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SUPPORTING AND OPTIMIZING STUDENT LEARNING

Abstract:

Supporting students of all ages is paramount within the field of education. Teaching professionals are tasked with addressing the learning needs of a broad range of learners, while maintaining standards and norms set by their institutions and other academic governing bodies. This requires educators to be creative in producing instruction that prepares students for success, which includes tailored individual supports designed to enhance academic attainment and emotional well-being. As Rapp (2014) notes, “No two students are alike in their thought process, learning styles, abilities, and interests (p. 2). As such, this requires well-trained special education educators to be aware of individual learning styles and preferences, connecting students’ previous educational and life experiences in meaningful ways, and being mindful of the nature of their ability and disability (Chu & Garcia, 2018).

Differentiated Instruction intersects with the basic principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in several ways. Adaptations and supplemental supports are at the core of individualized experiential scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) and ensure that regardless of the students’ learning strengths and cognitive skills, optimal learning experiences are available. Optimized educational outcomes for exceptional learners and their peers target unique learning needs that are expressed in the classroom setting. Differentiated Instruction also is recognized as an evidence-based best practice in education and is highly effective when it is actively implemented in Tier One, Tier Two, and Tier Three of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model (Walker-Dalhouse, Risko, Esworthy, Grasley, Kaisler, & McIlvain, 2009). While teachers are often familiar with the term, Differentiated Instruction, sometimes implementing strategies in the nuanced context of the classroom is challenging.

In this presentation, we will illustrate the fundamentals of Differentiated Instruction through the application of actual case studies and outcome data. We will also provide a variety of targeted strategies options that are considered best practices in enhancing the learning of all students in the educational setting.

Keywords:

Differentiated Instruction; Student Supports

JEL Classification: D83, I21, I23