

DIFFERENTIATING THE CURRICULUM

Just as we all have unique fingerprints, every child within the walls of a classroom is distinctive. As an individual, each student has varying strengths and weaknesses across all areas of the curriculum. Therefore, as a teacher, I need to use my knowledge of the abilities of the students in my class, to plan teaching and learning activities that are suitable to their next point of need.

For example, if I were to plan a Maths lesson based around the topic of skip counting, I may need to take into account that there are students in the class whose next point of need is to skip count by 5s, 2s and 3s. However, this is just the starting point! Amongst the students counting by 5s: some might be counting from zero, others could be counting from any two-number but still on sequence (35, 40, 45), whilst others may be counting from any two-digit number off sequence (38, 43, 48). There may also be a similar situation with the students counting by 2s and 3s. I could therefore potentially have students at nine or more different points of need for a single lesson.

I can have everyone in the class skip counting and even doing the same task if I choose. However to successfully differentiate the curriculum to cater for each child, it is necessary for me to have a good understanding in two different areas. I need to have a sound knowledge of where my students are at with their learning and also where they are headed.

I can gather information about where my students are at with their learning formally, through testing, or informally, using observation, questioning, etc. However, knowing where they are headed necessitates that I have a solid understanding of the particular learning pathway that is being taught. This knowledge enables me to move each child forward – onto their next point of need – so that they can achieve success with their learning and build upon their previous understandings.

As a teacher, if I know where my students are in their learning and where they are headed to next, I am able to successfully tweak learning tasks and differentiate the curriculum to cater for individuals. This enables all the students in my class to experience success and to move forward in their learning.