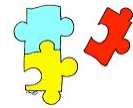




Pathways for Parents



A Differentiation Publication

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District 123 Students Participate in National Student Parent Mock Election!

As you are probably aware, students across the district participated in the National Student Parent Mock Election on Thursday, October 30, 2008. Prior to the mock election, students at all grade levels engaged in a variety of lessons and activities designed to enhance their understanding and involvement in the election process.

Across the district, students were reading and writing about the presidency and the election. For instance, students had the opportunity to analyze and create election and campaign posters using information learned about the candidates as well as propaganda techniques applied in the campaign process. Other students wrote presidential prose (If I were president...) and poetry using the candidates' names.

On Election Day, students visited their "polling places" to cast their ballots for the candidate of their choice, and results were announced in each building at the end of the day.

Authentic learning (like the mock election) allows children to simulate those real-life experiences they will have as adults. It enables children the opportunity to construct their own knowledge.



Encouraging Authentic Learning at Home

What can you do at home with your child to encourage authentic learning experiences? Here is a list of ideas to model and use with your child(ren):

- Give your child some sales flyers from local grocery stores. Have them do some cost comparison shopping!
- Have your child help you make lists, from "to do" lists to grocery lists, list making is an important organizational skill.
- Take your child grocery shopping. Children need to know how to make good decisions when it comes to cost, value and quality of purchases made.
- Once you've gone shopping, have your child help you with the cooking or baking. Reading a recipe correctly and measuring and mixing ingredients are opportunities to use both math and science (chemistry) skills.
- Do you have an upcoming home improvement project? Planning for the project including measuring the space or determining materials needed allows children to use a variety of math skills and encourages problem solving.
- If your child earns an allowance, that allowance is a great opportunity to incorporate learning experiences. Have your child plan a budget (what is spent and what is saved). With the money saved, open a savings account and allow your child to balance his/her savings book.
- Have your child use the TV guide to plan shows or movies the family can watch together for an evening or a week.

- Write a letter or note to a family member or friend who lives in another city or state. While people don't write letters the way they did years ago, writing encourages higher level thinking skills.
- Are you planning a family vacation this summer? Why not let your child be a part of the planning process? Give him/her a map to help plan your family's travel route if you are going by car. Pick up a train schedule if that is your preference. Check out the arrivals and departures at your local airport. You can even get some travel books to help your child plan sightseeing opportunities at your destination (as well as determine costs for transportation, accommodations, and attractions to visit).

What Can We Differentiate?

Along with the learning environment, teachers often differentiate the content of what students learn. Content is "what we want students to learn and the materials or mechanisms through which that is accomplished." (Tomilson, 1999)

In the classroom, this is often accomplished through formative assessments (those that allow teachers to determine student readiness for learning) in order to identify student needs. These assessments allow the teacher to make instructional decisions: Does the student require direct instruction or has he/she already mastered the content?

How Can We Differentiate?

Differentiating the content enables the teacher to work with students at the appropriate level of readiness. If the content is too difficult, learning becomes frustrating. Conversely, if the content is too easy, learning can become boring. Readiness helps guide teachers in determining the variety of content to be used as well as how complex or abstract the content can be.

Tiered Instruction

One strategy that is useful for differentiating content by readiness is tiered instruction. With tiered instruction, all students focus on essential content & ideas, but do so at varying levels of complexity. For some students, instruction might focus on knowledge and comprehension. For others, instruction might involve application and analysis of those ideas they already understand. Still, for other students, instruction might involve synthesizing or evaluating content and ideas already learned. Whole group lessons are still a part of instruction, but when it is time to practice or create a product, the work is appropriately challenging and meaningful to the students. Some students might need more teacher-directed guidance, while others might work relatively independently. With tiered instruction, the goals are the same, it is just the "route" to achieving those goals may be different based on where the child's needs are best met.

