



“DI Days:” Differentiating Instruction Through Student Choice

To better meet the needs of my high school students, who have a variety of abilities, interests and engagement levels, I often differentiate instruction through the use of “DI Days.” On these days, students use a choice board to select from a wide range of activities offered in learning centers. Each center offers content-focused activities based on choice, readiness and assessment data.

Because my students take the Northwest Evaluation Association’s Measures of Academic Progress® test three times each school year, I have access to data that helps me know who needs reading support, more exposure to certain topics, and/or extended learning opportunities to challenge them. Once I identify who needs reading support, I assign those students to a reading center led by a co-teacher. (The reading center contains materials that vary in complexity, so students can be *placed* there or *choose* to be there, which allows for some discretion in assigning certain students to reading practice.)

Other content-focused centers available on DI Days include:

- Homework help
- Computer research and reporting
- Concept diagram and collage construction
- Think-pair-share on select concepts

When I first instituted DI Days, I tried to include a teacher-directed activity in one of the centers. Surprisingly, some students actually chose this; however, it prevented me from properly monitoring other centers and students. (Teachers need to walk around and help students with directions, materials, and behavior.) I therefore eliminated the teacher-directed activity so I could focus more directly on student support.

Another surprise: students sometimes chose the easier tasks or assignments because they were just that – easy. I remedied this by adding steps to the easier assignments, such as content practice or the requirement that students report on their findings.

The success of DI Days is most easily measured by a lesson template that students must complete and turn in with their product. The template identifies what activity they chose and provides a tool to evaluate their own effort and outcomes. Although DI Days are a bit of work for me to prepare, students enjoy the opportunity to guide their own learning and are authentically engaged all hour. They look forward to DI Days, as do I.

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