

How To Create a Differentiated Classroom Without the Headache

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The Rules

1. Keep it simple
2. It's all about choice
3. it's okay to relinquish control every once in a while
4. The more you do it, the easier it will be
5. You define the parameters, they get to show you their style

My favourites

- Student Choice Assignment - let students choose their best work to turn in for a given assignment. You define what counts for a grade, they define pick what gets graded. You get to find out how well they can do.
- Hexagons - separate vocabulary into categories and have students draw a hexagon (or shape of your choice) for each category. For the quiz, give them a list of the most important vocabulary words and let them choose one to write and draw a picture of for each category. You can see their interests and what they want to learn about.
- Timed Writes - after reading and/or telling a story together, and circling vocabulary and grammar repeatedly, give students a specified amount of time (start with 5 minutes and go up as needed) to write. Tell them to write whatever they remember, however little or large. At the end, they count their words and record it. You get to see where their skills and weaknesses really are, and so do they!
- Only half of the story - separate information into bits (e.g. pictures, story pieces, etc). Give each group something different, or vary so that no two groups next to each other have the same thing. Do the assignment, but then let them present/talk. See how the information differs and allow students to ask each other questions. They will get to learn from each other!
- English as a last resort - when using the target language, resort to English last. First, give a synonym or antonym. Second, describe unknown words in the target language. Third, call up a student and act it out. Fourth, draw a picture. Then, and only then, and only if necessary, use English. You will hit most of the learning styles and 99 out of 100 times, not need the English at all.

Resources

1. <http://www.netc.org/focus/challenges/instruction.php> -- lays out some good thoughts on differentiation. Gives lots of generalised ideas that can apply to much of what we do.
2. <http://whatedsaid.wordpress.com/2012/03/31/10-ways-to-differentiate-learning/> -- a blog post that hits a lot of what I think is important. Could be a great starting place!
3. http://www.internet4classrooms.com/links_grades_kindergarten_12/tips_for_classroom_differentiated_instruction.htm -- great source of links to sample activities and ways to differentiate exit activities
4. <http://www.help4teachers.com/samples.htm> -- sample lessons from many areas (where I got my idea for the student choice)

Remember, this can be fun for you too!