Diversity in Learning & Delivering the Diverse Learning Needs

Introduction
Teaching in Diverse Classrooms
Today's schools are becoming increasingly diverse. Many teachers find that their classrooms are populated by students with diverse needs. Students' diversity may be reflected in many ways, including their linguistic or cultural background; their religious viewpoints; their sexuality; their socio-economic background; and their differing prior experiences due to age, schooling, and disability. No two students learn the same because of these traits. Diversity in the classroom does not just refer to cultural diversity but also refers to diversity in skills, knowledge, and needs. It is important to understand these attributes in order to effectively teach the students. All of these differences make teaching more complex. Students each have unique skills, abilities, and needs that need to be addressed.

Learning about the Students
The most important thing a teacher can do to help educate the students is to learn as much about them as possible. A teacher can achieve this in a wide variety of ways, either by spending time talking to the students, giving them questionnaires to fill out, or engaging them in activities that reveal information about them.

Using a combination of all these methods a teacher can get a clear picture of what each student needs to how they learn best. For example, talking to students can help a teacher get a clear picture of their verbal skills and personality. A questionnaire can target specific information about the student and help the teacher learn about their interests and passions. Different icebreaker activities can allow the teacher to observe students socializing in groups.

Welcoming Diversity
The broad range diverse students offer a powerful resource for everyone to learn more in different ways, in new environments, and with different types of people. Teachers promote critical thinking when they make the rules of the classroom culture explicit and enable students to compare and contrast them with other cultures. Students can develop cross-cultural skills in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. For such learning to take place, teachers must have the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to make their classrooms effective learning environments for all students. Every single person in this extremely diverse and ever-changing system has the power to serve as an invaluable resource for all other students, teachers, and the community as a whole. The growing diversity in classrooms all over the world necessitates

and encourages the development and use of diverse teaching strategies designed to respond to each student as an individual.

Pedagogy for Diverse Learners

The word Pedagogy means "To lead the Child". Pedagogy is "An Art and Science". In other words pedagogy refers to best way of teaching to variety of children. The task of teaching includes basics principles of teaching, approaches, methods, techniques, strategies and skills of teaching. The real teaching happens when the teacher understands minds of the learners or students. He/she will engage the students as per their levels and understandings. He plays pivotal role in adopting appropriate methods and strategies in order to teach effective to school children. The school children comprises of diverse learning in their nature. The term diverse learners can be used for gifted children, street children, slow learners, tribal children, disadvantaged children, and children with special needs. It is very important to understand various learning needs of diverse children and impart free and quality education for them. There should not be any kind of discrimination with regard to their religion, region, caste, creed, color and ethnicity while imparting education and gaining learning experiences.

To impart quality education the teacher of the class should adopt various pedagogical processes. It includes selection criteria of teaching, classroom management, effective communication, use of assistive technologies, ways of teaching to children with disabilities, gifted children, slow learners and tribal children and understanding their learning needs and disabilities.

Teaching for Diverse Learning Needs

Learning styles are not the only ways students are diverse. They also have different sets of abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Some of these, a teacher may only discover as he begins teaching students. Being aware of student strengths and weaknesses can help teachers prepare lessons to help those students. Some of the approaches are discussed here to address the diverse learning needs.

1. Differentiated instruction (DI)

Just as everyone has a unique fingerprint, each student has an individual style of learning. Not all students in a classroom learn a subject in the same way or share the same level of ability. Differentiated instruction aspected in students' individual learning styles and levels of readiness first before designing a lesson plan. Research on the effectiveness of differentiation shows this method benefits a wide range of students, from those with learning disabilities to those who are considered high ability.

Differentiating instruction may mean teaching the same material to all students using a variety of instructional strategies, or it may require the teacher to deliver lessons at varying levels of difficulty based on the ability of each student. Formative assessment is an essential ingredient of this method. Teachers who practise differentiation in the classroom may:

- Design lessons based on students' learning styles.
- Group students by shared interest, topic or ability for assignments.
- Assess students' learning using formative assessment.
- Manage the classroom to create a safe and supportive environment.
- Continually assess and adjust lesson content to meet students' needs.

Ways to differentiate instruction
Teachers can differentiate instruction through four ways:
1) Content,
2) Process,
3) Product, and
4) Learning environment.

1. Content
Fundamental lesson content should cover the standards of learning set by the regional or national educational system. Some students in a class may be completely unfamiliar with the concepts in a lesson, some students may have partial mastery, and some students may already be familiar with the content before the lesson begins.
The teacher may differentiate the content by designing activities for groups of students that cover various levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. It focuses classification of levels of intellectual behavior going from lower-order thinking skills to higher-order thinking skills. The six levels are: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating.

2. Process
Each student has a preferred learning style, and successful differentiation includes delivering the material to each style: visual, auditory and kinesthetic and through words. Not all students require the same amount of support from the teacher, and students could choose to work in pairs, small groups or individually. While some students may benefit from one-on-one interaction with a teacher and others may be able to progress by themselves. Teachers can enhance student learning by offering support based on individual needs.

Examples of differentiating the process:
- Provide textbooks for visual learners.
- Allow auditory learners to listen to audio books.

3. Product

The product is what the student creates at the end of the lesson to demonstrate the mastery of the content. Teachers may assign students to complete activities that show mastery of an educational concept in a way the student prefers, based on learning style.

Examples of differentiating the end product:
- Read and write learners write a book report.
- Visual learners create a graphic organizer of the story.
- Auditory learners give an oral report.

4. Learning environment

The conditions for optimal learning include both physical and psychological elements. A flexible classroom layout is key, incorporating various types of furniture and arrangements to support both individual and group work.

Psychologically speaking, teachers should use classroom management techniques that support a safe and supportive learning environment.

Examples of differentiating the environment:
- Break some students into reading groups to discuss the assignment.
- Allow students to read individually if preferred.
- Research shows differentiated instruction is effective for high-ability students as well as students with mild to severe disabilities.
- When students are given more options on how they can learn material, they take on more responsibility for their own learning.
- Students appear to be more engaged in learning, and there are reportedly fewer discipline problems in classrooms where teachers provide differentiated lessons.
- Differentiated instruction requires more work during lesson planning, and many teachers struggle to find the extra time in their schedule.

2. Universal Design for Learning

Universal design is an instructional approach that gives particular attention to students who have physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities. Like differentiated instruction, universal design embraces the idea that instruction should be designed from the beginning with students' diverse needs in mind. Universal design supports the thought that educators should not have to retrofit lessons for students with exceptional needs after those lessons have already been created. According to Orkwis (1999), "Universal design implies a design of instructional materials and activities that allows learning goals to be attainable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember" . With universal design, it is important that learning activities provide multiple means of representation or modes of presentation for students having auditory, visual, and varying levels of complexity.

3. Sheltered Instruction

Like differentiated instruction and universal design, sheltered instruction also embraces the needs of diverse learners, specifically English language learners. Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2004) define sheltered instruction by using the following eight broad elements:

1. Preparation,
2. building background,
3. comprehensible input,
4. strategies,
5. interaction,
6. practice and application,
7. lesson delivery, and
8. Review and assessment.

The preparation element suggests that teachers first identify lesson objectives aligned with national and regional standards.

The building background element requires that teachers link new content to students' background experiences and helps students focus on unfamiliar vocabulary.

With the comprehensible input element, as the name implies, teachers use controlled vocabulary, sentence structure, and visuals and gestures to facilitate students' comprehension.

The strategies element refers to teaching students different approaches for organizing and retaining information associated with effective learning.

The interaction element shows teachers how to structure opportunities for students to interact with their peers in the learning process.

The lesson delivery element illustrates how teachers can appropriately pace the lesson and provide for active engagement.

The review and assessment element focuses on establishing standards and including language-based and content-based evaluations. All of these elements are important in designing classroom instruction.

4. Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is another approach that is important in today's diverse classrooms. As the name implies, multicultural education addresses the needs of culturally diverse populations of students. Banks (2001) defined this approach with the following five major dimensions: (1) content integration, (2) the knowledge construction process, (3) bias reduction, (4) empowering school culture, and (5) equity pedagogy.

5. Instructional Strategies &Teacher Behaviour

Certain behaviors and instructional strategies enable teachers to build a stronger teaching/learning relationship with their culturally diverse students. Many of these behaviors and strategies demonstrate standard practices of good teaching, and others are specific to working with students from diverse cultures.

Instructional Strategies

a. Use a variety of instructional strategies and learning activities.

Offering variety provides the students with opportunities to learn in ways that are responsive to their own communication styles, cognitive styles, and aptitudes. In addition, the variety helps them develop and strengthen other approaches to learning. Consider students' cultures and language skills when developing learning objectives and instructional activities. Facilitate comparable learning opportunities for students with differing characteristics. For example, consider opportunities for students who differ in appearance, race, sex, disability, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or ability.

b. Incorporate objectives for affective and personal development.

Provide increased opportunities for high and low achievers to boost their self-esteem, develop positive self- attributes, and enhance their strengths and talents. Such opportunities can enhance students' motivation to learn and achieve. Communicate expectations. Let the students know the "classroom rules" about talking, verbal participation in lessons, and moving about the room. Tell them how long a task will take to complete or how long it will take to learn a skill or strategy, and when appropriate, give them information on their ability to master a certain skill or complete a task.

c. Provide rationales.

Explain the benefits of learning a concept, skill, or task. Ask students to tell you the rationale for learning and explain how the concept or skill applies to their lives at school, home and work.

d. Use advance and post organizers.

At the beginning of lessons, give the students an overview and tell them the purpose or goal of the activity. If applicable, tell them the order that the lesson will follow and relate it to previous lessons. At the end of the lesson, summarize its main points

e. Provide Frequent Reviews Of The Content Learned.

For example, check with the students to see if they remember the difference between simple and compound sentences. Provide a brief review of the previous lesson before continuing on to a new and related lesson.

f. Facilitate Independence In Thinking And Action.

There are many ways to facilitate students' independence. For example, when students begin their work without specific instruction from the teacher, they are displaying independence. When students ask questions, the teacher can encourage independence by responding in a way that lets the student know how to find answer for him. When the teacher wants to evaluate their own work or progress, they are facilitating independence, and asking students to perform for the class (e.g., by reciting or role-playing) also promotes independence.

g. Promote student on-task behavior.

Keeping students on task maintains a high level of intensity of instruction. By starting lessons promptly and minimizing transition time between lessons, teachers can help students stay on task. Shifting smoothly (no halts) and efficiently (no wasted effort) from one lesson to another and being business-like about housekeeping tasks such as handing out papers and setting up audiovisual equipment helps to maintain their attention. Keeping students actively involved in the lessons – for example, by asking questions that require students to recall information – also helps them to stay focused and increases the intensity of instruction.

h. Monitor Students' Academic Progress during Lessons and Independent Work.

Check with students during seatwork to see if they need assistance before they have to ask for help. Ask if they have any questions about what they are doing and if they understand what they are doing. Also make the students aware of the various situations in which a skill or strategy can be used as well as adaptations that will broaden its applicability to additional situations.

i. Provide frequent feedback.

Feedback at multiple levels is preferred. For example, acknowledging a correct response is a form of brief feedback, while prompting a student who has given an incorrect answer by providing clues or repeating or rephrasing the question is another level. The teacher may also give positive feedback by stating the appropriate aspects of a student's performance. Finally, the teacher may give positive corrective feedback by making students aware of specific aspects of their performance that need work.

j. Require mastery.

Require students to master one task before going on to the next. When tasks are assigned, tell the students the criteria that define mastery and the different ways mastery can be obtained. When mastery is achieved on one aspect or portion of the task, give students corrective feedback to let them know what aspects they have mastered and what aspects still need more work. When the task is complete, let the students know that mastery was reached.

Teacher Behaviour
a) Appreciate And Accommodate The Similarities And Differences Among The Students' Cultures.

Effective teachers of culturally diverse students acknowledge both individual and cultural differences enthusiastically and identify these differences in a positive manner. This positive identification creates a basis for the development of effective communication and instructional strategies. Social skills such as respect and cross-cultural understanding can be modeled, taught, prompted, and reinforced by the teacher.

b) Focus On The Ways Students Learn And Observe Students To Identify Their Task Orientations.

Once students' orientations are known, the teacher can structure tasks to take them into account. For example, before some students can begin a task, they need time to prepare or attend to details. In this case, the teacher can allow time for students to prepare, provide them with advance organizers, and announce how much time will be given for preparation and when the task will begin. This is a positive way to honor their need for preparation, rituals, or customs.

c) Teach Students To Match Their Behaviors To The Setting.

We all behave differently in different settings. For example, we behave more formally at official ceremonies. Teaching students the differences between their home, school, and community settings can help them switch to appropriate behavior for each context. For example, a teacher may talk about the differences between conversations with friends in the community and conversations with adults at school and discuss how each behavior is valued and useful in that setting. While some students adjust their behavior automatically, others must be taught and provided ample opportunities to practice. Involving families and the community can help students learn to adjust their behavior in each of the setting in which they interact.

Inclusion
As attention increases to ensure that all learners reach common standards, there is also more attention focused on including students with disabilities into general education classrooms. It is important to note that the physical placement of students with disabilities in general education classes is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. The power of inclusion lies in how educators respond to individual differences. While quality based reform calls for convergence in terms of learning outcomes, inclusion calls for divergence in terms of the strategies used in teaching. Inclusion provides many

opportunities for educators, such as enhancing access to general education curriculum for students with disabilities.

This enhanced access to a general education curriculum should include Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. Differentiated instruction is an example of a supporting instructional approach that embraces the needs of academically diverse populations of students, in particular students who are gifted or who have disabilities. Differentiated instruction involves creating multiple paths to learning for diverse students (Tomlinson, 1999). Instruction can be differentiated in a variety of ways, such as tailoring content to an individual student's needs, modifying instructional methods to address student learning. Together, differentiated instruction, sheltered instruction, universal design, and multicultural education, instructional strategies and teacher behaviour address the broad array of students in today's classrooms. By using these approaches, teachers have the pedagogical tools they need to teach standards in diverse, inclusive classrooms. Without the supporting pedagogy, inclusion in diverse, could not be successful.

Summary
Today's schools are becoming increasingly diverse. No two students learn the same because of these traits. Diversity in the classroom does not just refer to cultural diversity but also refers to diversity in skills, knowledge, and needs. All of these differences make teaching more complex. Students each have unique skills, abilities, and needs that need to be addressed. The broad range diverse students offer a powerful resource for everyone to learn more in different ways, in new environments, and with different types of people. This boundless diversity has resulted in the introduction of various new methods of teaching for enriching classrooms. However, we need a greater repertoire of approaches to teaching and learning to cope with varied styles of learning. The real teaching happens when the teacher understands minds of the learners or students. To impart quality education the teacher of the class should adopt various pedagogical processes. It includes selection criteria of teaching, classroom management, effective communication, use of assistive technologies, ways of teaching to children with disabilities etc., some of the approaches are differentiated instruction, universal design, sheltered design and multicultural design. Apart, certain behaviors and instructional strategies enable teachers to build a stronger teaching/learning relationship with their culturally diverse students. Many of these behaviors and strategies exemplify standard practices of good teaching. As attention increases to ensure that all learners reach common standards, there is also more attention focused on including students with disabilities into general education classrooms. By using these approaches, teachers have the pedagogical tools they need to teach standards in diverse, inclusive classrooms. Without the supporting pedagogy, inclusion in diverse, could not be successful.