

Chapter 1

Diversity, Disability, and Addressing the Varied Needs of Learners: Guiding Material Design and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a thorough examination of international and U.S. legal and educational foundations which justify instructional variation and diversification for all students, particularly for those with disabilities. With the exploration of various instructional frameworks, objective setting, methods and strategies, materials, and outcomes assessment, the reader develops an understanding of instructional diversification and why it is important for students with and without disabilities. The diverse educational approaches of differentiated instruction, multi-sensory instruction, Bloom's taxonomy of learning, understanding by design, and universal design for learning are presented and explained.

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the importance and role that hand-made materials of all kinds can play in achieving greater access to instruction and learning for students who have special needs or disabilities, and to fully grasp how such materials can be used by educators to develop diversified and accessible learning environments for all students, it is critical that the foundations for diversification of instruction are explored. The term “hand-made materials” can, and should, be linked to the idea of customization of materials to address and support varied learning needs. While it is easier to recognize the differences that exist between students with disabilities and students who are not disabled, it is also important to understand that a broad diversity of capabilities and needs exists within and among areas of disability, and that the approaches and tools needed to support such diversity vary greatly. Various frameworks can guide educators in their planning for diversification of instruction, by offering different lenses through

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which they can understand individual differences. At the same time, it is important to consider the ways in which our varied students' abilities, interests and needs overlap, so that curriculum and instructional planning can leverage students' strengths, support development in areas of weakness, and offer many varied paths for students to pursue learning and to demonstrate what they have learned.

This chapter begins by building the reader's understanding of legal issues relating to diversity and disability from an international perspective and presents a context by which readers can consider the diversity within the field of special education and disability studies. Specific frameworks are introduced which provide several different perspectives on how educators might consider planning in their learning environments to address students' diverse abilities and needs. Finally, specific ideas and recommendations are made for the diversification of strategies, materials and outcomes, mainly through the lens of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The integration of hand-made or customized materials is addressed through several examples, as the framework of UDL is further explored.

Objectives of this chapter include:

- Understand the legal and educational foundations for diversification of instruction.
- Learn five current frameworks for use in diversifying instruction.
- Identify ways to diversify learning goals, strategies, materials, and assessments.

BACKGROUND

With broad proliferation in the use of technology around the globe over the past 10 to 15 years, the world seems to have gotten much smaller. It is now possible to communicate with persons on the other side of the world, face-to-face, using virtual tools in real time. Barriers of distance have clearly fallen - however the fact that we are more closely connected digitally around the world helps us to be even more cognizant of diversity - diversity of languages, diversity of cultures, diversity of beliefs, diversity of needs, and diversity of learning styles, to name but a few. Diversity is truly the norm, and not the exception.

We live in an increasingly diverse world – diversity of populations, of backgrounds, and of experiences. In the fields of education and special education, as our awareness of our own diversity grows, teachers must educate themselves in order to be prepared to meet the challenges of a diverse and inclusive classroom - one that is filled with students for whom diversity is the norm, and for whom diverse learning frameworks, strategies, materials, and outcome expectations will need to be used, in order for every student to benefit. Achieving education benefit for each student, especially those with special needs or disabilities, is at the foundation of current educational laws in the United States (U.S. DOE, 1975; 2004) and around the world (UNESCO, 1990; UNESCO, 1994; UNESCO 2009).

Continued growth of inclusive educational settings in the USA (Osgood, 2005; Daren, 2018) and increasingly around the world means that it is incumbent upon all educators to understand the capabilities, needs and gifts of ALL students, and to develop a mindset of belief in and emphasis on equity and accessibility of learning experiences for *every* student. To be even more specific, educators in today's world needs to be prepared to apply the widest range of diversified strategies, tools, and materials to reduce barriers to learning for students with varied needs. In this chapter, diversity and diversification in education will be explored from a variety of perspectives: diversity within and among those who are identified as experiencing disability; diversification of educational frameworks that support variation; diversification of instructional strategies and materials; and diversification of outcomes possible to

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