

Exercise 6.1

Questions for Teachers About Differentiating Instruction Based on Student Interest

Respond to the following questions. After you finish, review your responses and reflect on whether you should consider making any changes to your instruction to respond more effectively to students' varied interests. Building administrators can use this activity at a faculty meeting to discuss the school's progress toward differentiating instruction in response to student interests. The questions could also provide a framework for planning professional development and helping teachers incorporate differentiation based on student interest into their instructional plans.

1. Have you clearly articulated the knowledge, understanding, and skills for the unit or lesson?
2. Do you ensure students are clear about the knowledge, understanding, and skills as they do interest-based tasks so each task focuses on what is essential about the lesson or unit?
3. Have you thought about potential high-interest areas in your subject or unit?
4. Have you invited students to contribute interest-based ideas for exploration during a unit?
5. Have you built interest-based options into varied aspects of the curriculum?
6. Have you developed a narrative for your subject or unit—a story to help students make sense of the content and find it memorable?
7. Are you aware of the various cultural backgrounds of students in your classes? Do you understand them well enough to have a sense of what is relevant and interesting to them?
8. Do you look for and provide examples of use of the content by a variety of individuals in a variety of contexts likely to be of interest to students?

9. Have you developed and administered a student-interest survey?
10. Do you listen to student conversations and engage students in conversations about their interests?
11. Do you have a systematic way of recording what you hear so you can develop and draw on an increasing sense of what captures students' interest?
12. Do you use what you learn about student interests to inform your instructional planning?
13. Do you consider critical readiness needs in planning interest-based assignments?
14. Do you use examples from students' lives and interests to help them move from familiar to more complex applications and understandings?
15. Do you use student interests to help correct student deficit areas and enhance student proficiency areas?
16. Do you make time to share your interests with students?
17. Have you looked for ways to use contemporary technologies as teaching and learning tools?
18. Do you plan for both similar and dissimilar interest-based groups as part of each unit?
19. Do you use strategies such as sidebar studies, expert groups, learning centers, jigsaws, independent studies, anchor activities, and other approaches that invite attention to student interests?

20. Do you provide interest-based work options to students, as appropriate, and invite them to propose interest-based options as well?
21. Do you provide clear guidelines for work and quality when students are doing interest-based assignments so they are prepared to succeed?
22. Have you developed classroom routines and procedures that support students in working with varied tasks and in varied group configurations?
23. Have you prepared students to work effectively with and contribute to the refinement of those routines?
24. Do you use student work time to meet with individuals and small groups about interests and interest-based assignments?