FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

Anchor Activities
February 2010

RATIONALE

As teachers, we constantly strive to reach each student and help develop his or her knowledge and skills. We know that our students do not contain the same set of skills or abilities and may not be reached by one set way of teaching. This is the reasoning behind using differentiated instruction in the classroom. Differentiated instruction is an approach whereas a teacher enters the classroom "with the dual goals of honoring each student's learning needs and maximizing each student's learning capacity" (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003, p. 3).

Using Anchor Activities is a great way to apply differentiated instruction to activities that go beyond the normal mode of instruction. Anchor activities are additional activities that students can do that "are purposeful activities that extend and review skills. They also deepen student understanding of content and enrich the skills students need to acquire" (Sandy Valley Local Schools, n.d.). These activities should coincide with the content area or thematic unit rather than activities that can just take up time or that are seen as "busy work". Anchor activities aid in differentiation by creating choices for students depending on their skill level and interests. Benefits of anchor activities include the following:

- Giving students responsibility and a feeling of accomplishment
- Harboring students' interests in the subject matter
- Students gain more detailed knowledge of the subject matter
- Have student work at their own pace and abilities
- Creates a better environment and use of time during transitions
- Provides teacher with the ability to work one on one or with small groups
- Reaches to the multiple intelligences

HOW TO USE THE STRATEGY

 There are many variations to using Anchor Activities in the classroom. For this reason we give examples for each step.

Create Activities

To begin**,** create a set of activities or projects that coincide with the content area where the activities range for different skill levels as well as interests. To incorporate all students' abilities and interests, create the activities based upon Garner's Multiple Intelligences. Some examples are included to show the breadth of activities that can come from one subject matter and how to differentiate the activities. Students can also have the option of creating their own projects. It must be approved by the teacher before they begin and must be appropriate for their skill level and the subject matter.

Introduce Activities

Once these activities have been created, introduce the idea of independent activities to the students. Describe your expectations, the tasks, the appropriate times to work on the activities, and the due date. The appropriate times for students to work on the activities should be when there is time between subjects or when they find they have finished all their coursework before others in the class. The teacher may create a day or time at the end of the day for all students to work on the activity to give those who rarely finish early

the opportunity to get their anchor activity done (Jarvis, 2003).

Creating Contracts

Once the students have picked (or created upon approval from the teacher) the desired activity, the students will create a contract. The contract should be agreed upon by both the student and the teacher. The contract is a great way to set the goals, the timeline, and the due date of the activity. Throughout the time of the activity, student-teacher conferences should be made based on the contract. The conferences will not only track the progress of the activity, but it gives the students time to ask questions and discuss what they are learning thus far. We have provided both a blank student contract and an example to further use and understanding.

Anchor Activities Handouts

Blank Template Contract

Example Contract

Anchor Activities Example
Intermediate to Middle School

Anchor Activities Examples
Middle School to High School

ASSESSMENT

Assessment of the activities can be done through student-teacher conferences, rubrics, and student contracts.

Student-teacher conferences are a great way to assess student knowledge and learning, student engagement, and the progress of the activity. Teachers and students will set dates and times for two conferences where the student will bring the contract with them.

The contract will be a guide for the conference where it will help discuss the goals and learning process.

Rubrics are useful through the assessment process whether it is during the conference or for the final assessment of the project. The rubric can be broad enough to fit all the activities, or can be tailor made for each activity.

Lastly, contracts are used for assessment of not only matching the project with the goals set, but also to check the progression of the activity.

RESOURCES

Anchor Activity Samples
http://www.iu29.org/Resources/Documents/AnchorActivity.pdf
Great website to show examples for each school level and for each school subject.

Best Practices: Instructional Strategies and Techniques
http://www.centralischool.ca/~bestpractice/anchor/resources.html
This site details the description, process, examples and assessments for this strategy. This site also gives resources on this activity.

I'm Done Now What? Anchor Activities for Ragged Times
http://www.beginwiththebrain.com/resources/I_M%20DONE_NOW_WHAT_ASCD_07_comp.pdf
This PowerPoint describes all areas regarding anchor activities including how to plan for the activities and the guidelines to use.

REFERENCES

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www.svlocal.org/staff/data/kxk05sv/files/Anchor_Activities.doc

Tomlinson, C. A. & Eidson, C. C. (2003). *Differentiation in practice: A resource guide for differentiating curriculum Grades 5-9.* Davers, Ma: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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