

Chapter 6

DIFFERENTIATING THE CURRICULUM

*Inclusive and Multilevel
Practices in Social Studies*

Thinking Ahead

1. How might you go about meeting the special learning needs of gifted and talented students within your general education classroom?
2. What are some strategies you know for meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities in a general education classroom?
3. What strategies might be used in a general education classroom to meet the needs of students who are ELLs?

EDUCATION FOR ALL

Humans are not standardized products. We come in different sizes, with different interests and abilities. Our brains process the world differently, and we are all shaped by our individual experiences and worldviews. In a general education classroom, it is very likely that you will have students who are achieving two or more grade levels above and below grade-level average. In these classrooms, you can also expect to encounter students with different languages, learning styles, emotional needs, backgrounds, socioeconomic status, religions, cultures, and interests. Given this, you cannot expect to serve up one common educational experience in such a classroom and expect to meet everybody's learning needs.

This chapter describes some basic strategies for differentiating a social studies curriculum (or any other kind of curriculum) to meet the variety of learning needs of the students in your classroom. Keep this point in mind as you read this chapter: Good differentiated instruction is good instruction for all.

A Living Social Studies Lesson

Teaching for everybody in the general education classroom is the ultimate form of democracy. It is a living social studies lesson in civic ideals that says cultures are stronger and more vibrant when they include everybody, and classroom learning experience is made better by enabling all to contribute to their fullest extent. As well, in an egalitarian society, all are considered to be of equal worth. Remember these words from the U.S. Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men [and women] are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Our society was founded on these words. In an educational context, this means that the needs of students who are gifted learners, students with learning disabilities, students with emotional/behavioral disorders, students with developmental cognitive disabilities, and students who are English language learners are all of the same importance. One group is not more or less important than another. One should not gain at the expense of another. In a truly democratic society, we strive to help all individuals reach their full potential. It is by helping all in this endeavor that our society is also able to reach its full potential. That is, we all benefit when all our citizens are knowledgeable decision makers who have skills to contribute to society.



Humans are not standardized products.

IDEA

Teaching for everybody in the general education classroom is the ultimate form of democracy.

In 1975, the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 94–142—the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. It was later amended and was called the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**. This law ensured services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. Reauthorized in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), it guarantees special education services to students with disabilities and governs how states go about providing these services. The two parts of this law that have particular relevance to general education teachers are described below.

Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). Schools must provide free appropriate public education to all children with disabilities at no expense to the family. The key word here is *appropriate*. This means that educational experiences must be designed to meet students' specific learning needs.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Students must receive special education services in the least restrictive environment. This means that to the greatest extent possible, students with special needs are to be educated in a general education classroom.

Figure 6.1 contains a continuum of services for special needs students from most to least restrictive.

Inclusion Versus Mainstreaming and LRE

Two terms used in reference to the least restrictive environment provision are mainstreaming and inclusion. **Mainstreaming** assumes there is one main stream in which all should swim. To mainstream is to help special needs students adapt to the general education classroom curriculum, thereby getting them into this main stream. **Inclusion** recognizes that there are many educational streams, thereby honoring the rich diversity of human experiences and conditions. Inclusion seeks to adapt the curriculum to meet the diverse learning needs of all students and get each into his or her particular stream. Here, the special education teacher takes the role of an educational specialist, working with the general education teacher to help modify and design

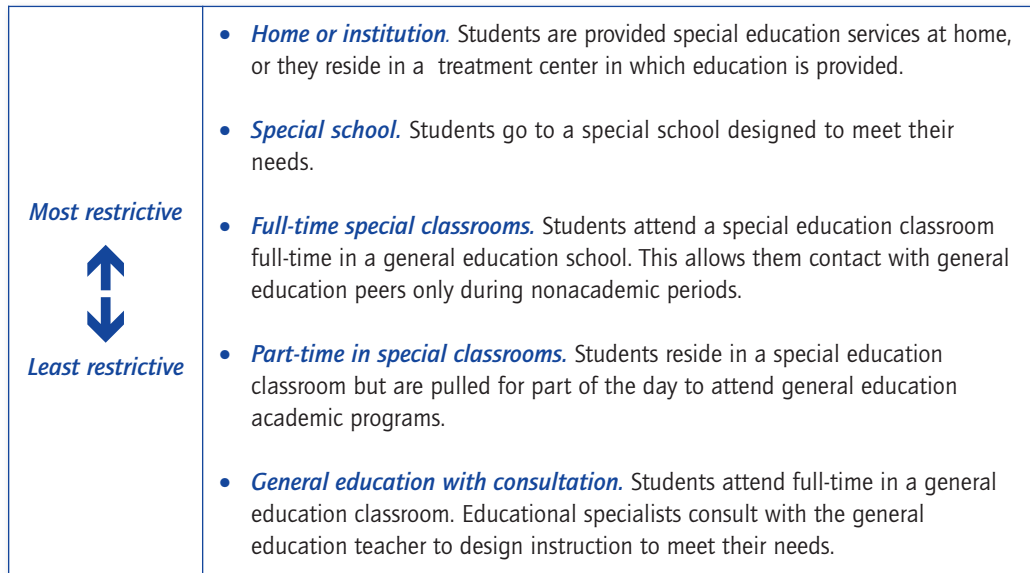


Figure 6.1 A continuum of services for students with special needs

curriculum and learning experiences in a general education setting that are appropriate for special needs students. Of the two, inclusion is more in keeping with the philosophy of this text and IDEA mandates.

Differentiation

Differentiation means to make different. Differentiating the curriculum refers to designing different types of learning experiences or activities for the same class in order to meet the needs of all learners. This concept is basic to an inclusive classroom. However, it is recommended that you take baby steps here. Try one or two of the strategies described below at a time. When you get comfortable with these, then begin adding other new strategies to your teaching toolbox.

STUDENTS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

In looking at inclusive classroom practices, we first examine learners whose first language is not English. These are students who are English language learners, or ELLs.

Understanding ELLs

Understanding ELLs is the first step in helping to meet their special learning needs. The English language learners in your general education classroom are not only trying to comprehend the skills or academic content being taught, but they are also dealing with a new language, a new culture, and often a new and confusing set of social dynamics.

Probably the best way to understand what ELLs in your classroom are dealing with is to try to put yourself in their place. Try to imagine yourself at age 10. You and your family have just moved to a new country (let us say France). You find that people have different customs and values in France. Everything is written in French. You are put in a school that is much different from the school you used to attend. You want to make friends, but you do not understand the jokes or comments made at recess and in the halls, you do not understand the games on the playground, and you certainly do not understand what is happening in the classroom. You could be pulled out for an hour or so a day for your French lessons, but that will do very little to help you with what's going on in your classroom. In the meantime, you are falling behind in important academic knowledge and skills because you understand very little of what is going on. For the few words that you do catch, you have to filter them through your English language system first to identify them.

Goals of Instruction



A complete set of TESOL standards can be found on the Chapter 6 Student Study Site, www.sagepub.com/johnson2e.

With this background, let us look at goals for instruction. The national organization, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (www.tesol.org), has three superordinate goals related to teaching students who are ELLs: (1) Help them develop social language so that they can interact with peers, (2) help them develop academic language so they can learn and understand classroom instruction, and (3) help them understand the culture and the appropriate use of language and conventions within the culture.

Social Language. This is the language students use to interact with their peers in social settings apart from formal classroom instruction. Social language is learned much more quickly than academic language. Depending on the age and ability of the student and the situation, this can be learned in from 1 to 3 years (Padilla, 2006). However, social language is much different from academic language. Social language is rich in context; it is purposeful and immediate; and speakers can rely greatly on nonverbal gestures, body language, and immediate feedback and the ability to question. It is easy to mistake social language proficiency with proficiency in academic language. That is, we see a student who is well able to converse with peers, and we automatically think that he or she has mastered the language of the classroom and thus needs no special strategies to differentiate the learning experience.

Academic Language. This is the language used in classroom instruction. Learning a second language at the level needed for instructional competence (academic language) is a more complex endeavor and can take from 5 to 7 years (Padilla, 2006). It takes

longer because in an academic learning context, students do not have the use of social or personal context. They also are not able to rely on the immediate feedback and nonverbal gestures of social conversation.

Sociocultural Expectations. These expectations involve knowing the types of language and behaviors that are appropriate when interacting with a particular social group or in a particular situation. As stated above, ELLs are often learning the norms and expectations of a new culture as well as a new language and academic content. Learning social norms enables them to fit in with peer groups and friends. Understanding cultural norms enables them to use the communication styles appropriate to various settings.

Some General Strategies

The TESOL goals and standards provide a framework for understanding some of the strategies that general education teachers can use in their daily instruction. As you will see below, these strategies can be used to enhance the learning of all students, not just ELLs.

Provide opportunities for social interaction. Interaction can be used as a tool to enhance learning for all students (D. R. Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Providing opportunities for ELLs to interact during learning enables them to use social language to help them understand academic concepts. Strategies such as cooperative learning, T-talks, book talks, small-group speeches, creative dramatics, or simply “turn to a neighbor and share an idea” are all ways to include talk and social interaction in academic settings (see Chapter 9).

Use visual aids or props during instruction. When presenting new information to students, as part of lesson input include pictures, diagrams, models, drawings, or props. This makes the language more understandable and provides a visual image to help students connect words and concepts. You might also use a digital camera to take pictures related to academic content for use during instruction. These can be combined with words and displayed with PowerPoint software to create a powerful, multimodal learning experience.

Use predictable classroom routines. Make your morning rituals, transitions, or beginnings of class consistent and predictable. Predictability lessens stress for English language learners, as they do not have to worry about what to do. It also makes it easier to connect words with particular concepts and experiences.

Use gestures. Gestures make the language more understandable during instruction and other communication.

Use advance organizers with pictures or symbols. As described in Chapter 5, advance organizers show the structure of what is to be learned in an upcoming lesson or the content in an assigned chapter of a textbook. They can be in verbal form such as when a teacher would say, “Today in our social studies class we’ll be looking at three big ideas related to local government.” Advance organizers can also be in graphic form (see graphic organizers below) and include things such as outlines, semantic maps, pictures, or diagrams. The graphic advance organizer should include pictures or symbols.

Provide a first language (L1) preview/review. Have an ELL teacher or paraprofessional provide a preview or review of a lesson in students' first language. With older students, this might include an outline in their native language. There are also many free translation programs on the Internet, as well as computer programs you can purchase. Here, you type in the words in English and the site or program provides a written translation in one of a variety of languages. While you cannot always be assured of the accuracy of the translation, these are valuable tools to consider.

Use learning centers. The learning center is a differentiation strategy in which students go to particular places in the room for specialized projects or self-contained instruction. This differentiation strategy can be adapted to meet the needs of a variety of learners including ELLs and is described further below.

STUDENTS WHO ARE HIGHLY CREATIVE OR GIFTED LEARNERS

Strategies that can be used to meet the needs of students who are highly creative or gifted learners include tiered assignments and agendas (described below). As mentioned in Chapter 2, it is important not to simply give gifted learners more work to do. Instead, their special learning needs can be met by designing differentiated learning experiences that include three elements: choice, challenge, and complexity. Strategies that include these elements are the use of expanded views of intelligence (see Chapter 3), problem solving (see Chapter 7), inquiry learning (see Chapter 8), and using creative and critical thinking skills (see Chapter 7). Other teaching strategies that can be used are curriculum compacting and differentiation, creative and open-ended activities, and alternative reading selections.

Curriculum Compacting and Differentiation. Streamlining the regular curriculum to eliminate the repetition of previously mastered material is referred to as *curriculum compacting* (Renzulli & Reis, 1997). Here, students demonstrate mastery of basic skills or concepts by “testing out of” a unit or area of study. This then provides them time for appropriate enrichment or accelerated learning activities.

Creative and Open-Ended Activities. One of the easiest and most effective ways to differentiate the curriculum for all students is to design creative, open-ended activities and assignments in which students of all abilities are able to succeed and demonstrate their learning. Further, open-ended activities can serve to meet the needs of highly creative and gifted learners, as they can make them as inventive and complex as they want. Many of the strategies described in this chapter involve creativity and are open-ended.

Alternative Reading Material. Instead of the regular chapter in the social studies textbook, provide alternative reading material that describes similar ideas at higher levels. For younger students, you could use upper-grade textbooks. For older students, look for academic journal, magazine, or Internet articles. Always give gifted learners a choice of which reading material to select. Again, do not simply give them more work to do; rather, provide more complex or open-ended activities (see the following section).

STRATEGIES TO DIFFERENTIATE A COMMON CURRICULUM

The strategies described below can all be used to differentiate a common general education curriculum for students with a variety of special learning needs.

Tiered Assignments. These manipulate the same idea or input at different levels or tiers (Tomlinson, 2001). In tiered assignments, the same lesson is presented to all students; however, two or more activities or assignments are designed at differing levels of complexity. In this way, each student still comes away with the important knowledge and understanding and at the same time is challenged at a level appropriate for his or her ability. The action words for Bloom's taxonomy of thinking can be used as guides to help you construct assignments at differing levels (see Chapter 3). Tiered assignments can be used to differentiate the curriculum for students with learning disabilities as well as for gifted and highly creative learners.

EXAMPLE: TIERED ASSIGNMENTS

Ms. Puckett's fourth-grade class is studying a unit on American history in the 20th century. As part of this unit, Ms. Puckett has created a series of lessons on sewage and waste disposal and the effect this technology has had on society. In one lesson, she describes how sewage is treated in the city in which she lives, using pictures taken with her digital camera. At the end of the lesson, students are given assignments at three different levels. At the first level, students are given a map that indicates the steps of the sewage treatment process. They are to label and describe each step of the process (Bloom's taxonomy—knowledge). At a second level, students are asked to list the steps involved in the treatment of sewage and then to create a map that indicates the process (Bloom's taxonomy—comprehension and application). At a third level, students are asked to list the steps used in the treatment of sewage and then to design a more efficient or effective sewage treatment process (Bloom's taxonomy—evaluation and synthesis).

Sometimes, Ms. Puckett designates which students are to complete which assignment. But often, Ms. Puckett lets her students choose the assignment they wish to complete. This gives students the elements of choice and avoids the perception of MOTS. (MOTS is when gifted learners are given *more of the same* assignment as a way of differentiating their curriculum.) If you simply assign more work to gifted learners, you will find that they soon learn to hide their giftedness. Instead, assignments for gifted learners should have higher levels of complexity. Also, advanced assignments are often more interesting than those at lower levels. Allowing students to choose their assignment gives all students opportunities to display thought processes that often are just as creative and complex as those of the students who have been formally identified as gifted learners.

Modified Assignments. These are assignments that are shortened or made more concise for special needs learners. You can also modify assignments by breaking them into smaller, more manageable steps. Do this by using a checklist or some other method to describe each step that must be completed. As well, provide class time for students to work on their assignments. This allows you to structure the learning environment in order to help students individually.

Agendas. These are personalized lists of tasks given to students (Tomlinson, 2001). The tasks are designed to accommodate their abilities and interests. Students are usually given 2 to 3 weeks to complete the tasks on their individualized agendas. You then act as a coach, helping students complete their agendas and providing short mini-lessons in both large-group and small-group settings. Agendas can also be used to differentiate the curriculum for highly creative and gifted learners.

EXAMPLE: AGENDAS FOR A UNIT ON SEWAGE TREATMENT

Personal agenda for: _____		
Starting date: _____ Date for completion: _____		
Student and Teacher Initial After Completion	Task	Special Instructions
	With a partner, read the article, "Sewage Treatment." Describe three interesting or important ideas.	Use reciprocal reading. Record the ideas in your learning log.
	Look on the Internet to find and describe health problems related to exposure to untreated sewage.	What is the name of the disease? What are the symptoms? Record your ideas in your learning log.
	Listen to the vocabulary tape that defines and describes each of the following words: sewage, treatment, recycle, sludge, aerobic, purification, chemicals, fecal matter, centrifuge, manure, dehydration, chemical, plant, refining, excrement, environment, ecology, purification, micro-organisms, bacteria, tertiary treatment, water.	Write five interesting or creative sentences. Each sentence should contain at least one vocabulary word. Record your sentences in your learning log.
	Complete the two Sewage Treatment worksheets.	Check your answers and put the sheets in your portfolio.
	Choose two vocabulary words to include for study for your weekly spelling. Add eight of your own words that you wish to study this week.	Record the words and the definitions in your learning log. Look them up in the dictionary to make sure they are spelled correctly.
	Look on the Internet to find an interesting Web site related to sewage treatment.	Work with a partner to complete the Web site description sheet.

Cluster Grouping. This is a strategy designed originally for students who were identified as highly creative or gifted learners, but it can be adopted for other special learning needs. (This would work particularly well with students who have learning disabilities or who are ELLs.) Here, students who are identified with a special learning need are clustered together in the general education classroom of a teacher who has mastered the pedagogical skills necessary to differentiate the curriculum. (A cluster group should have at least two but no more than eight students.)

Curriculum Compacting and Differentiation. As described above, this strategy provides students time for appropriate enrichment or accelerated learning activities called alternative learning experiences (ALEs). It is specifically designed for high-ability learners.

HOW DO I? Compact and Differentiate the Curriculum

These are the steps for compacting and differentiation.

1. Identify major learning goals and objectives of an upcoming unit.
2. Provide an outline to students who may wish to test out of the unit and a chance to study. That is, they should be given the books, Web sites, and other material to learn this material.
3. Create a pretest based on learning objectives with a designated criterion score. Establish a time for students to take the pretest. Those who meet the criterion are able to engage in an alternative enhanced learning experience.
4. Design an alternative learning experience (ALE) that could include an individual learning contract (see below), an independent study, or agenda for students. The ALE should expand upon or enhance curriculum content. This needs to be thoughtfully planned, giving students some degree of choice and structure. You do not want to simply give more work to students, nor do you want to create a completely open-ended experience. Rather, the ALE should be intrinsically motivating and of high interest. This is done by offering choice, challenge, and open-endedness. Open-endedness invites students to have choices as to content and to make the activity as complex or as simple as they deem necessary.
5. If grades must be given, students should be graded solely on their ALE and not be graded on their pretest score. The pretest is merely their ticket into the game. Possible grading criteria are listed below.

Grading Criteria for the ALE

Your ALE will be graded on the following criteria:

1. **Responsibility**—Responsibility is demonstrated in the following ways: (a) You were able to read and follow directions, (b) you asked for help (from teachers or peers) when you did not understand something, (c) you completed the ALE in the prescribed time, (d) you used your time wisely, and (e) you made good choices.

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2. **Knowledge**—Your ALE (a) is interesting and informative, (b) demonstrates a knowledge base, and (c) uses appropriate sources.
3. **Thinking**—Your ALE (a) describes or demonstrates interesting or important ideas or themes, (b) uses data to come to a conclusion or answer a question, and (c) shows an interested learner.
4. **Communication**—The presentation (a) communicates background knowledge and new ideas effectively; (b) is free of mistakes and is of professional quality; (c) is clear, logical, organized, and easy to understand; and (d) is interesting.

EXAMPLE: COMPACTING AND DIFFERENTIATION

Ms. Burress was teaching students about leaders of the free world (1945–1975) as part of her third-grade social studies class. Her upcoming 2-week unit would focus on three leaders: Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Fannie Lou Hamer. Two weeks before the unit began, she created an outline that listed the important information students should know and the resources in which it was found (textbook plus other supplemental material). The day before the unit began, all students were given the option of trying to qualify for the ALE via the pretest. (In this way, all students were eligible for the enrichment activity, not just those who were formally identified as being gifted learners.)

Out of the 26 students in her class, 4 qualified for the ALE. Students were put in groups of two. A cooperative learning activity was designed in which they had to first identify two additional interesting or important leaders from this time period. (Ms. Burress had prepared a list for them—but they were free to deviate from it.) Next, they had to locate the background information that defined these leaders. Finally, students had to present the new information to their class. The presentation could take the form of a poster session, two individual speeches, a PowerPoint presentation, dramatic reenactment, visual art display, or mock interviews. Ms. Burress checked in on their progress every day. Students were graded on their daily progress, their final presentation, and their individual contributions to the project.

As often happens, all students wanted to do an ALE. So at least once a month, Ms. Burress put students in cooperative groups of three and created short ALEs in which students had to find, organize, and present new information related to a social studies curriculum objective. In this way, her curriculum became open-ended, invited creativity, and could be made as complex or simple as students wanted. In addition, the oral communication necessary for cooperative learning groups enhanced the experience for students with learning disabilities and English language learners.

Graphic Organizer. This is a visual representation of information presented in a lesson, displayed in a way that students can see the relationship among concepts, ideas, or items (Dye, 2000). (Note: There is sometimes confusion between advance organizers and graphic organizers. Advance organizers, described in Chapter 5, are anything that shows structure and

relationships at the beginning of a lesson. These can include graphic organizers as well as verbal cues.) Graphic organizers assist students by making abstract ideas more concrete. Figure 6.2 contains three common types of graphic organizers that can be used in social

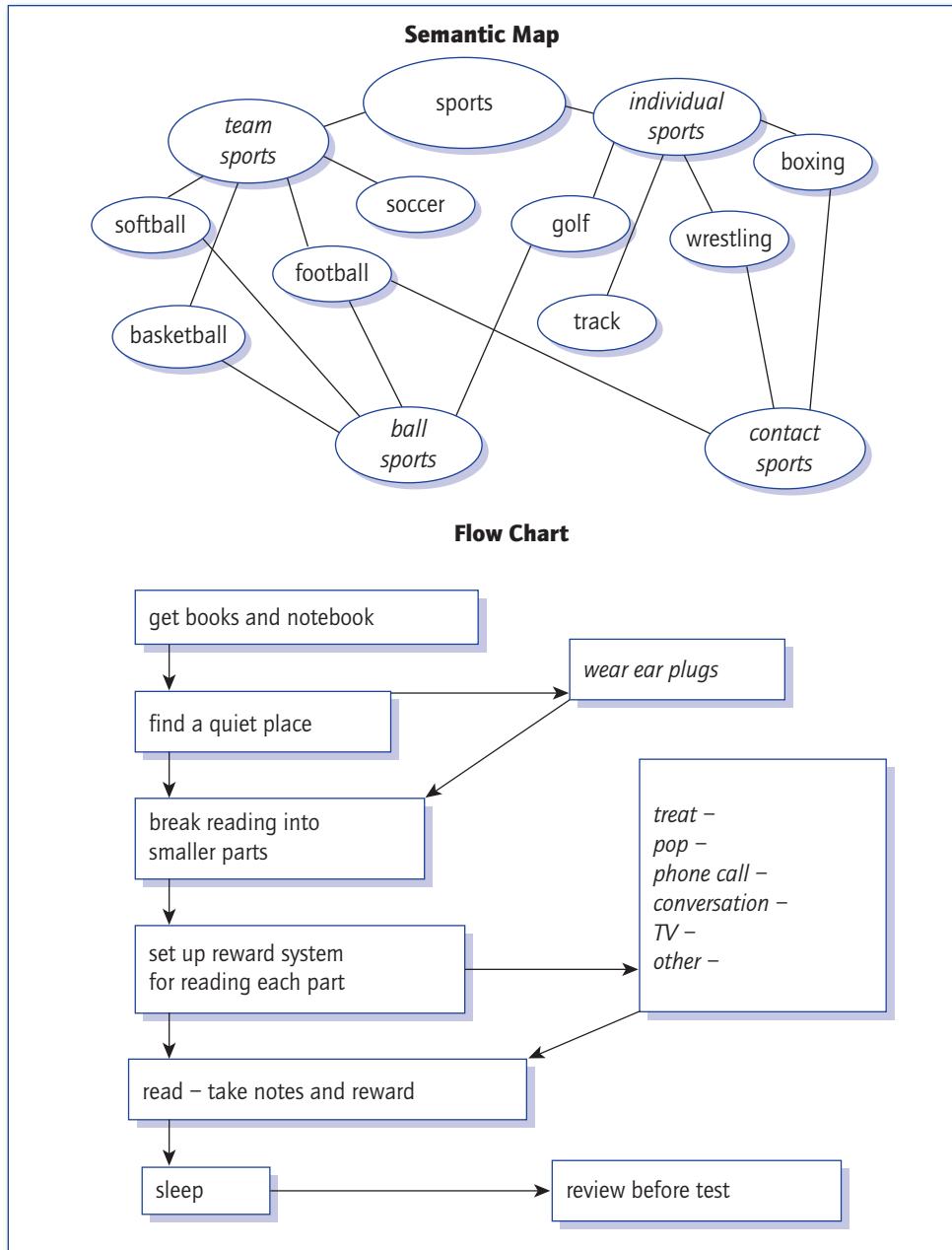


Figure 6.2 Examples of graphic organizers: Semantic map, flow chart, and Venn diagram

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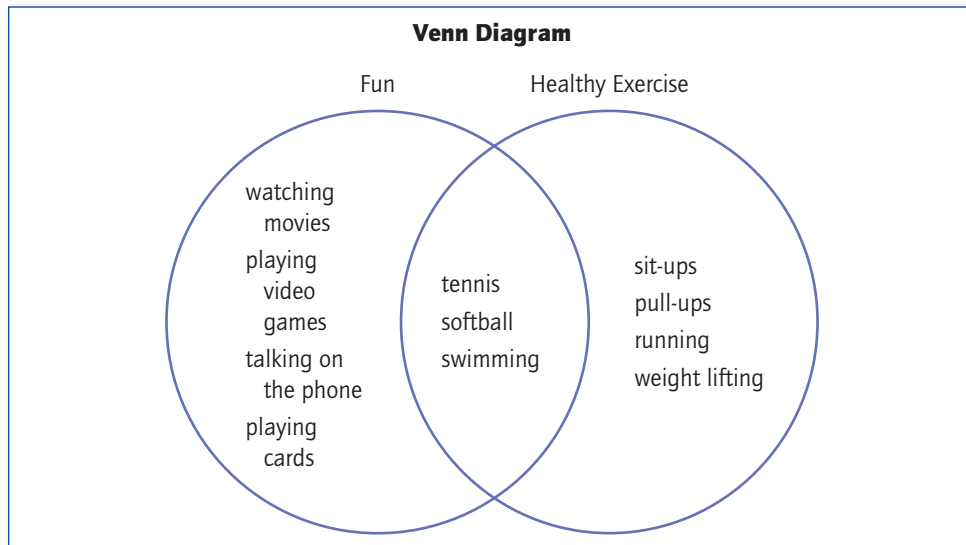


Figure 6.2 Examples of graphic organizers: Semantic map, flow chart, and Venn diagram

studies lessons: a semantic map, flow chart, and Venn diagram. Other forms of graphic organizers include outlines, tables, graphs, charts, diagrams, or pictures.

Learning Contracts. This is a written agreement between a student or group of students and the teacher. It specifies what students will learn, how they will learn, how they will demonstrate their learning, and the time frame for completion. Learning contracts come in various forms and can be adapted to the ability or interest of particular students. They can also be used as the ALE in compacting and differentiation for gifted learners. Below are described two kinds of learning contracts: those for specific learning objectives and for selective learning objectives.

HOW DO I ?

Design a Contract for Specific Learning Objectives

These are the steps for designing a contract for specific learning objectives:

1. Identify the learning objectives for a unit or lesson—and specific concepts or skills that students must learn. Often students can be included on this decision. Learning contracts can be used to (a) cover current curricular goals and objects, (b) enhance curriculum content, (c) expand upon or examine related content, or (d) discover things of importance and interest to the student. Each of these approaches has its merits; none should be used exclusively.
2. Assemble learning resources (books, computer programs, Web sites, community experts), or decide if you want students to do this. Inquiry projects or independent learning projects lend themselves more to this sort of thing.

3. Decide how students will learn. Will they work in small groups? Will they read books, look at Internet sites, listen to audiotapes, view DVDs, or a combination of all? If it is a skill they are learning, will they have an older student, parent, or paraprofessional teach them?
4. Decide how students will demonstrate their learning. As you can see in the example below, there are a variety of ways for students to do this. These demonstrations are found on a continuum from fairly structured objective exams, written reports, and class presentations on one end, to visual art, Web sites, mock interviews, and even creative drama at the other end. The key to this demonstration of learning is for the teacher to first identify and then clearly communicate the main skills or concepts that students are to know.
5. Design grading criteria. Chapter 4 describes a variety of checklists and rubrics that can be used for a learning contract.

Grading Criteria

Learning contracts can be designed around the following criteria:

1. **Responsibility**—In fulfilling your learning contract: (a) you used your time wisely, (b) you met your goals for check up dates and completion dates, and (c) you asked questions when needed.
2. **Knowledge**—Your demonstration of knowledge (a) is interesting and informative, (b) fully addresses learning objectives, (c) uses correct knowledge, and (d) uses complete knowledge.
3. **Thinking**—The demonstration of knowledge (a) meets learning objectives, (b) expresses knowledge accurately, and (c) shows the learner's thinking.
4. **Communication** (when appropriate)—The demonstration of knowledge (a) is free of mistakes and is of high quality; (b) is clear, logical, and organized; (c) meets time or length parameters; and (d) is interesting, creative, or expresses important ideas.

6. Identify checkup dates and dates for completion. The checkup dates are agreed-upon times when the teacher and student check on the progress being made. The completion date is when students will demonstrate their learning.

Contracts for specific learning objectives define exactly what is to be learned. This type of learning contract is designed to bring students to a predefined conclusion related to standards or curricular objectives.

Figure 6.3 contains an example of a contract for specific learning objectives used with Mr. Feagles's sixth-grade social studies class. Here, students sat down with Mr. Feagles before beginning the contracted learning experience (CLE) to agree upon parts II through VI.

I. What will you learn or learn about?		
Initial Settlement of American Colonies by Europeans: 1600–1750		
You will		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identify three reasons why people left Europe in the 1700s. 2. identify three reasons why Europeans settled in North America. 3. describe early settlements. 4. describe problems Europeans faced when they tried to adapt to a new environment. 		
II. How will you learn? (check all that apply)		
<input type="checkbox"/> books <input type="checkbox"/> Web sites <input type="checkbox"/> interview experts <input type="checkbox"/> magazines	<input type="checkbox"/> learn from others: peer, parent, paraprofessional or expert	<input type="checkbox"/> observation <input type="checkbox"/> survey or interview <input type="checkbox"/> other
III. How will you work?		
<input type="checkbox"/> individually <input type="checkbox"/> pairs <input type="checkbox"/> small groups		
IV. How will you demonstrate your learning?		
<input type="checkbox"/> poster session <input type="checkbox"/> demonstration <input type="checkbox"/> poetry <input type="checkbox"/> objective exams <input type="checkbox"/> mock interview <input type="checkbox"/> create a Web site	<input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint presentation <input type="checkbox"/> class speech/ presentation <input type="checkbox"/> visual art <input type="checkbox"/> creative drama or reenactment	<input type="checkbox"/> write a story (realistic fiction) <input type="checkbox"/> write a story (nonfiction) <input type="checkbox"/> video documentary <input type="checkbox"/> write a report <input type="checkbox"/> other
V. How should you be graded?		
VI. Dates		
1st check up date: _____		
2nd check up date: _____		
Completion date: _____		

Figure 6.3 Contract for specific objectives

Once the contract was agreed upon, Mr. Feagles designed a checklist that included his grading criteria (Figure 6.4). This was presented to students before they began their contracted learning experience. Upon completion, the checklist was used as a basis for assessing their work.

Grading Criteria

Demonstration of knowledge: PowerPoint presentation to class using Internet images and original visual art to enhance content

Key: ✓ = trait is present; ✓+ = trait is present to a greater degree;
 ✓- = trait is present to a lesser degree; # = trait is not present

Learning contracts can be designed around the following criteria:

- ___ 1. Used time wisely
- ___ 2. Met goals for check-up and completion dates
- ___ 3. The presentation demonstrated knowledge of learning objectives
 - ___ • identified three important reasons why people left Europe in 1770s.
 - ___ • identified three important reasons why Europeans settled in North America.
 - ___ • described early settlements.
 - ___ • described problems Europeans faces in adapting to their new environment.
- ___ 4. The presentation was organized and showed student thinking.
- ___ 5. The presentation was interesting or expressed important ideas.

Figure 6.4 Grading criteria for contracted learning experience

Contracts for self-selected learning objectives are a form of independent study (see Chapter 5). This type of learning contract creates the structure necessary for open-ended inquiry learning projects (see Chapter 8). It is open-ended in that it should not lead students to a predefined conclusion. Here, students first meet with the teacher to identify a topic or area of interest for the contracted learning experience. The teacher helps students put the topic in the form of one or two questions. Students then gather data to answer the questions.

HOW DO I?

Design a Learning Contract for Self-Selected Learning Objectives

These are the steps for designing a contract for self-selected learning objectives:

1. Decide how students will work. Will they work individually, in pairs, or in small groups?
2. Students identify a topic or area of interest. Ideally, this topic is related to the curriculum or current unit of study. The link here can be specific or tangential. (Keep in mind that choice is one of the most powerful factors in creating intrinsic motivation for learning.)
3. Help students put the topic into the form of one or two questions. The questions are important, as they define the learning objectives and direct the data collection.

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4. Decide on type and number of data sources. Students may conduct observations, interviews, or surveys in order to collect data. This would reflect the inquiry approach described in Chapter 8. They might also collect data in the form of written or recorded sources such as books, magazines, newspapers, or the Internet. The teacher should put parameters on the sources used. Example: *You must use two book chapters and at least two Internet sources.* For primary-age students, have them use a minimum of two sources. For intermediate and middle school students, have them use a minimum of two types of sources.
5. Decide on data sources and how they will be collected. Students might conduct observations, interviews, or surveys, or read written sources or listen to/watch recorded sources. Data is collected in the form of notes from these sources. Having a well-defined question or questions narrows their focus and enhances data collection as students record the data that are relevant to their question.
6. Help students analyze data. After students have collected their data, you will have to provide students a short mini-lesson to teach them how to organize the data they have collected. (After students have done this a couple of times, you will not need to intervene here.) If numerical survey data are collected, they should be tallied and displayed in a table or graph. For other types of data, inductive analysis should be used. Here, common themes or patterns are identified. Data are organized into groups. The type of groups and data to include within each group are identified and expressed.
7. Help students organize and display the data. Again, a mini-lesson may be necessary here as well, to teach students how to display data (see Chapter 11).
8. Show students how to use the data to answer their question(s).
9. Help students decide how to communicate their findings. Findings must be presented to an audience (students, the school, or parents). Students may often select the modality of their communication before beginning the contracted learning experience. Students can select from a wide variety of modalities to use in communicating their findings, including a speech, demonstration, drama, report, Web site, video, drawing, sculpture, dance or creative movement, a simple research report, poster, or visual art.
10. Design grading criteria. Chapter 4 describes a variety of checklists and rubrics that can be used for a learning contract.

Grading Criteria

Learning contracts can be designed around the following criteria:

1. **Responsibility**—In fulfilling your learning contract: (a) you used your time wisely, (b) you met your goals for check up dates and completion dates, and (c) you asked questions when needed.
2. **Knowledge**—Your demonstration of knowledge (a) is interesting and informative, (b) fully addresses learning objectives, (c) uses correct knowledge, and (d) uses complete knowledge.
3. **Thinking**—The demonstration of knowledge (a) meets learning objectives, (b) expresses knowledge accurately, and (c) shows the learner's thinking.
4. **Communication** (when appropriate)—The demonstration of knowledge (a) is free of mistakes and is of high quality; (b) is clear, logical, and organized; (c) meets time or length parameters; and (d) is interesting, creative, or expresses important ideas.

11. Identify checkup dates and dates for completion. The checkup dates are agreed-upon times when the teacher and student check on the progress being made. The completion date is when students will demonstrate their learning.

Figure 6.5 contains an example of a contract for self-selected learning objectives used with Ms. Manning's fifth-grade social studies class.

Once the contract was agreed upon, Ms. Manning designed a checklist that included her grading criteria (see Figure 6.6). This was presented to students before they began their work. Upon completion of the contracted learning experience, it was used as a basis for assessing their work. (A note about grading these projects: While students' final products are important, the process is more important. This should be emphasized, as this is where real learning occurs.)

Learning Stations. These are often confused with learning centers, but they are different in terms of purpose and organization. *Learning stations* are designated places in the classroom used to practice, reinforce, or extend a skill or related set of skills. They are done simultaneously with the whole class. Here, the teacher designs four to eight short mini-lessons related to a skill with guided and independent practice. Small groups of three to five students go to a station. On a signal (classroom lights flashing or a bell), the small group rotates to the next station. This continues until the whole class has worked through all stations. Stations can be set up to be done independently or in the form of a cooperative learning activity. They are most effective if there is a parent, paraprofessional, or older student at each station to provide short bits of instruction. Depending on the age of the student and the number of stations, students should spend 5 to 10 minutes at each station.

I. What is your topic or area of interest?		
II. What is/are your specific research question/questions?		
III. How will you work?		
___ individually ___ pairs ___ small groups		
IV. How will you learn? (check all that apply)		
___ books	___ learn from others: peer, parent, paraprofessional or expert	___ observation
___ Web sites		___ survey or interview
___ interview experts		___ other
___ magazines		

Figure 6.5 Contract for self-selected learning objectives

(Continued)

(Continued)

V. How will you demonstrate your learning?		
<input type="checkbox"/> poster session	<input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint presentation	<input type="checkbox"/> write a story (realistic fiction)
<input type="checkbox"/> demonstration	<input type="checkbox"/> class speech/presentation	<input type="checkbox"/> write a story (nonfiction)
<input type="checkbox"/> poetry	<input type="checkbox"/> visual art	<input type="checkbox"/> video documentary
<input type="checkbox"/> objective exams	<input type="checkbox"/> creative drama or reenactment	<input type="checkbox"/> write a report
<input type="checkbox"/> mock interview		<input type="checkbox"/> other
<input type="checkbox"/> create a Web site		

VI. How should you be graded?

V. Dates

1st checkup date: _____

2nd checkup date: _____

Completion date: _____

Figure 6.5 Contract for self-selected learning objectives**EXAMPLE: LEARNING STATIONS**

Mr. Tollefson had been teaching students various ways of classifying information in his second-grade social studies class in River Falls, Wisconsin (NCSS Essential Skills for Social Studies, Organizing and Using Information—Thinking Skills: classify information). His class was studying a unit on Wisconsin. He used stations to reinforce five thinking skills that he had been teaching throughout the year, as well as to reinforce relevant unit concepts.

Station 1—*Identify facts and opinions.* Given a list of facts and opinions printed on 3x5-inch cards, students had to put them in one of two groups: facts or opinions. (Picture clues were drawn on each card to enhance learning for students with learning disabilities or who were ELLs.)

Station 2—*Identify relevant factual material.* Students at this station were presented with a poster that said, “Wisconsin is a great place to vacation.” They were presented with 3x5-inch cards that listed various facts related to Wisconsin. They had to select the ones that supported the idea that Wisconsin is a great place to vacation.

Station 3—*Group data in categories according to appropriate criteria.* Students at this station were presented with a map of Wisconsin and printed resource material. They were given the names of 10 cities and towns. They had to put each in one of the following categories: (a) large city, metropolis, or urban area; (b) small city; (c) town; (d) small town; or (e) rural.

Station 4—*Place in proper sequence—order of importance.* Students at this station were given eight 3x5-inch cards with a list of facts about Wisconsin. In regard to making Wisconsin a nice place to live, they had to put these in order of importance. (Of course, there is no right answer for this, but the discussion that takes place in this small-group activity invites students to discuss and support their ideas.)

Station 5—*Place in proper sequence—order of occurrence.* Students were presented with 10 3x5-inch cards with important events and the dates. Students had to arrange these in chronological order.

Station 6—*Place data in tabular form—charts.* Students were presented with quantitative data related to the number of rivers, lakes, forests, and other natural resources. They had to design and put this data in table form.

Mr. Tollefson first quickly explained the task required at each station to the whole class. Then, students were put in groups of four and assigned to an initial station. At each station was a third-grade student from Mr. Tollefson's last year's class to help. These older students enjoyed the responsibility of helping to teach younger students. (The verbal interaction that takes place in small groups like these enhances learning for all students—especially students with learning disabilities or who are ELLs). A small bell was rung, and students began work at each station. Mr. Tollefson watched to get a general sense of when groups neared completion. He allotted 5 minutes for each station but was flexible if students needed more or less time.

Grading Criteria

Demonstration of knowledge: PowerPoint presentation to class using Internet images and original visual art to enhance content

Key: ✓ = trait is present; ✓+ = trait is present to a greater degree;

✓- = trait is present to a lesser degree; # = trait is not present

Learning contracts can be designed around the following criteria:

- ___ 1. Used time wisely
- ___ 2. Met goals for checkup and completion dates
- ___ 3. Used data to answer the question(s)
- ___ 4. The presentation was organized and showed thinking.
- ___ 5. The presentation was interesting or expressed important ideas.

Figure 6.6 Checklist for contracted learning experience

Learning Centers. This is a designated place (or places) in the classroom that contains a collection of activities or materials designed to reinforce or extend a skill or concept. Unlike the learning station, students do not rotate with learning centers; they spend all their time at one center. Also, learning centers are self-sufficient or mostly self-sufficient. Students should be able to go to a learning center and complete the activities there without a great deal of additional instruction.

EXAMPLE: LEARNING CENTERS

Mr. Tollefson designed learning centers for his second-grade classroom that included activities to extend or apply information students learned in his unit on Wisconsin. He also used learning centers to reinforce, apply, or extend skills related to math, reading, and writing. Throughout the year, many of his learning centers combined math, reading, writing, and thinking skills with social studies, science, or other curriculum. In this way, learning centers can be *interdisciplinary*.

Many teachers start by having one or two learning centers in their classrooms where students can go after their other work is completed. If you are new to the concept of learning centers, this might be a good way to start; however, this approach can give the impression that learning centers are merely keeping-busy-centers and not to be taken seriously. Other ways to use learning centers are described in Figure 6.7.

- **Learning center day.** Once a week or every other week, have a learning center day where all students spend the majority of a class period at one learning center. This enables you to design *differentiated learning experiences* by assigning students to learning centers that meet their particular need.
- **Remediation.** Learning centers can be used for remediation. Here, a teacher or paraprofessional provides instruction and practice with a designated group of students. Instead of completing homework or other assignments, these students would receive instruction and guided practice in the learning center.
- **Open-ended learning centers.** The activities at these types of learning centers would require students to use problem solving, imagination, or creativity to design a product or performance or to solve a problem that is ill structured (see Chapter 5). For example, students might design a book cover for the book they're reading. They might work with a friend to create a short drama, design a PowerPoint presentation, write a book review, create a poster, write an editorial, design a comic strip, write a description, or evaluate a Web site (see Chapter 13).

Figure 6.7 Types of learning centers

Expanded Views of Intelligence and Multiple Levels of Thinking. Lessons and activities can be modified using Gardner's (1999b) multiple intelligence theory, Sternberg's (1996) triarchic theory of intelligence, or Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives (see Chapter 3). This type of modification ensures multimodality of input and honors students' cognitive strengths.

Chapter Review: Key Points

- Human beings are not standardized products; therefore, we cannot assume a standardized learning experience meets the needs of all the students in a classroom.
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act ensures free and appropriate education (FAPE) for all students, regardless of their disability, in the least restricted environment (LRE).
- To meet the needs of students who are English language learners (ELLs), general education teachers should provide structure and use advance organizers; visual cues; first-language, or L1 clues; and opportunities for social interaction related to the lesson content.
- Students who are highly creative or gifted learners need learning experiences that include three elements: choice, challenge, and complexity.
- Good differentiated instruction is good instruction for all.

Making Connections

1. What is your initial impression of the various instructional strategies described in this chapter? Rank them in order from most likely to least likely to use.
2. Find a lesson online or in a social studies teacher's manual. Describe how you would use at least two strategies from this chapter to differentiate the curriculum.
3. Create a graphic organizer for this chapter.