effective with all learners. Support can be gained, we believe, by thinking about a classroom as a learning community where teachers and students work together to ensure that everyone is learning. More tools become available with the implementation of teaching routines and learning strategies that make learning more accessible to more learners.

Understand what students already know

What students already know, or their “prior knowledge,” comes not only from what students have previously learned in school, but also from their lived experiences. Lived experience includes all the differences that students bring with them into the schools, such as culture, language, ethnic backgrounds, as well as previous learning successes or failures. Valuing and using the prior knowledge of students allows teachers to link new knowledge to what students already know, thereby making learning more meaningful for students.

It also allows students to construct new knowledge for themselves.

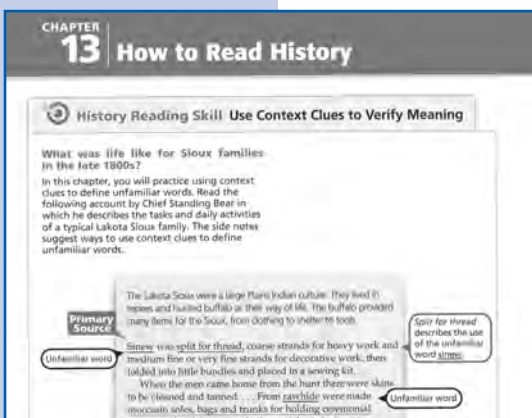
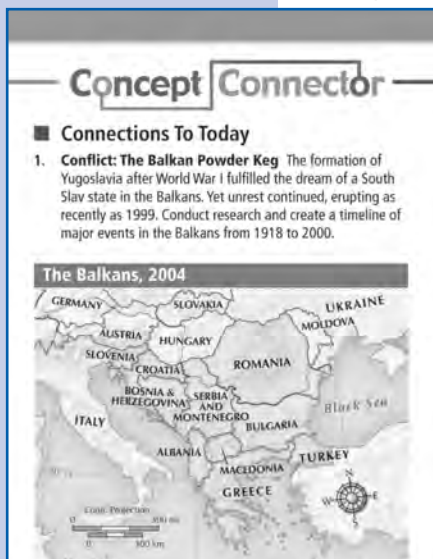
Teach learning strategies

Finally, students are more likely to make connections in learning the content in your class if they know how to learn. All good listeners use strategies to learn new things. Some students are better than others at developing strategies to learn. Inclusive teaching means that you have to take into account whether all your students are good strategic learners, and the only way to do this is to teach them—explicitly—how to use and develop learning strategies.

What is the result of differentiated instruction?

A learning community

Making connections and building a learning community in your classroom will establish an environment where learning, cooperation, and respect for differences are all valued. The “work” of this community is learning. Everyday practices and routines are based on cooperation in accomplishing this work, and the interests and learning needs of everyone in the community are taken seriously.



▲ Providing instruction in explicit reading strategies helps students learn.
America: History of Our Nation

Instructional Design Principles for Student and Teacher Materials

For Student Materials

Positive Design Features

1. Provide advance organizers at the beginning of a unit* of instruction and at critical junctures throughout the unit to reorient the students as to where they are in the overall learning sequence.
2. Provide scaffolded progressions throughout text (in the nature of questions asked, types of vocabulary presented, complexity of concepts presented).
3. Highlight overarching or big ideas in text units and provide sufficient exposure to a basic concept before additional concepts are presented.
4. Clearly delineate foundational background information at the beginning of a unit.
5. Provide multiple opportunities for review of critical content to enhance comprehension and retention throughout a unit of instruction.
6. Incorporate specific prompts for students to use strategies to enhance their learning such as predicting, comprehension monitoring, questioning, and summarizing.
7. Specify clear and explicit connections between the written text and graphics/illustrations.
8. Provide sufficient white space so students don't feel overwhelmed by text.
9. Employ the following principles in presenting and teaching new vocabulary:
 - Ensure that critical vocabulary words are highlighted and defined,
 - Define terms in parenthetical phrases or in context that relates to the subject matter in which the term will be read,
 - Provide multiple opportunities to use new words in varying contexts throughout the text.
10. Use standard, predictable formatting so location of critical chapter features can be readily located.

Negative Design Features

1. Failure to ensure that "modified" versions of texts are identical in appearance to "regular" versions of text (in terms of pictures, pages, and diagrams—placed identically).
2. Failure to ensure that students have multiple options for demonstrating their understanding and competence (e.g., orally, dramatically, graphically).
3. Failure to keep reading level consistent throughout the text.

Providing background knowledge shows students how what they are going to learn relates to information they already know.
America: History of Our Nation ▼

Background Knowledge After four years of bitter war, the Union finally had won the Civil War. Even though the fighting had ended, the nation remained divided. In this section, you will read of early plans for rebuilding national unity after the war.

Vocabulary Builder	
Use the information below and the following resources to teach the high-use words from this section. Resources: Teaching Resources, Unit 6; Teaching Resources, Skills Handbook	
High-Use Word	Definition and Sample Sentence
utilize, p. 825	vt. to put to practical use I utilized a new graphics program to make the sign.
confront, p. 825	vt. to face in opposition He confronted the student who had taken his book and asked her to return it.

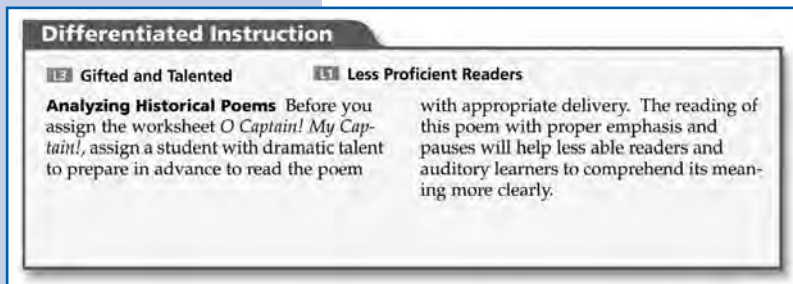
▲ *Teaching vocabulary helps students understand critical terms and new words.*
Prentice Hall
World History

Providing explicit guidelines includes offering specific strategies for modifying instruction. America: History of Our Nation ▼

For Teacher Materials

Positive Design Features

1. Provide explicit guidelines for ways for teachers to (a) model critical behaviors students are to learn, (b) provide scaffolded practice opportunities, (c) measure student progress and mastery, (d) employ strategies to reach students who fail to respond to standard lesson protocols, and (e) actively engage students in the learning process.
2. Incorporate systems for teachers to gather and use student performance data so their decision-making can be data driven.
3. Provide guidelines for how teachers should make the organizational structure of the content being taught explicitly clear to students.
4. Provide teachers with realistic timeframes that should be allotted to teach specific concepts and chunks of content (including suggestions for how to catch students up who have missed critical content through absenteeism).



Negative Design Features

1. Suggesting instructional strategies or interventions that lack sufficient research support.
2. Requiring teachers to do extra lesson planning to meet individual student needs (e.g., ELL students) without making it clear at the very beginning of the lesson that modifications will be required for these students.
3. Failure to clearly demonstrate how critical skills or content taught in one lesson should be integrated into and built upon in subsequent lessons.
4. Failure to provide sufficient materials for student practice and review of critical skills and content to ensure mastery.
5. Failure to include well-designed questions/probes for teachers to assess student understanding and mastery of critical content.
6. Failure to provide specific suggestions for ways to effectively present information so as to ensure active student engagement and responding.

**Note: The term "unit" throughout this document refers to sections of chapters, chapters, units, or section of texts.*

Don Deshler is the head of Prentice Hall's Differentiated Instruction Board. He assembled a distinguished panel of national experts with extensive experience in special needs, English language learners, less proficient readers, and gifted and talented students to serve on the board. This team informs Prentice Hall's approach to differentiated instruction and offers guidance on the development of new materials based on this approach. The instructional design principles listed above were generated by the Prentice Hall Differentiated Instruction Board.