



Professional Development for **DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION**

An ASCD Action Tool

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What Is High-Quality Professional Development for Differentiating Instruction?

Watching young people grow is fascinating and exciting, and guiding them in this growth is a privilege and joy. The best teachers know both their content area and their students well. They are flexible and responsive to student need, yet sure and steady in their commitment to help their students grow in key knowledge, understanding, and skills. They are passionate about their work and strive to give their best to students every day.

Watching teachers grow is just as fascinating and exciting. Professional development that helps teachers expand and refine their practices over time affects both the individual teachers and the hundreds of students they work with over the course of their careers. Therefore, like their students, teachers should have guidance from educators who understand both their content (best-practices teaching) and their students (staff development participants). Our teachers deserve the very best staff development we can offer—staff development that is flexible and responsive to teacher variance, yet firmly committed to teacher growth.

Unfortunately, to many educators, “high-quality staff development” is something of an oxymoron. The list of complaints about teacher workshop days is long and most often includes

- “Drive-by” workshops
- One-size-fits-all presentations
- “Been there, done that” topics
- Little or no modeling of what is being taught
- Focus on rotating fads
- Lack of follow-up

All of these complaints often lead educators to feel disillusioned, resent staff development days for the time they take away from the classroom and planning, and take an overall attitude of, “If I just close my eyes, this new initiative, too, shall pass.”



Organization of This Action Tool

In this action tool, we will learn to practice what we preach. The staff development activities included here will help us:

- Establish a learning environment that is welcoming and respectful of teachers and administrators at all levels of expertise with regard to differentiation;
- Increase teachers' and administrators' knowledge about, understanding of, and skill with differentiated practices;
- Use ongoing assessment to guide staff development;
- Plan respectful differentiated staff development activities; and
- Flexibly and reflectively group teachers for a variety of learning experiences.

Part 2 of *Professional Development for Differentiating Instruction* provides tools for administrators and teacher leaders. In Section 1 of Part 2, leaders reflect on their own and their district's strengths and weaknesses with respect to knowledge about, understanding of, and skill with differentiated instruction. Various tools encourage leaders to examine their own thinking about differentiation and practice responding to teacher questions and concerns about differentiated instruction. Section 2 of Part 2 includes suggested protocols for examining and critiquing individual differentiated tasks, conducting postobservation conferences focused on differentiated practices, and evaluating and supporting overall teacher growth in the ongoing quest to become more responsive to student differences in readiness, interest, and learning profile.

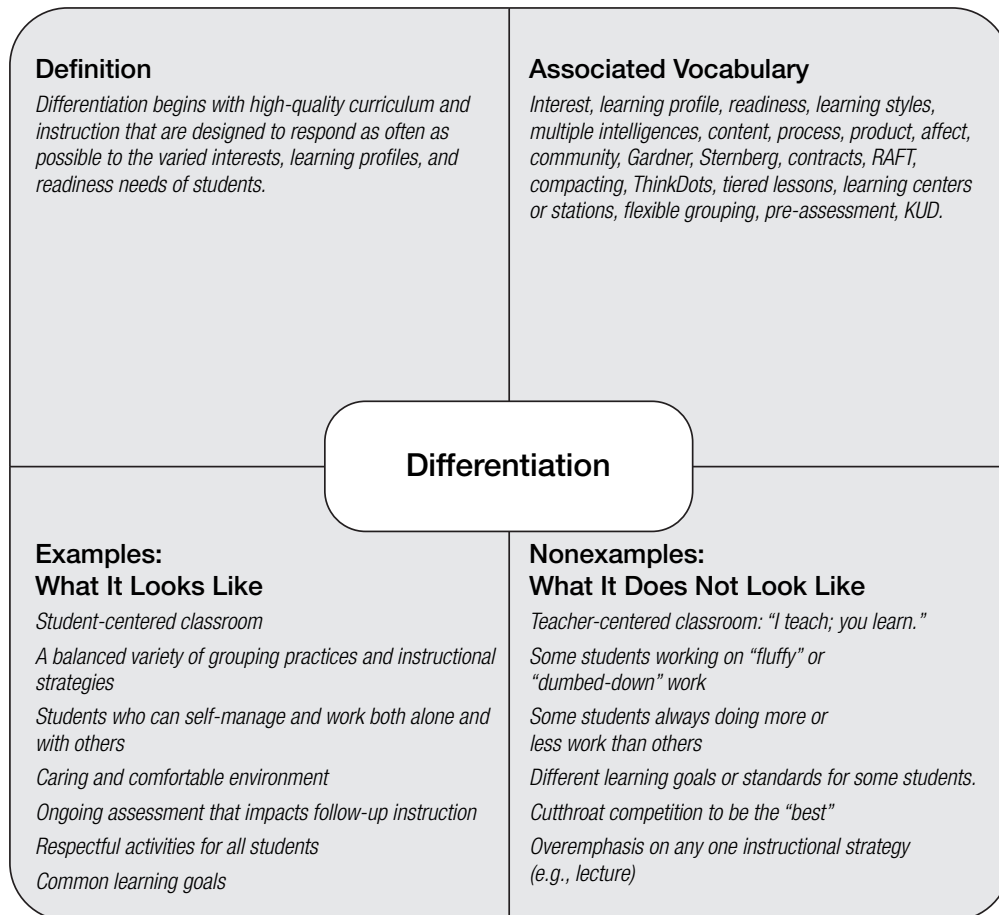
Part 3 of *Professional Development for Differentiating Instruction* provides differentiated tools for leaders to use with teachers before, during, and after DI-focused professional development. In the spirit of modeling differentiation, the tools incorporate variations for teacher interest, learning profile, and readiness differences. Many of the tools also model specific instructional strategies that are useful in the differentiated classroom. In this way, staff development sessions can not only increase teacher knowledge about, understanding of, and skill

Pre-assessment for Administrators and Staff Developers

Sample 3: Advanced Level

Part 1: Complete the chart to show what you know about differentiation. Write as much as you can. You may also use symbols or pictures to communicate your thoughts.

Part Two



Part 2: What are the three most important things to understand about teaching in a differentiated classroom?

- Teachers must understand that they need to vary materials, activities, and assessments and combine them with high-quality curriculum, high-quality instruction, and research-based strategies.*
- Teachers must understand that differentiated instruction is not a dumbing down of the curriculum. All students work to key standards.*
- Teachers must understand that students learn differently and differentiated instruction facilitates learning and academic growth in all students.*



Sharing Your Differentiated Activity

Rationale and Purpose

This tool provides a list of discussion questions that teachers can use when sharing their work with colleagues.

Directions

- Divide teachers into small groups of 3–4, and give each teacher a copy of the tool.
- Explain that teachers will each take a turn to share their differentiated activities, using the provided questions as a reference for their commentaries. Tell them how long each teacher will have to share his or her work. Encourage teachers to solicit suggestions from the small group once they have finished their presentations.
- As a large group, ask each teacher or group of teachers to share an insight they gained from sharing their differentiated activities.

Tips and Differentiation Options

- Place the questions on a card, and laminate for later use. These questions will work with any differentiated activity.
- This activity works well in groups with as few as 2 people and as many as 5–6.
- If possible, ask teachers to bring enough copies of their tasks for each teacher in their small group.
- It generally works best to have teachers share with others in their own subject area or grade level. If this is not possible, try to group them so they are in similar school levels (primary, upper elementary, middle, high).
- Try to have a mixture of newer and more experienced teachers in each group.
- Appoint or ask each group to appoint a discussion leader and a timer to help them stay on track. This models an effective classroom practice with students.
- Teachers asked to present at a faculty meeting or staff development session can use the questions in this tool as a preplanning aid.

What to Look For

- Circulate as teachers discuss. Listen for indicators of the degree to which teachers:
 - Thought carefully about what was being differentiated and why.
 - Analyzed the success of implementation.
 - Reflected on ways to improve the activity and their own next steps for growth in differentiation.
- Listen for teachers who are particularly good at expressing themselves with peers. Consider asking them to present other differentiated activities they try to the whole group at a later date.