
A differentiated curriculum will help Helen realise and appreciate her different strengths and weaknesses and will introduce new mediums of interest that can potentially become lifelong pursuits that she may otherwise not be exposed to. It will also increase the likelihood of experiencing success in the classroom and facilitate the teacher ascertaining the best ways to teach all of the class, including Helen, to achieve curriculum objectives. (Halvorsen et al, 2009). A differentiated curriculum involves the teacher tailoring the lesson to each student’s need. (Bryant, Smith and Bryant, 2008). Helen will likely have markedly different needs in an inclusive classroom setting compared with the rest of the class. Differentiation will encourage the teacher to focus more on the individual needs of students, including Helen and produce lessons where all students will have an equal opportunity to learn. Bryant et al speak about the A.D.A.P.T. framework to create a differentiated curriculum which will include analysing each student’s strengths and weaknesses, proposing adaptations to make learning easier and continually testing to see if such teaching is having a successful outcome for all students. In this way differentiated teaching will help a teacher hone and direct their teaching skills, becoming better teachers for all students, particularly for those with special needs. Differentiation often involves co-operated learning and this will allow Helen to interact more with her peers and help her peers learn to better interact with Helen. (Hardin and Hardin, 2002; Horne, 1982). While these advantages will tend to help all students, Helen, because of her reduced mobility, is more prone to experiencing a lack of social opportunities and so, in this way, a differentiated curriculum will tend to be especially beneficial for her in this regard. (Soto, Solomon-Rice and Caputo, 2009).
Section D.  Real world feedback on my Unit of Work and two lesson plans.

The feedback received for this assessment was from two Special Needs schools, including a Principal of a school that deals specifically with students having disabilities such as cerebral palsy, and another from an experienced teacher, specialising in students with behavioural difficulties. Both were impressed with the thought behind the lessons and remarked that “it was quite a good attempt at including students (such as Helen) in the classroom”.

The teacher agreed with the use of special prompts for the painting lesson to help guide the students hand in that task. The angled leaning board and the upright painting board mounted on an easel would help contribute to a good final outcome and remove or reduce any frustration that Helen may otherwise encounter.  (Gould et al, 1999) This fits in well with the research that would describe Helen as having poor fine and gross motor skills and that she may be prone to hyperactive behaviour if she is not experiencing success in the painting task (Copeland, 1984).

The teacher remarked that ‘putting myself in Helen’s shoes’ every step of the way throughout my planned lesson is a good way to anticipate possible problems and head them off. She was impressed that this seemed to have been done with regard to having painting equipment adapted and ‘ready to go’. She commented that the classroom sometimes can be hectic, especially during painting activities and the teacher is often pre-occupied with helping students and managing ‘excess enthusiasm’that can often lead to behavioural problems. Having situations where Helen had to wait or seek help in things such as pouring out paint, lessened the time Helen would be spending on task. It could also possibly disrupt the class if other students were spending time ‘setting her up’ which of course meant they were also spending less time on task which was alluded to by Jellison. (Jellison, 2002).
One area that the Principal recommended improving was in the area of visual clues. She remarked that because many students with cerebral palsy have trouble communicating verbally, (Keever, 2009) there needed to be found ways of helping Helen communicate non-verbally. Helen was likely to have a speech therapist to help her in communication but typical verbal communication skills were not usually developed enough to be relied solely upon in the classroom. (Casey, 1994).

She thought games such as ‘word domino’ would help Helen demonstrate her learning through the communication inherent in the game. She also advised similar type games where word cards could be placed around the room where students would go and stand in front of different cards as a response to questions relating to, for example, natural places, or descriptive words or animals with perhaps bonus points if students chooses a correct card that no one else is standing in front of. Another adaptation would be to place the Aboriginal word cards in a ‘story event order’ and then have students tell a story by pointing to the different words as they come up. This will help all students facilitate the telling and structuring of stories. The Principal mentioned it is probable that in a regular classroom an aide would still be needed to help Helen with her verbal communication, but the cards will help students comprehend each other’s stories, and especially Helen’s story more easily and enhance inclusion in the skill of storytelling.

The teacher likewise agreed with this strategy and commented that lots of group work and co-operative learning was likely to better help Helen with her own learning and social needs. This was supported by the journal article previously cited, that was written by Soto, Solomon-Rice and Caputo from 2009.

The Principal suggested that instead of the teacher simply reading out map co-ordinates in the ‘bingo’ game lesson, the teacher should also display the
co-ordinates around the class on cards. These cards likewise could be used when asking students to choose the correct answer and a multiplicity of different group games could be based on this interactively visual and kinetic learning style.

She also recommended that the painting exercise be broken into two phases, where students work co-operatively in pairs using initial worksheets instead of going straight into the main painting phase after the initial introduction. This is something that Gould et al also advocates. The Principal suggested students work in pairs from the start of the lesson to co-operate in discussing the choice of symbols for different parts of the school. This 'two phase' process will help with keeping the students on track and provide visual clues for communication between Helen and her partner and also between all students and the teacher. The Principal also remarked that it would help all students to plan their painting with regards to the colour, symbolism and spatial assessment criteria and that I should continually mention and re-enforce to students the need to co-operate in discussing and deciding the use of these three aspects in their shared painting. She also recommended that I explicitly make known to the students the assessment rubric I intended to use which will better help the students stay on task.

Similarly, she suggested the role play lesson could involve two stages where initially students work in groups to fill in scaffolded ‘help cards’ to list different strengths their community has and then incorporate the giving of these cards to the other ‘community’ in the subsequent role play. Perhaps a follow up exercise could be that each community group then reaches a consensus in ranking the cards they have received from another group in numerical order from the most to least useful ideas.

These ideas were incorporated into the unit of work as the ‘two phase’ process would help all students, particularly Helen, stay on task and it also creates a common physical medium of communication.
Another main point from the received feedback that I have incorporated into my lessons is that I have to be aware of communicating through
non-verbal media such as scaffolded help cards, paintings, playing of musical instruments, word dominoes and bingo game sheets. This can be used as
an aid for both communication and learning and is particularly useful to students with verbal communication difficulties as well as for deaf students
(Halvorsen et al, 2009; Goldin-Meadow, 1999) and those who are visual learners. (Murphy, 1997). Approximately 7% of students with cerebral palsy
are likely also to be deaf (Physical as Anything, 1996) and as many as 30% of students are visual learners (Bostick, McGready and Nipper, 1988) and
so learning to teach through visual cues will address many student’s individual learning needs including those of Helen.

This was an aspect of learning and teaching that I was not previously aware of. Such visual learning and teaching is recommended by many authors and
in a variety of structures. These include the use of visual prompts (Halvorsen et al, 2009); cued speech (Casey, 1994, and Ashman et al, 1998); and also
transition pictures and the use of simple class-made communication boards. (Gould et al, 1999). Importantly, teaching Helen to communicate in
non-verbal ways will give her life skills and allow her to better form personal connections with people who she would otherwise not be able to
satisfactorily interact with.
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