**Differentiation Strategies**

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# Abstract

Diversity of learning is continuously expanding as learning strategies are evolving and developing. As standards change and update over time, the importance of knowing the learners, understanding their learning strategies, learning new ways of differentiating the teaching and products produced by learners and educators. When understanding the roots of learning philosophy, students are provided a robust learning experience through differentiated learning.

*Keywords*: Curriculum, Instruction, Content, Differentiation

**Differentiated Strategies and Assessment**

*Title of Sample Lesson Plan:* United States History to 1865

*Topic:* Civil War: 1861-1865

*Grade Level:* 9-12

*Virginia Standard of Learning:* USI.9: The student will apply social science skills to understand the causes, significant events, and effects of the Civil War by e) describing critical developments in the war, including the location of significant battles

**Differentiating by Readiness**

**Background**

***Proposed Background:***

This lesson is planned toward the end of the school year and should indicate the student's abilities. Throughout the year, students will have developing independent, interdependent, and dependent products throughout the school year that includes team building, collaborations, and various study groups. Students will need a basic understanding of the events leading to the initiation of the Civil War. This assessment will cover significant events during the conflict, such as the firing on Ft. Sumter that began the war, the First Battle of Bull Run, the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Students will also understand the influences that lead to the signing of surrender by General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox to end the conflict.

**Strategies**

***Content Strategies****:*

When this unit begins, students are expected to have the basic information needed to study this unit. Examples include events leading up to the Civil War conflict, state's rights, and African slaves. Each student will be provided bullet points and expand on those points by taking notes to gain a detailed understanding of the objective. An instructor will ensure that students highlight vital issues, terminologies, definitions, and people. Also, key people and battles will be discussed in more detail.

A second content strategy used would be the KWL model. Greenwood (2019) describes the model to answer three basic questions 1) What do I know? 2) What do I want to learn? 3)What did I learn? Each student can chart their answers to these questions individually and amongst their small groups. This strategy allows the instructor to assess the learner's previous knowledge of a content area and focus on the gaps. For example, suppose students already mastered the content of the events leading up to the conflict. In that case, that time can be more focused on another occasion or critical person that may not be taught.

***Process Strategies:***

When each student and group completes the discussion and assignment, the class will come back together and discuss their findings. Trends and common knowledge points will be discussed in class as a brief review. Using the KWL model, students will have ownership of their learning. Students can use the KWL chart in their daily journals. The teacher can provide a paper copy of the chart to put in the students' binders. If they have the technology, they can use their digital notetaking programs to brainstorm and organize their thoughts and send them to the class dropbox or cloud.

As mentioned before, collaboration is a significant part of the learning experience. The use of gamification strategies such as using teams can increase the collaborative experience. Gamification is defined as "incorporating game-based mechanics or behaviors in a non-gaming environment" (Buckley and Doyle, 2017). Students can be placed in learning teams based on their strengths and abilities to enhance their learning and produce a quality product. Students will be working on independent, dependent, and interdependent projects that will incorporate teamwork and collaboration throughout the school year.

***Product Strategies:***

Two product strategies would identify a student's readiness and knowledge of the content. First, I would use the KWL chart to assess the students' base knowledge in the classroom. Next, the students will fill these charts out individually. Then, they will come back to class the next day to discuss these topics in their respective learning groups. Once these answers are discussed and compiled, the students will have an open-class discussion to determine where the students can fill in the knowledge gaps. This technique allows the students to take ownership of their learning experience. This technique gives students ease of discussing the material without the potential implications of test anxiety some students have (Roblyer and Hughes, 2019, p. 147)

Another product that can be used to determine readiness is to provide the students a pre-test to assess their level of knowledge of the subject of the Civil War. This pre-test gives an idea of areas of focus in the curriculum that students need more comprehension assistance. With technology, creating computer-based assessments have been becoming more popular and easy to distribute. Roblyer and Hughes (2019) highlights computer-assisted testing (CAT) can give instant feedback and streamlined review to student knowledge of a subject (pp. 146-147)

**Differentiating by Interest**

**Background**

***Proposed Background****:*

Today's student body is widely diverse in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and physical and intellectual limitations. Some students may find history boring, so the instructor may need to be creative when presenting material and requesting products from their students. It is important to provide acceptable assignment choices and clear expectations of the final product while keeping students' attention and motivation. Establishing practical classroom management skills gives students trust in the material and the reason to complete the task (Alsawaier, 2018).

**Strategies**

***Content Strategies:***

It is ideal to know what the students are interested in learning. As mentioned earlier, the KWL model can assist in what the student is also interested in learning. For example, some students may be interested in the military history of the Civil War and will study the tactics used on various battlefields. On the other hand, some students may show interest in the key figures of the Union and Confederate Armies. Having the students learn within their interests can make them subject matter experts to assist their fellow students in learning. Again, this allows the student to take ownership of their learning experience.

Students can also view a virtual museum tour of the National Civil War Museum. They can view artifacts and learn of historical battles and key figures during the conflict. Students can also learn the events that led to the Civil War conflict in 1861 and the effects upon the Confederate surrender in 1865. The museum was designed to present history with no bias toward the Union and Confederate Armies (National Civil War Museum – Virtual Tour, n.d.). Students can also check into the list of various battles and campaigns in Virginia as well.

***Process Strategies:***

Students are encouraged to locate various resources from online libraries, virtual museums, and textbooks. In addition, those who have language barriers and need academic supports would receive assistance based on the student's IEP. Such technologies could include text-to-speech programs, books, audio, and documents for the legally blind. Closed-captioned media for the hearing impaired are examples of other supports (Roblyer and Hughes, 2019, p. 318).

Another strategy is to promote team building based on the interests and abilities of the team members. For example, in a class of 20 students, you can divide the students into five students. Some students may be more comfortable with technology to handle the technology portions of the assignment. One student may take great notes and is designated the note taker of the discussions. You may have one excellent student at public speaking. You can provide a voice to the student who isn't comfortable with public speaking but can do excellent research and put the information together. Individually, what the student would have a significant weakness in could be filled in by their team member to provide a quality product.

***Product Strategies:***

One product that could be an excellent collaborative experience for the student is creating a PowerPoint presentation of one of the significant conflict battles of the Civil War. Using the team roles mentioned in the content strategies, members can choose a battle, research, take notes and combine the members' team skills into the product. Students with technology experience can put the presentation together and have the speaker narrate the presentation or film them presenting for the PowerPoint slides as a video for YouTube as the assessment (Roblyer and Hughes, 2019, p. 129).

Another product students can produce similar to a PowerPoint presentation; students can reenact a battle or display military tactics using various videography programs. Because most students have Smartphones with cameras, students can use the Camera feature to film their reenactment. Upon filming, students can use different video editing software to edit and piece together the video. YouTube, owned by Google, has a Creator Studio that allows video editing and effects. Apple users have iMovie that also carries similar visual products and tools. If students do not have the equipment to complete a video, the school may have equipment that the students may use. It is important to note that instructors need to identify the abilities and technologies readily available to students when considering these assignments (Roblyer and Hughes, 2019, p. 259).

**Differentiating by Student Profile**

**Background**

***Proposed Background:***

The development of learning styles has been studied extensively, covering various learning techniques that students internally use to comprehend material for retention and practical application. It is essential to get to know the students. Do they have special needs? Do they need assistive technology or resources to adapt their learning? What is allowed to be used following a student's IEPs, and 504? Orlich et al. (2017) stress the importance of considering what tools are available to enhance the student's learning (p. 66).

**Strategies**

***Content Strategies:***

Students can conduct their research through multimedia such as YouTube videos, documentaries, and online guided tours or physical tours if geographically close. In addition, students can utilize their textbooks for general information and online libraries for more in-depth understanding. Finally, through collaboration amongst their peers, students can come back together to their respective learning groups, compile and report their findings.

When discussing various subjects within the unit, students are free to free write and doodle their notes to understand them, providing engagement to the material. In addition, this form of brainstorming allows the student to express their creativity for future assignments and products (Orlich et al., 2017, p. 257).

***Process Strategies:***

Having students in teams or small groups allows practical communication skills students need in and out of the classroom. How discussions can go depends on the group and their abilities. The conversations do not have to be about the material itself but how to communicate the group's needs to complete the task. Using group discussions to learn collaboration, teamwork, and problem-solving is a lesson that extends beyond the curriculum. With clear rules, discussion groups allow students to express their thoughts without judgment and encourages more discussion.

These are questions needed to be asked when approaching an assignment. Orlich et al. (2017) discuss that if no two people thought precisely alike, it would be fair to assume that learning styles would not be similar either (p.165). Understanding learners' strengths and weaknesses in and out of the classroom allows the instructor to motivate learners to engage in the content. Once you assess the various strategies of learners, then the instructor can adapt the assignments to maximize the overall engagement in the curriculum (Wiggins and McTigue, 2012, p. 89).

***Product Strategies:***

Journaling and notetaking can provide a significant part of learning. Journaling, doodling, and free-writing ideas allow students to organize their thoughts before putting the final product on paper or media. Using charts similar to the KWL model enables the student to brainstorm to identify subjects that interest them. Journaling will also provide different approaches to take on the assignment and present the information to engage the learner.

They can have a student reflect on the learning process and annotate in their own words. Questions instructors should ask their students to reflect on (1) what learning objectives did they meet? 2) What challenges did they face, and how did they overcome them? 3) Did the student meet the assignment's standards, and where do they need to improve? These questions students should be answering when completing a final product (Sackstein, 2016, p. 99).

**Assessment Response**

The assignment is going to be a three-part assignment. First, students will be placed in groups of interest in learning. These groups will be 1) Civil War Battles in the State of Virginia, 2) Key People during the Conflict, and 3) Military Tactics. Then, using the KWL model (see attachment, Slide 1), students will complete the KWL chart on day one and meet with their peers the next day to combine their answers (See Attachment, Slide 2). Finally, on day two, they will choose one subject within their interest group for approval by the instructor. Finally, they will provide a PowerPoint presentation discussing what they learned with the class.

Students will discuss and designate team roles based on strengths and abilities in research, presentation, technologies, and collaboration to complete the project. Each team member will reflect on the lessons learned from the assignment and what they accomplished upon completing the project. Including in the review, students will have to write about three things they learned from the other teams in the class.

For the assessment, I chose the project-based learning approach. This learning model allowed the use of tools such as the KWL model for the brainstorming portion of the writing process. Especially for students who may have difficulty organizing their thoughts, such as students with ADHD and other barriers. As previously mentioned, class discussions and peer groups also enhance the learning objectives. This task makes student peers the subject matter experts of a particular subject while promoting multidisciplinary skills such as social skills, peer instruction, and tutoring (Orlich, 2017, p. 264). At the same time, they are drawing on a student's strengths while challenging their peers and fosters a culture of creativity (Cooper and Murphy, 2016, p. 17).

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