**Differentiation in Literacy Development**

**Literacy:** Kindergarten and Elementary school is a crucial time period for students to develop their reading, writing and comprehension skills. In these younger years, students will begin to *learn to read* in preparation for the future in which they will *read to learn*. These literacy skills that they develop at this stage will be of fundamental use in their everyday life.

**The Issue:** Students are different from one another and the ways in which they develop their literacy skills contrast from one another. In a broad sense, we can look at the struggling students and the advanced learners in a specific grade. Some students may feel overwhelmed and unable to achieve the intended curriculum, as their literacy skills are under developed. While advanced learners may complete literacy tasks with ease and feel no challenge to push themselves to develop further. *Literacy is such a fundamental skill, how can we effectively ensure that each student succeeds to his or her full potential?*

**A solution? Differentiation:** Learning and understanding about students varying *backgrounds, experiences, interests,* and *readiness*. The teacher can apply this useful knowledge to help individuals develop their literacy skills to the best of his or her potential. *What* each student learns remains constant, *how* he or she learns varies.

**How do we differentiate?**

1. Know the content and curriculum well. Organize it in a way that will make sense to you and the students.
2. Create an environment in which the children can feel safe and comfortable. Establish individual relationships; build trust. Get to know the students’ interests and backgrounds.
3. Set and keep in mind the learning goals. What should children be able to read, write and comprehend by the end of the day/week/month/year?
4. Teach/Test/Re-teach. Students understand various content at various paces. Know where your students stand with reading, writing and comprehension. Notice what areas they are improving in and what they still struggle with.
5. Try a variety of differentiation methods. There are methods to differentiate in the way the *content* is delivered, the *process* in which the children practice, and the ways that they *produce* the knowledge they have learned. Notice what works and what does not work for the class and for individuals. Continuously push the students a bit further then their comfort zone.

\*4 & 5 are used interchangeably

**Ways to Differentiate within Literacy:**

* Reading materials at various levels
  + Allowing children to read individualized books allows them to be challenged at an appropriate level. They can also choose something that is of interest to them, so they can enjoy their own personal challenge.
* Meeting with small groups. Re-teach those that are struggling and extend the literacy skills for those that have achieved.
* Spelling vocabulary lists at readiness levels of students
  + In example of spelling tests, create ‘bonus’ words to challenge those that are advanced a bit further.
* Interest center’s
  + Perhaps at one center, children will make a web-diagram about the story’s characters. A different center may complete a written summary.
* Presenting ideas through both audio and visual means
* Give students options ways to express what they have read as long as it has the stated required elements
  + Puppet show, letter, skit, painting etc.
* Flexible grouping
  + Group by interest, learning-style, random, independent etc.
* Using rubrics that match and extend students various levels
  + When students can see detailed reports on how they were marked versus just a number, they can recognize their skills and specific areas in which they can improve.

**By using differentiation to develop literacy**, it helps the students conquer the content to their own abilities and become more self-aware as learners. The student may become more independent, motivated and focused as the learning is specified to their readiness, interests and learning style.

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