WHY IS DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION NECESSARY FOR AN EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM?

Effective teachers understand that students learn in a variety of ways and at a variety of rates, and they accommodate for student differences by adapting their strategies to meet learners' needs. Differentiation to maximize learning is the cornerstone of effective teaching, because it recognizes that “one lesson, one activity does not fit all”. Differentiated instruction is a way of teaching; it’s not a program or textbook. It requires teachers to know their students so they can provide each one with experiences and tasks that will improve their learning. It is through differentiated instruction that each student is ensured the opportunity to learn at the depth, complexity, and pace most suited for him or her.

Successful differentiated instruction requires basic structures be in place. Teachers that effectively differentiate instruction have a strong content knowledge and have identified what students need to know, understand, and do to master the standards. They consistently use a variety of data to identify student-learning needs and to drive instruction. Effective teachers also have established an efficient classroom management system with consistent rituals and routines, so students know what is expected of them in various classroom settings. Instructional planning, including well-organized materials and resources that can be accessed easily for smooth transitions between activities, is a critical component of quality differentiation.

Differentiated instruction doesn’t happen automatically. It takes time, effort, planning, and practice; thus requiring determined, motivated teachers. Rather than be overwhelmed by the amount of information, strategies, and options associated with differentiated instruction, teachers need to remember to “start small” by using one or two methods that fit best with what is already being done in the classroom. As teachers become comfortable and successful with one strategy, they should expand to include a new instructional method.