

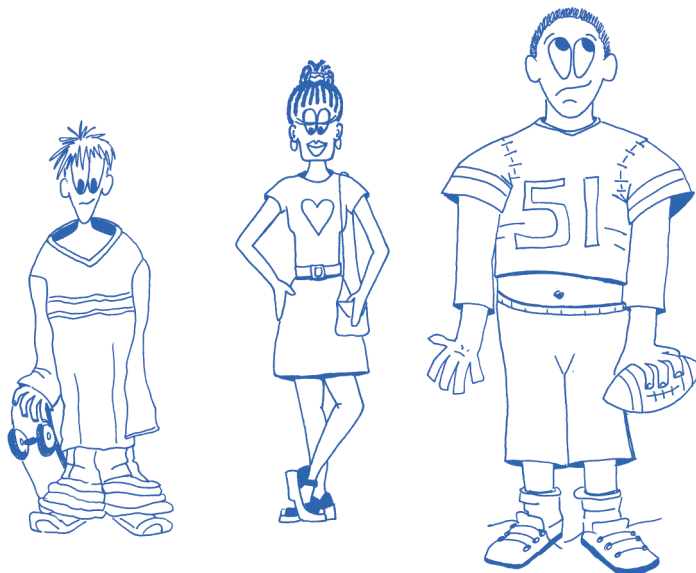
ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

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NO ONE WOULD EVER SAY THAT ALL STUDENTS ARE THE SAME. Certainly no teacher or parent would tell you that. Yet in schools, we often treat students as if they were, even though all those faces look so different. We sometimes put them through the same hoops, even though we know it isn't making a difference for all of them. Experience, as well as the research we now have about the human brain, tells us that students are different, that they learn differently and have different likes, preferences, and needs.

We have used the analogy of "One size doesn't fit all" for years in education (see Figure 1). We know that students are different from one another in height, size, shape, hair and eye color, and background and experience. As with clothing, we would not buy or make the same garments for all learners (even school uniforms, although they look the same, are sized and adjusted and accessorized for the wearer) because they would not fit, suit, or be comfortable. Students differ from each other in physical abilities and social development as well.

Figure 1. As With Clothing, So With Lessons: One Size Does Not Fit All



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2 DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Yet for years we have planned “The Lesson” and taught it to all, knowing that we were boring some and losing others because they were not ready for that learning. Still, we expect students to adjust to the learning when the learning should really be adjusted to the learner. Adjustments should be based on the sound knowledge of the learner. This includes what they know already, can do, like, are like, need, or prefer.

Effective teachers must know the standards and their students. The standards and the needs of the students should determine instructional decisions. Programs, materials, and resources should not guide curriculum and instruction. The specific materials and resources are selected to teach to the needs of the particular group of students and the standards being taught.

Our quest in schools and classrooms everywhere is to foster success for students in their lives through becoming self-directed, productive problem solvers and thinkers. For years, we have been studying and implementing research-based instructional strategies and assessment tools that make a difference in student achievement. *Differentiation* is a philosophy that enables educators to plan strategically in order to reach the needs of the diverse learners in classrooms today to achieve targeted standards. Differentiation is not a set of tools, but a belief system educators embrace to meet the unique needs of every learner.

Supporters of differentiation as a philosophy believe:

- All students have areas of strength.
- All students have areas that need to be strengthened.
- Each student’s brain is as unique as a fingerprint.
- It is never too late to learn.
- When beginning a new topic, students bring their prior knowledge base and experience to the learning.
- Emotions, feelings, and attitudes affect learning.
- All students can learn.
- Students learn in different ways at different times.

By using differentiated strategies and activities, educators are implementing this philosophy daily in classrooms across the grade levels and content areas.

Differentiating instruction is not new, but requires a more conscious effort to analyze available data and make decisions about what is working and what needs to be adjusted. Keep what works. Discard practices that don’t work. Change what needs changing. Educators are already doing a great job! More conscious consideration and a greater repertoire of strategies will help educators do an even better job.

THE DIFFERENTIATED CLASSROOM

A *differentiated classroom* is one in which the teacher responds to the unique needs of students. Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999) names content, process, and product as things that are differentiated in a classroom. The content is what is taught. The way a learner interprets, adapts, and finds ownership is the process. The product shows the learner’s personal interpretation

and what he or she knows. Differentiated instruction gives a variety of options to successfully reach targeted standards. It meets learners where they are and offers challenging, appropriate options for them in order to achieve success.

Teachers can strategically and effectively differentiate

- content
- assessment tools
- performance tasks
- instructional strategies

Differentiating Content

One way to differentiate is to provide different content to meet the varying needs of students. Content teaches the standards and meets the needs of the particular students being taught. The information to teach and the resources to best teach it are selected strategically. This is implemented by

- using different genres
- leveling materials
- using a variety of instructional materials
- providing choice
- using selective abandonment

Differentiating Assessment Tools

Most teachers are already effectively differentiating assessment during and after the learning. However, it is equally important to assess knowledge and interests prior to the learning. Understanding what students know about the upcoming topic is essential to planning quality learning experiences. Dispense a blending of formal and informal tools for ongoing assessment.

Differentiating Performance Tasks

Students demonstrate their knowledge in many different ways. Provide various opportunities and choices for learners to show what they know. For example, students can choose how to demonstrate their knowledge by creating a prop, giving an oral report, or engaging in a center experience.

Differentiating Instructional Strategies

When teachers vary instructional strategies and activities, more students learn content and information and they develop the necessary skills. By targeting diverse intelligences and learning styles, teachers can label learning activities in ways that help students choose when to work with their areas of strength and when to work with areas that still need strengthening. Using research-based best practices (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001) will help ensure that more students develop the concepts and skills targeted. Rehearsal in a variety of ways helps learning become part of long-term memory.

As in clothing, "One size doesn't fit all," so in classrooms one way is not the only way.

WHY DIFFERENTIATION?

We have been faced with more change than ever before in education. Several decades ago, teachers came into the profession with a desire to work with children, a knowledge base, and good intentions. Today, teachers face a challenging landscape that is in constant flux. Many factors influence the constantly changing classroom:

- Standard-based classrooms: targeted expectations set by districts, states, and nations
- High expectations for all students: no longer can we leave children behind and just “spray and pray” for success
- Multicultural diversity: continuous influx of immigrant children with little or no communication skills or competencies in English
- Student diversity: unique learning styles and different levels of multiple intelligences
- New cognitive research on human learning: knowledge of the brain and how it processes memory and makes meaning
- Rapid societal and technological change: political and economic revolutions that influence what and how learning takes place

Along with all these changes, schools are expected to put the “C.A.R.T. before the horse.” The acronym C.A.R.T. stands for

C onnected, Competence, Confidence, Compassion

A cceptance, Affection, Appreciation

R eading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic and also Responsibility, Respect, and Relationships

T hinking, Technology, Teamwork

All these C.A.R.T. skills and attributes are necessary to be successful in life, not just at school. Schools are expected to build in opportunities within the curriculum for students to practice and develop these skills. However, the balancing act is dealing with district and state standards and the reality that classrooms contain a diverse, heterogeneous group of learners. Learners with different cultural backgrounds and different experiences, interests, learning styles, and multiple intelligences are the norm.

Students don't all learn the “same thing in the same way on the same day.” As educators in classrooms, we need to consider each child within the learning community, based on his or her needs, readiness, preferences, and interests.

We live and work in a global society of high accountability. The legislative notion that any educator would willingly “leave a child behind” is insulting to most educators who view their chosen profession as a “mission” rather than as a job.

For many decades, educators used a “bell curve” to rank students. They didn't expect everyone to succeed. It was more the norm to “teach, test, and hope for the best.”

Today, however, we do expect that all students will learn to their full potential and that all teachers will find a way to enable each individual to be successful. Dr. R. L. Canady, of the University of Virginia, shared that there are three groups of students in classrooms:

- A group of 25% to 37% of students learn “in spite of us.” Those are the students who come ready, willing, and prepared to play the school game in order to succeed. These learners see education as a means to an end, do the work as assigned regardless of preferences, and have the support of significant others in their lives.
- A group of 15% to 25% of students are identified as having some exceptionality and receive additional resources.
- A large group of about 37% to 50% learn because of the teacher’s skills and efforts and because of appropriate instruction and assessment aligned with targeted standards.

Through differentiation, we give all these students the opportunity to learn to their full potential. Throughout this book, we explore the elements needed in the differentiated classroom to engage students and to facilitate learning to increase the chances that all learners will succeed. Figure 2 organizes these elements in categories listing tools and strategies that build an inclusive, nurturing classroom and allow teachers to design learning to honor the diversity of the learning population.

Figure 2. Tools and Strategies for Designing Inclusive Differentiated Classrooms for Diverse Learners

Climate	Knowing the Learner	Assessing the Learner	Adjustable Assignments	Instructional Strategies	Curriculum Approaches
Safe	Learning Styles Dunn & Dunn Gregorc Silver/Strong/Hanson	Before <i>Formal</i> Pretest Journaling	Compacting	Brain/Research Based Memory model Elaborative rehearsal Focus activities Graphic organizers Compare & contrast Webbing Metaphorical thinking Cooperative group learning Jigsaw Questioning Cubing Role-play	Centers
Nurturing	Multiple Intelligences Using observation checklists, inventories, logs, and journals to become more aware of how students learn	<i>Informal</i> Squaring off Boxing Graffiti facts	TAPS		Projects
Encourages Risk Taking		During <i>Formal</i> Journaling/Portfolios Teacher-made tests Checklists/Rubrics	<i>Total Group</i> Lecturette Presentation Demonstration Jigsaw Video Field trip Guest speaker Text		Choice Boards
Multisensory		<i>Informal</i> Thumb it Fist of five Face the fact	Alone Interest Personalized Multiple intelligences		Problem-Based Learning
Stimulating		After <i>Formal</i> Posttest Portfolio/Conferences Reflections	<i>Paired</i> Random Interest Task		Inquiry Models
Complex		<i>Informal</i> Talking topics Conversation Circles Donut	<i>Small Groups</i> Heterogeneous Homogeneous Task oriented Constructed Random Interest		Contracts
Challenging					
Collaborative					
Team and Class Building					
Norms					

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PLANNING FOR DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

A planning model (see Figure 3) can be used to help teachers make decisions about differentiated instruction and assessment. Each phase of the planning model will be explained. Throughout this book, the strategies are clarified using examples.

1. Establish what needs to be taught. First, consider the **standards**, benchmarks, essential questions, or expectations to be taught. It should be clear what the students should know, be able to do, or be like after the learning experience. Determine which assessment strategies will be used to collect data (logs, checklists, journals, observations, portfolios, rubrics).

Essential questions may be developed that will be visible and posted throughout the unit so that students can consider the questions as they work on tasks.

2. Identify the **content**, including facts, vocabulary, and essential **skills**.
3. **Activate**. Determine what students know and what they need to learn next. This may be done 1 to 3 weeks prior to the unit to allow plenty of time for planning learning activities, grouping students, and raising anticipation about the new topic. “Emotional hooks” can be used to engage and to capture the attention of the students through challenge, novelty, and unique experiences.

A strong pre-assessment determines what the students know. The pre-assessment is sometimes formal and other times informal. It is essential to select an assessment tool that best shows students’ prior knowledge, background experience, and attitudes and preferences toward the information.

4. **Acquire**. Decide what new information and skills students need to learn and how they will acquire the knowledge. Also decide whether the acquisition will take place in a total group setting or in small groups.

Now it is time to lay out the plan. Determine how the information is best taught to this particular group of students. In this step, weed through the resources available and find the materials that will best meet the needs of these students. Focus on quality materials and remember that what works for one group does not always work for another group.

5. **Apply and Adjust**. Students need the opportunity to practice and become actively engaged with the new learning in order to understand and retain it. Determine how the students will be grouped and what tasks will be assigned to challenge them at the appropriate levels.

6. **Assess**. Decide how the students will demonstrate their knowledge. Consider providing choices for doing so.

All these decisions are made with the intention of honoring the diversity of the students’ learning styles, multiple intelligences, and personal interests.

So, let’s get started exploring the facets of differentiating instruction and offering our students diverse opportunities to succeed.

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Figure 3. The Six-Step Planning Model for Differentiated Learning: Template

Planning for Differentiated Learning	
1. STANDARDS: What should students know and be able to do?	Assessment tools for data collection: (logs, checklists, journals, agendas, observations, portfolios, rubrics, contracts)
Essential Questions:	
2. CONTENT: (concepts, vocabulary, facts)	SKILLS:
3. ACTIVATE: Pre-assessment Prior knowledge & engaging the learners	Focus Activity: Pre-assessment strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz, test • Surveys • K-W-L • Journals • Arm gauge • Give me • Brainstorm • Concept formation • Thumb it
4. ACQUIRE: Total group or small groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecturette • Presentation • Demonstration • Jigsaw • Video • Field trip • Guest speaker • Text
5. Grouping Decisions: (TAPS, random, heterogeneous, homogeneous, interest, task, constructed) APPLY ADJUST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning centers • Projects • Contracts • Compact/Enrichment • Problem based • Inquiry • Research • Independent study
6. ASSESS Diversity Honored (learning styles, multiple intelligences, personal interest, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz, test • Performance • Products • Presentation • Demonstration • Log, journal • Checklist • Portfolio • Rubric • Metacognition

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