

Anchor Activities

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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



The image shows a blank student contract form titled "Blank Student Contract for Anchor Activity". At the top, it features the logo for "Florida Online Reading Professional Development" and the website "floridareading.org". The form includes fields for "Student Name", "Anchor Activity", "GOALS" (with sub-sections G1, G2, G3), "Student Name/Comments", "Check Point 1", "Check Point 2", "Due Date", "Student Signature", and "Teacher Signature". A footer contains a URL and copyright information: "© Copyright 2008-2009 for FCOR-PE by the Florida Department of Education and the University of Central Florida. All rights reserved."

Blank Template Contract



The image shows an example student contract form titled "Grade 4-6 Example Student Contract for Anchor Activity". It includes the same header as the blank template. The form is filled out with the following information: "Name: Jane Smith", "Anchor Activity: Create your own planet", "GOALS: 1. Research the characteristics of the planets in our solar system using five articles. 2. Write down the characteristics you would like your planet to have. Create a 3-D Model of my planet with a paragraph describing the characteristics, how they relate, and its name.", "Student Name/Comments: Characteristics include rings, make up, color, location within the solar system, temperature and type of crust.", "Check Point 1: February 12th", "Check Point 2: March 19th", "Due Date: April 3rd", "Student Signature: Jane Smith", and "Teacher Signature: Mr. Tucker". The footer is identical to the blank template.

Example Contract

**Florida Online Reading
Professional Development**
<http://floridareading.org>

Anchor Activities Example: Intermediate to Middle School Grades (4-8)

Subject: Science
Thematic Unit: Space
Possible Activities:

- **Create Your Own Planet**
 - Low level
 - Include 3-4 characteristics
 - Write characteristics on index card
 - High level
 - Include 5-6 characteristics
 - Write a paragraph describing the characteristics and why they relate to each other (e.g., Temperature of the planet relates to location).
- **Write your own Space newspaper**
 - Low level
 - Create at least 2 articles related to the solar system. One article must be an interview.
 - High level
 - Create at least 4 articles related to the solar system. One article must be about letters to the editor while another needs to be an interview.
- **Write and record your own space rap CD**
 - Low level
 - Create 2 songs related to the solar system. One song needs to rhyme.
 - High level
 - Create 4 songs related to the solar system topic of your choice. Two of the songs need to rhyme.
- **Create a model or play**
 - Low level
 - Create a model/play regarding the galaxy. Use persuasive messages and explain why to live in or visit the galaxy.
 - High level
 - Create a model/play regarding gravity. Inform on what gravity before it is and is not found is and use persuasive messages to explain the need for it.

For comments and suggestions, please contact us at floridareading@floridareading.org or 407-623-4353.
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Anchor Activities Example Intermediate to Middle School

**Florida Online Reading
Professional Development**
<http://floridareading.org>

Anchor Activities Example Middle School to High School

Subject: Math
Thematic Unit: Geometry
Possible Activities:

- **Escher Art (pp. 148)** – create a piece of art in the Escher style. You must research the life of M.C. Escher and write a report on the relationship between Escher's art and mathematics. You must learn to make a tessellation and use it to create your artwork.
 - Low level
 - Include 1-2 paragraphs in the report
 - Write characteristics of your finished project on an index card
 - High level
 - Include 3-4 paragraphs in the report
 - Write a one paragraph description of your finished product
- **Children's Picture Book** – Write and illustrate a picture book in which the main character learns a geometry concept as part of the plot.
 - Low level
 - The book must be long enough to have an introduction, some plot development, and a conclusion. Must read the book to the class.
 - High level
 - The book must be long enough to have an introduction, plot development, and a conclusion. Plot development should include a conflict and a resolution. Must read the book to the class.
- **Geometry CD** – Write and record a CD where the songs include geometry vocabulary. The songs can be about what you have learned, what is cool about geometry, or why it is important.
 - Low level
 - Create 3 songs related to geometry. One song needs to rhyme. Must share one song with the class.
 - High level
 - Create 5 songs related to geometry. Two songs needs to rhyme. Must share one song with the class.

Inspiration from the work of Steve Spitzer. No P.D. www.floridareading.org, based on Thomson, D. (2011, 2006). *Inviting Mathematics Through Literature: Models and Lessons for Promoting Growth Through Story*. National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
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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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