**Six Strategies for Differentiated Instruction in Project-Based Learning**

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Project-Based Learning (PBL) naturally lends itself to differentiated instruction. By design, it is student-centered, student-driven and gives space for teachers to meet the needs of students in a variety of ways. PBL can allow for effective differentiation in assessment as well as daily management and instruction. PBL experts will tell you this, but I often hear teachers ask for real examples, specifics to help them contextualize what it "looks like" in the classroom. In fact, the inspiration for this blog came specifically from requests on Twitter! We all need to try out specific ideas and strategies to get our brains working in a different context. Here are some specific differentiation strategies to use during a PBL project.

**1) Differentiate Through Teams**

We all know that heterogeneous grouping works, but sometimes homogenous grouping can be an effective way to differentiate in a project. Sometimes in a novel- or literature-based PBL project, it might be appropriate to differentiate by grouping into reading level. That way, I can take groups that need intensive work and ensure they are getting the instruction they need. Pick appropriate times to break your class into teams to create a structure for differentiated instruction.

**2) Reflection and Goal Setting**

Reflection is an essential component of PBL. Throughout the project, students should be reflecting on their work and setting goals for further learning. This is a great opportunity for them to set personalized learning goals and for you to target instruction specific to the goals they set.

**3) Mini-Lessons**

This is probably one of my favorites. In addition to being a great management strategy to prevent "time sucks" in class, mini-lessons are a great way to differentiate instruction. Perhaps you "offer" mini-lessons to support your students' learning. After reflection and goal setting, this is a great way to have them connect their goals to specific mini-lessons. Not all students may need the mini-lesson, so you can offer or demand it for the students who will really benefit.

**4) Voice and Choice in Products**

Another essential component of PBL is student voice and choice, both in terms of what students produce and how they use their time. Specifically to products, you can utilize multiple intelligences to create summative assessments or products that allow students to show what they know in a variety of ways. From written components to artistic or theatrical, you can differentiate the way students are summatively assessed. Again, it all depends on the standards you are assessing, but don't let standards confine your thinking. Yes, you may have a written component if you're assessing writing, but ask yourself, "How can I allow for voice and choice here?" Embrace possibilities for differentiated student summative products.

**5) Differentiate Through Formative Assessments**

Formative assessments can look the same for all students. They can also look different. We know that students can show what they've learned in different ways, as mentioned above in terms of products produced as summative assessment. In addition, as you check for understanding along the way, you can formatively assess in different ways when appropriate. Perhaps you are targeting collaboration as your 21st century skill in the project. You can differentiate a formative assessment of this through a variety of ways. Perhaps it's an oral conference. Perhaps it's a series of written responses. Perhaps it is a graphic organizer or collage.

**6) Balance Teamwork and Individual Work**

Teamwork and collaboration occurs regularly in a PBL project. We want to leverage collaboration as much as content. However, there are times when individual instruction and practice may be needed. Students learn in teams, and they learn on their own. Make sure to balance both, so that you are demanding a 21st century collaborative environment while allowing time to meet students on an individual basis. Often you can read the room during collaborative work time and work with students individually, but sometimes it is necessary to "take a break" from teamwork. You need to differentiate the learning environment because some students learn better on their own, and others learn better in a team.

As you master the PBL process in your classroom, you will intuitively find ways to differentiate instruction for your students. You will design the project to scaffold content and skills in a variety of ways. You will create formative and summative assessments to allow for multiple intelligences, and you will manage the process so that it allows you meet students where they are and move them forward.

Please share some of your successful strategies with us!