

THE COMMON SENSE OF DIFFERENTIATION: MEETING SPECIFIC LEARNER NEEDS IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

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Preface to Workshops

This video series emphasizes important principles and practices for teachers who want to provide appropriate and effective instruction for students with diverse learning needs. This may include students with learning disabilities, students learning English as a second language, academically gifted students, and other students whose needs require detailed Individual Education Plans (IEPs), as well as students who have no particular identification but who nonetheless have specific learning needs.

The series as a whole takes viewers inside classes at the primary, elementary, middle, and high school levels. It engages participants in discussions, observations, and tasks designed to emphasize the common sense of differentiation. In other words, the series explores the reality that differentiation is largely rooted in the basic elements of high-quality classroom practice: clarifying important learning goals, consistently attempting to understand needs that affect the learner's achievement of those goals, and adapting instructional plans to maximize success for each learner.

Program 1 examines the role that pre-assessments and ongoing assessments play in helping teachers understand their students' needs. Program 2 looks at useful techniques for addressing the learning needs of many kinds of students. Program 3 explores classroom routines that enable teachers to consistently address a range of learner needs in ways that are comfortable and predictable for both teacher and students.

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A Special Note About Differentiating the Workshops

The following workshops are designed to engage teachers in a series of carefully crafted discussions, reflections, and activities based on the three program topics. When engaging in the workshop activities, some participants may prefer working alone and some with colleagues. Some might like the chance to talk with peers from schools, grades, or subjects other than their own, whereas others will want to work with peers who teach the same subject and grade or at the same school.

Some participants may even find it more beneficial to use workshop time to differentiate instruction based on an approach or strategy they already employ in their teaching. This is entirely appropriate, because teachers are more likely to understand and use differentiation if they learn how to tailor instructional plans to content, practices, and tasks that are important for students in their particular classrooms. Further, in a series of workshops on differentiation, it is important to differentiate in response to teachers' varying learning needs, just as we ask them to differentiate for the learning needs of their students. As facilitator, part of your responsibility is to enable participants to work in ways that meet their particular needs and to remind participants that in so doing, you are modeling approaches they might want to use in their classrooms.

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Discovering Learner Needs

This session is designed for use with Program 1. It explores how teachers can use various forms of assessment to better understand the range of learning needs their students bring to the classroom. Participants will see teachers assess student status relative to the experiences, knowledge, understandings, and skills that are prerequisite for success in the class as a whole; pre-assess student knowledge, understanding, and skills that form the focus of an upcoming unit; use ongoing assessment to understand learner progress toward essential goals; and assess for insights about student interest and learning profile. Use the following agenda for this session, or vary it to suit the particular needs of your setting and participants.

Agenda and Time Guide

Activity	Minutes
Introduction	30
View Video Program 1	40
Reflection	20
Wrap-Up	5
Total Approximate Workshop Time:	95 minutes

Workshop Materials

For this workshop, you will need

- Handout 1 and copies of Overheads 2 and 3 for each participant.
- Overheads 1–3 for your own use.
- Flip chart and paper, masking tape, blank transparencies, and markers for possible use during activities and to record participant responses.
- You may also wish to provide copies of the readings suggested in the Readings and Resources section of the guide. Although the readings are intended for the longer workshops, they can be used as follow-up material for this workshop. Choose readings to share based on the experience and needs of your participants.

Workshop 1

Facilitator's Note

Providing folders with all materials inside is an efficient way to distribute handouts and other resources. You may also want to provide name tags. Before participants arrive, write the objectives for the session on the flip chart, or display Overhead 1, Objectives of Workshop 1.

Introduction (30 minutes)

1. Welcome all participants. Introduce yourself and explain your role as workshop facilitator. As the facilitator, you will guide the group through the workshop to help them meet the workshop objectives.
2. Depending on the size of the group and whether the participants know one another, you may want to include time for participants to introduce themselves individually or in small groups.
3. You may find it useful at this point to poll the group to determine the degree to which participants are familiar with the principles and practices of differentiation. For example, you may ask participants to raise their hands if they (a) are just beginning to learn about differentiation, (b) have a general understanding of the concept and use it sometimes in their classrooms, or (c) feel very comfortable with the principles of differentiation and use them consistently in their classrooms.
4. Display Overhead 1, Objectives of Workshop 1, or use the flip chart to present the objectives for the workshop to the group.
5. Tell participants that one goal of this workshop is to help them reflect on connections between what teachers know to be good practice in the classroom and key principles of differentiation. In other words, it's helpful to see differentiation as a way of applying the common sense of effective teaching.
6. Distribute Handout 1, The Common Sense of Differentiation—Program 1. Explain that the handout will help participants reflect on this commonsense aspect of differentiation. Ask participants to work independently to complete Part 1 of the handout. Tell them they will have 7 minutes to do this. Then ask participants to form groups of two or three to share their responses to Part 1. Allow about 5 minutes for sharing.
7. Next, ask participants to work independently to complete Part 2 of Handout 1. Tell them they will have 7 minutes to do this. Once again, ask them to form groups of two or three to share their responses to Part 2. Allow about 8 minutes for sharing.

View Video Program 1, *Discovering Learner Needs* (40 minutes)

1. Tell participants that as they view the program, they will likely see some of their own thoughts about differentiation reflected in the classroom scenarios, but that they should also see some new ideas about the common sense of differentiation demonstrated—particularly as it relates to the use of assessment to understand learner needs.
2. Display Overhead 2, *Some Uses of Assessment to Discover Learner Needs*, and tell participants they may want to use the information it provides to help them identify categories of learner needs they will see in the program. Encourage them to compare the practices they see in the video with the ones they currently use throughout instructional cycles to identify the learning needs of their students.
3. Show Program 1, *Discovering Learner Needs* (approximately 35 minutes).

Reflection (20 minutes)

1. Invite participants to reflect on the video. Display Overhead 3, *Reflecting on the Video—Program 1*, and use the questions it presents to guide the reflection and discussion about the ideas presented in the video program. Write participant responses on chart paper or a blank overhead transparency. Alternatively, you might consider asking one or two participants to record responses for you so that you can concentrate on the discussion. Allow 12–15 minutes for this activity.
2. Ask participants to share with a colleague a strategy related to assessing prerequisite skills, assessment of interest, assessment of learning profile, or ongoing assessment of student progress that they could use in an upcoming unit. Ask them to share what sorts of information they hope the strategy would provide for them. Allow 5–8 minutes for discussion.

Facilitator's Note

If there will be a full-day workshop on Program 1, announce those plans. If workshops are scheduled for the other programs in this series, announce when they will take place. Mention that Program 2 explores techniques for adjusting instruction to meet diverse learning needs and that Program 3 examines classroom routines that support differentiation.

Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

1. Display Overhead 1, Objectives of Workshop 1. Review the workshop objectives, and invite participants to ask any remaining questions they might have about the objectives or the workshop content.
2. If you have provided copies of readings from the Readings and Resources section, point them out to participants and encourage them to use the readings to extend their thinking on the topic of assessing to understand learner needs.
3. Thank participants for their attendance and contributions to the workshop.

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