

Enrichment News

Wenatchee School District Enrichment Program

Mission: To find and nurture talent in students by providing and supporting opportunities for them to pursue their interests at an appropriate pace and level of complexity, and regular opportunities to work with students of similar abilities.

Kari DeMarco, Editor, 662-9047 ~ demarco.k@mail.wsd.wednet.edu ~ Fall 2009



Differentiation

We all know each of our kids is different. As parents and as educators, we know students are different in many ways, like each snowflake is different when studied closely. We all know that one size does not fit all in education. But when teachers have about 30 students per class, how can they differentiate instruction? Isn't the workday long enough for these teachers without designing separate lesson plans for each student?

Definitely! But "separate lesson plans for each student" is not the expectation. A teacher can still employ differentiation *and* have a life. Working smarter not harder, a teacher can actually shift some of the "differentiation lesson planning" to individual students and groups of students. Rather than feeling put upon, these students will likely be thankful for the trust and choice (within bounds). They will also grow as learners, taking responsibility for their own education.

Students can make choices that meet their own needs, such as which novel to read, who to have as a reading partner, which spelling "demons" they need to work on next, whether to go for an A or a B on the teacher's rubric, how they would like to proceed when they have "compacted out" of material they already know, produce test questions or learning activities, not just consume them, etc. As Carol Ann Tomlinson said (*Organizational Leadership*, ASCD, 2008), "Differentiated instruction is a way of thinking about teaching. Certainly one of its goals is increased student mastery of essential content and skills. But few students will become dedicated learners because their standardized test scores increase. Differentiation, fully understood, is concerned with developing not only content mastery but also student efficacy and ownership of learning."

And students needn't come up with every differentiation activity. Without any or much extra time, a teacher can structure flexible learning groups based on readiness, or interest, or learning style. Teachers can allow students to go at their own accelerated pace on occasion, or they can tier the complexity level. Activities, discussions, and assignments can be open-ended more of the time, rather than one-right-answer. Computer websites, programs and games can be used as extensions. Think-pair-share can be utilized to cement learning and allow for personal expression. Socratic seminars can be part of the lesson so students of varying abilities can engage at the level that suits them. (And heck, as renowned consultant and educator Bertie Kingore says, "Whoever talks about the material the most, learns the most, so that better not be the teacher!")

It has been dawning on me lately how exciting this educational era is. Sweeping some of the most progressive, successful school districts in the country—including our own—are two ideas with great potential to better serve *all* students. These ideas, in educational parlance, are PLC (Professional Learning Communities) and RTI (Response to Intervention). Both of these systems start with the focus on what we want all students to know and be able to do. Then we measure how well the individual students are doing at meeting said learning targets. At this point, differentiation is the logical next step. What to do with those who didn't understand the essential learning yet? And what to do with the other students, meanwhile, to ensure they are learning something new as well?

RTI is a special education-related philosophy. It urges that classroom teachers are the first line of defense and can serve most kids most of the time in helping them learn the key concepts. Less often, more interventions and interventionists will be necessary. Even less frequently, for even fewer students,

special education services will be necessary in a resource room or pull-out model. This Pyramid of Intervention (POI) model emphasizes frequent, universal screening (formative assessments) and quick response to learning needs.

I am not the only one, it seems, who sees RTI as an opportunity for highly capable students right along with the struggling learners. PLC and RTI are common sense tools that will help meet *all* kids' learning needs--differentiation at its best! The Georgia Department of Education recommends applying RTI concepts to high achieving students: "By providing instructional interventions prior to identifying students for specialized educational services, the RTI/POI process allows high-achieving students access to differentiated curriculum, flexible pacing, cluster grouping, and other universal interventions available to all students in the regular classroom." I like this way of thinking because it places equal value on *all* learners. *Each* child will get to work on his/her next learning goal. Although there may be students at one end or the other of the continuum who are formally identified for more intense focus, the usual, day-to-day way of operating is to monitor progress and serve the needs right there, as soon as possible, in the "regular" classroom. The same student might need intervention one week, catch up, and receive extensions the following week. And vice-versa.

As Tomlinson wrote, "Differentiated instruction is student-aware teaching. It is guided by the premise that schools should maximize student potential, not simply bring students to an externally established norm on a test. To grow as much and as rapidly as possible, students must not only learn essential content, but also increasingly take charge of their own lives as learners."

So you see, differentiation requires more of a *paradigm shift* than it does an "extra shift."

Gift Ideas

Are you looking for a gift that is worth more than it costs? That will engage the heart, hands, and mind of your youngster? The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) compiles a list of such items every year. Check out *Tools of the Trade: 2009 NAGC Holiday Toy and Game List* at http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/PHP/PHP_Article_Archive/Toy_Lists/PHP_Sept09ToyList.pdf

Important Enrichment Dates

Nov. 2—suggested turn-in date for WHS Academic Challenge verification forms

Nov. 6—Math is Cool Competition, Spokane, for 7th and 8th grade

Nov. 18-21—inexpensive enrichment activity: bring your children to "The King and I" at WHS

Dec. 6—Math is Cool Masters, Moses Lake, for 7-12th grade

Talent Search

Parents of gifted students may or may not want more testing opportunities and acknowledgement for their children. If you do, Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth offers this service and others for a fee. Check it out at www.cty.jhu.edu. If you decide to proceed, call Kari DeMarco at 662-9047, or e-mail demarco.k@mail.wsd.wednet.edu for qualifying test scores and the school code for your student.

Thought-provoking Quote

"We live in a technological age where every study shows that the more knowledge you have as a worker, and the more knowledge workers you have as an economy, the faster your incomes will rise. Therefore, the centerpiece of our stimulus, the core driving principle, should be to stimulate everything that makes us smarter and attracts more smart people to our shores. That is the best way to create good jobs." ~Thomas L. Friedman, author of *The World is Flat*

The Wenatchee School District complies with all federal and state rules and regulations and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, sexual orientation, including gender identity, disability, familial status, marital status or age. This holds true for all staff and for students who are interested in participating in educational programs and/or extracurricular school activities. Inquiries regarding compliance and/or grievance procedures may be directed to RCW Officer and ADA Coordinator Ms. Lisa Turner. Issues related to 504 should be directed to Mr. Chet Harum, Administrator for Student and Support Services.