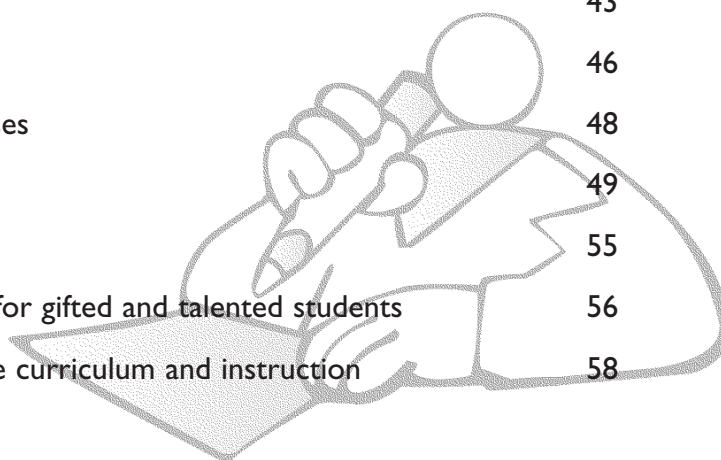


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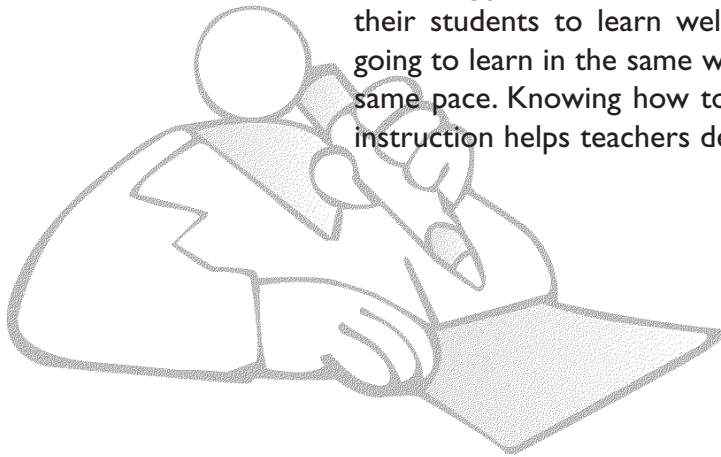
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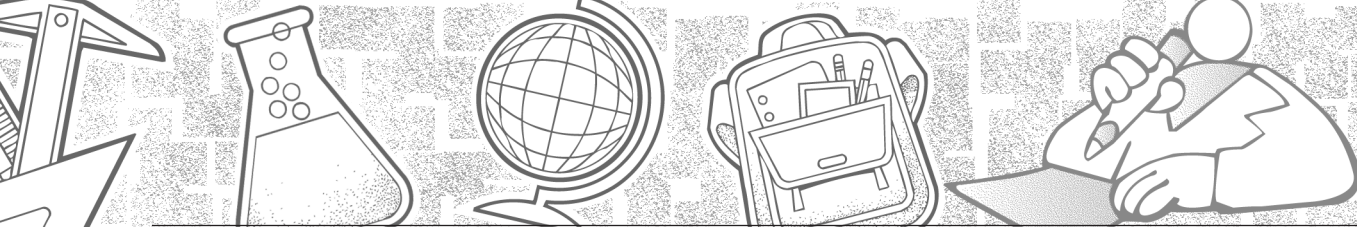
This is the second in a series of occasional papers written by Carolyn Coil and published by Hawker Brownlow Education.

These occasional papers give teachers, principals and other educators a quick way to be brought up-to-date on current research, approaches to teaching and learning, best teaching practices and practical strategies for dealing with the challenges and concerns facing 21st century educators.

Written on the assumption that most busy teachers do not have the time or energy to read lengthy academic texts, yet would like to know and understand the latest thinking in their profession, these occasional papers are short, readable and targeted to one issue at a time.

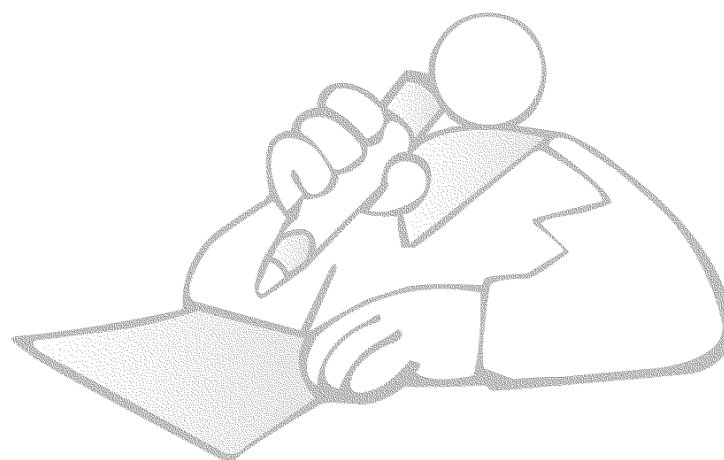
The topic of this occasional paper is differentiated curriculum and instruction. This is an important topic because teachers are being asked to work with an increasingly diverse student population. Teachers want all their students to learn well, yet realise that all are not going to learn in the same way, at the same level or at the same pace. Knowing how to differentiate curriculum and instruction helps teachers deal with this major challenge.





The need for differentiation is obvious. All teachers would like to accommodate each child and meet the diverse needs they have. How to actually do the differentiation is the main concern for them. On a practical level, they are looking for workable strategies to help them differentiate instruction in a variety of classroom settings. There is no one magic strategy that works for every teacher in every school with every child! This occasional paper examines a number of feasible ways to differentiate, and focuses on specific strategies that can be used for differentiation. As you read, decide which strategies and techniques will work best in your classroom with your students.

This occasional paper is written for teachers. However, some pages are examples of student activities or are guidelines for students to use. Teachers should copy these pages and give them to parents as appropriate. You may also want to copy pages that provide a structure for lesson planning in a differentiated classroom. All students, from those who struggle with learning to highly gifted students, will benefit from this approach to teaching and learning.





Differentiating curriculum and instruction

Mr Paterson looked at his year 5 class. Each student was truly a unique individual, yet he basically taught all of them the same content using the same strategies, as if they were clones of each other. A few of them responded well to this approach, but many were bored and others seemed to be falling further behind. He knew he should meet individual needs, but didn't know how to begin. 'There are so many of them and only one of me!' he thought ruefully.

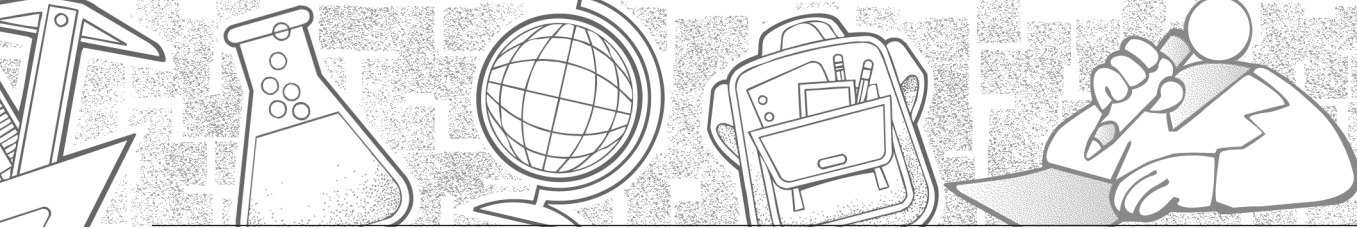
Differentiated curriculum: What is it?

Like Mr Paterson described above, many teachers are frustrated with the traditional 'one size fits all' approach to teaching. At one point in time, 'teaching to the middle' may have been a workable strategy, but as the big middle has become the little middle in most classrooms, teachers are increasingly seeking ways to diversify and differentiate their instruction.

Differentiated curriculum gets teachers away from the 'one size fits all' curriculum which really fits no-one! It encourages students to become more responsible for their own learning and to recognise and use their own strengths, thereby helping them become lifelong autonomous learners.

Brain research which has been done in the past five to ten years reveals much about how humans learn and provides yet another reason for differentiating curriculum. Briefly, researchers concur that learning occurs when the brain seeks connections to what it already knows. These connections form differently for each person because each person's experiences are different. Our brains are individualised and our learning experiences need to be too!

Differentiating curriculum and instruction is an approach to teaching based on the premise that students learn in different ways; therefore, we must provide them with a number of different options for learning. We need to consider each student's interests, level of readiness, pace of learning, learning styles and modalities, strengths and weaknesses and types of intelligences. This is a big order for an individual teacher!



Differentiated curriculum includes:

- **Different ways to take in the information**

This focuses on the fact that students learn in a variety of different ways. Using learning modalities, multiple intelligences and learning styles to form the base for curriculum planning helps us differentiate for a wide variety of learners.

- **Differing amounts of time to complete work**

As every teacher knows, students who are doing exactly the same assignment finish at different times. If you've planned a half hour for a certain task, one student will be finished in five minutes while another will have hardly begun when the half hour is over. Planning what you will do with both the slow student and the student who finishes first is an important skill in differentiating curriculum. You don't want to give the quick learner another worksheet just like the first one! Instead, you want to give this student more challenging work. At the same time, you need to make sure the slower students have mastered at least the basic concepts of the lesson.

- **Different levels of thinking**

Bloom's taxonomy provides a good set of guidelines for planning ways to teach students who are at different levels of learning. Some students will just barely understand a concept or idea whereas others can explore it with a great deal of depth and complexity. When you plan lessons and units reflecting these levels of thinking your lessons can be appropriately targeted to meet the needs of all students. Tiered lessons and units, which you will read about later in this book, provide an excellent structure for planning levelled activities.



Different assignments

In a differentiated classroom, the assumption is that sometimes everyone will be doing the same work, but at many other times, students in the same classroom will be doing different assignments. Teachers need to plan carefully for this, both because they need to know which students are doing which activities and also so the students understand what they are meant to do and why they should be doing it.

Different means to assess what has been learnt

If you differentiate your curriculum and your instruction appropriately, it seems logical that assessments should be differentiated as well. This means you should assess individual projects and products according to agreed criteria, but that every assessment checklist or rubric will not look the same, nor will every project be evaluated in the same way. Formative assessments work well in a differentiated classroom because they can be used to show students how well they are doing as they work on a specific task. The progress each student makes can be charted individually. This may be a difficult concept in the current educational climate where standardised tests and assessments are sometimes looked upon as the only thing that counts.

How can I differentiate?

Once teachers understand the concept of differentiation, the next question almost always is: 'How do I do this in a real classroom? After all, I'm just one person!'. The strategies in this occasional paper will show you many different approaches to differentiation. The idea is not to use every strategy. Instead, pick the ones that should work well for you and start there.