

DIFFERENTIATION STRATEGIES/TIPS FOR TEACHING ARTISTS

Differentiation Strategies: “Instructional approaches that respond to individual student needs and strengths to maximize student learning and success”¹. As experienced and dynamic teaching artists, this is likely all familiar. This document is intended as a reminder and a support.

Classrooms will always have children with a variety of learning needs. Teacher education includes studying ways to “differentiate” learning so that *all students* can access the curriculum including those with learning challenges such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, recent immigrants, ELL, blindness, and hearing impaired. This list also includes students who experience trauma, past or current, and those living in extreme poverty, as well as those dealing with homelessness, food insecurity, and mental health issues, all with symptoms that can range in severity from day to day. Clearly teacher education requires skills on how to *read* a room! We know teachers work hard to get to know their students. They will be your best resource for understanding the current needs in the classroom.

This spring we witnessed the stark inequities that came from the sudden switch to remote learning and the uncomfortable reminder of racism in our country. Teachers may be looking at their curriculum through a new lens, one of equity, accessibility, and race. You may hear the acronym “DEI” often. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion consultant Verna Myers explains that *diversity* is receiving an invitation to a dance, *equity* is possessing the resources to attend, and *inclusion* is being asked to dance.

(<https://www.nais.org/magazine/independent-school/fall-2018/using-a-social-justice-framework-to-guide-diversity,-equity,-and-inclusion-work/>)

As a Side x Side teaching artist, having brief and socially distanced contact with your classroom, you will need to keep in mind the students you will be working with and their specific needs. Here are some suggestions:

Get as much information as possible ahead of time.

- Talk with your teacher about learning differences and modify instruction to meet varying needs of students.
 - Keep in mind that a large number of elementary students are undiagnosed at an early age. Trust your gut and make modifications where you see them being helpful.
 - Even though we are not in the same room, the hurdles to participation and learning still exist and may be greater remotely. (talk with your teacher)

Create a predictable pattern for your time together with a beginning, middle and end.

- This helps every student, and particularly those with challenges. Start your project with a beginning, middle and end routine.
 - Start with ice breakers (check with staff for ideas if needed).

¹ Fountain, H. (2014). Differentiated instruction in art. Worcester, MA: Davis.
<https://www.davisart.com/Portal/K-12-Curriculum/Differentiated-Instruction-inArt-DIGITAL-133421.aspx>



- Use closing rituals and reflection. Small moments of reflection help cement learning (See Pocket Guide to Reflection in TA resources).
- Remember **Beginning**, **Middle** and **End!** Think of it like a piece of music or a fabulous meal. All the stages are important.

Use diverse resources tailored to the students in the class.

- Source culturally diverse books, to use as examples with artworks, as well as art materials and techniques. Try this resource: [Diverse Book Finder](#)

Always present instruction/resources verbally, written and visually, and multiple times.

- If the teacher is able, provide translation for written material or ASL if needed.
- If using a video for demonstration, turn on closed captioning.
- Some students may be working with support staff. Be sure support staff understand the directions as well. (talk with your teacher)

Adjust timelines to provide additional time for students with varying abilities to complete work.

- This may mean building in an extra session. Don't be afraid to ask your teacher for time if you perceive hurdles.

Modify tools and materials for use by students with varying abilities and understanding.

- Don't assume all students know how to use the materials you provide. Some may never have had access to simple supplies.
 - Consider left handed scissors, smaller paint brushes, or thick pencils with grips.

Provide varying means through which students can express what they have learned.

- As artists, this seems simple, but sometimes even the most open assignment can seem challenging. Flexibility is key. As artists, you are problem solving/solution making masters!
 - Provide options. If a student is unable to illustrate their book, have them take photos instead and paste in their prints.
 - Some materials can be triggering or uncomfortable to touch. Offer gloves.
 - Provide opportunities for students challenged with writing to present their work orally, or record with video.
 - If a student is struggling with too many options, help them narrow down choices.

Encourage students with high ability to modify their work, capturing greater levels of complexity. Or encourage students to explore various subtopics within the project.

Have students work in groups with defined jobs, allowing for those students with varying writing and verbal abilities to share thoughts/opinions.

- If using Zoom or Google, try using breakout rooms to give students 'space' to work collaboratively.

If at any time, you have questions about differentiation, arts integration, or core content, or you just need support, reach out to a Side x Side team member. We are always here for you. You are what make Side x Side happen!

Additional resources: <https://www.edglossary.org/differentiation/>