



From the Director . . .

Last month I talked about the lovely spring! That must have been before the spate of cold and rainy weather that has plagued us for much of May. What a delight to see the sunshine this past week! I join you all in hoping for more of the same.

We are approaching the end of another successful year. I would be remiss if I didn't pause to thank each of you for all of your efforts in ensuring the very best possible instruction for our students. I am especially grateful to all of the members of the Curriculum Improvement Teams for their hard work this year.

Math Leadership Cadre members planned and led professional development for their peers in March, and they have worked diligently throughout the year to revise and refine assessments as well as to create new assessments for various units of study. Their work will help all of us understand what our students know and are able to do.

The Science Curriculum Improvement Team spent the year developing the new science units that we will pilot in 2005-2006 as well as honing and refining the units that we piloted this year. K-8 teachers should be looking for some new units before school begins in the fall. This team also planned and led professional development for their colleagues! Well done!

The Language Arts Improvement Team has completed the difficult task of determining how to manage the many areas of language arts instruction and put all of that information into a usable format – particularly for the K-5 teachers, where so much of instruction involves skills acquisition. Children are learning to read and write in the earliest grades and make the transition to using reading and writing for learning before they leave elementary school. Several of our elementary teachers have worked with Michelle Steck to develop a template for the new curriculum, and many teachers will devote time this summer to working on the new curriculum. This work will continue through next year.

I thank all members of these three teams for their commitment and dedication to curriculum improvement, and look forward to our continued work together next year, when our fourth team – Social Studies, will get started.

Differentiating Instruction ~ Simple Strategies



One size does NOT fit all!

Keeping in mind that our students come to us with varying degrees of background knowledge, readiness, ability and interests, differentiating and/or providing students with choices is key. Does this mean that you should develop a separate set of activities for every child in your class? Absolutely and resoundingly “NO”! What it does mean is that we should make every effort to create two or three groups as we design our learning activities. These groups should be flexible in nature – sometimes reflecting ability; sometimes interests; sometimes learning preferences. For each group, develop activities that best meet their needs. If for example, you decide to group students according to their learning profiles: practical, analytical and creative, then you would design three sets of activities that tap those learning strengths. However, each set of activities are geared to the same set of goals. Begin by identifying what you want all students to know, understand and do.

So what does it look like in practice? Let's start with a strategy called “Tiering”. In tiered assignments, you begin by identifying what you want students to know, understand and be able to do. Then you create a set of activities that every student in your class could do. For certain students, this will be a “stretch”. Target the activities to those students. Then create a “cloned version” of the activities, but ratchet the level of difficulty or abstraction up a notch to stretch the next group in your class. Finally, create a third version that

Differentiating Instruction ~ Simple Strategies (continued)

will challenge your brightest students. Take for example the following History assignment/assessment:

Know: causes and effects of the Great Depression; programs of the New Deal; pros and cons of the New Deal.

Understand that: democratic societies use government for the common good to meet the changing conditions; government sets criteria and eligibility in social programs; social conditions such as unemployment, lack of education, health concerns, unskilled labor and language barriers determine the need for public assistance; the degree of governmental support for social programs causes controversy.

Do: Describe, discuss and/or show the causes and effects of the Great Depression and the New Deal.

Franklin Group

- Interview a person who remembers the Great Depression. Find out what life was like for this person and his/her family or friends. Based on your interview describe life in the depression.
- Make a poster illustrating the causes of the Great Depression.
- Make a poster that shows the three goals of the New Deal and the programs Roosevelt proposed for each goal.
- Make a word search puzzle using names and terms associated with the Great Depression and the New Deal.

Delano Group

- Interview a person who remembers the Great Depression. Find out what life was like for this person and his/her family or friends. Then pretend that you are the person and write a memoir in his or her voice.
- Create a political cartoon illustrating the effects of the New Deal on American culture.
- Make a collage of pictures, drawings, headlines, graphs and charts showing the economic problems of the Great Depression.
- Research the federal deficits and surpluses from 1930 to 2005; show these on a spreadsheet or poster.

Roosevelt Group

- Make a poster illustrating the causes of the Great Depression, the ways that the Depression affected Americans' lives and some of the remedies devised by the Federal Government.
- Write a dramatized debate between Herbert

Differentiating Instruction ~ Simple Strategies (continued)

Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt on the topic: Resolved, that the Federal Government should give direct aid to citizens during a severe depression.

- Create a crossword puzzle using names and terms associated with the Great Depression and the New Deal.
- Create a political cartoon that shows how American government today is either similar to or different from Roosevelt's New Deal.

Notice that the level of complexity of the tasks increases in each of the tiers, yet there is enough similarity between and among them to alleviate concerns that students may have about doing "different" work from others in their classes. Initially, you may get some questions. Remind students that everyone is different and in this class everyone will be challenged to maximize their potential.

Here's an example for use in a physics class:

Know: Basic Vocabulary (e.g. efficiency, force, velocity, mass, friction)

Understand: Aerodynamics are improved by proper manipulation of area, mass and friction.

Do: Construct objects that project themselves through space in the different directions as a demonstration of effective manipulation of the objects' area, mass and friction.

Hawking Group

- Design a paper airplane that flies for tricks
- Design a layered kite
- Design a pin wheel with the propellers tilted to create upward motion

Newton Group

- Design a paper airplane that flies for distance
- Design a box kite
- Design a pin wheel with the propellers tilted to create forward motion

Einstein Group

- Design a paper airplane that flies for hang time
- Design a diamond or triangular shaped kite
- Design a pin wheel with the propellers tilted to create backward motion

The key to differentiating instruction is to ensure that every student is challenged by the assignment, the learning activities and the assessment. The end result is increased engagement, motivation and learning for all students.