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Introduction

This Viewer's Guide is for use by individuals and/or facilitators who will be viewing the tapes in the *Differentiated Instruction Practice Series (DIPS)*. This Guide can be used with any tape within the series. (Initial release in 2003 includes two tapes: *A Focus on Inclusion* and *A Focus on the Gifted*.)

Our assumption in developing this series is that teachers are currently working in heterogeneous classrooms, with all that is implied in this diversity. Thus, our goal is to provide the viewer with a framework through which an array of practical tools can be identified and subsequently used to make teaching more effective and learning more successful for all students. A metaphor is used to aid in understanding the concepts presented in the video. We liken children and our diverse classrooms to flowers, wherein each can be seen as unique, with varied characteristics, strengths, and needs, yet each being special in his/her own way. As our video jacket and book cover state:

Children and Flowers: Beautiful in their Diversity

This publication is designed to support and supplement the videotapes of this series. It will clarify and enhance the concepts presented and provide a more comprehensive presentation of them. Use of this material will increase the effectiveness of the viewing by providing a structured outline and specialized materials. This is so for individuals as well as groups of professionals who are participating in pre-service, in-service or other staff development activities.

Each tape is divided into 4 segments. This format offers natural breaks so that they may more readily be used over multiple sessions.

- Why Differentiated Instruction?
- What Will We Teach? Planning & Preparation
- How Will We Teach It? Implementation of Instruction
- How Will We Measure Progress? Assessing Evidence of Learning

Chapter 1 of this guide provides a “foundation” for differentiated instruction. It sets the stage for a comprehensive understanding of the issues and challenges in today’s schools, emphasizing the rationale for and value of this approach to instruction.

Chapter 2 contains Reproducibles/Handouts. These are of particular value in training as they facilitate an understanding of the concepts presented. Their order in the Guide follows the sequence within the tapes. For most of these Reproducibles/Handouts, there are two versions:

- “A” is the brief form of the material, with space available in which viewers can fill in the outline with their own notes and reflections.
- “B” is an expansion of “A,” providing more detailed and specific information.

There are a variety of ways in which these two versions can be used. For example:

- Facilitators may wish to make copies of “A” and have participants complete them individually after viewing. “B” can be used as an overhead to follow up the independent part of the session and stimulate participant discussion.
- Facilitators may use “B” as an overhead for instructional purposes with participants before they view the tape. Participants could then use “A” during the viewing for notes, questions, observations, etc.

Chapter 3 provides specific reference materials that are associated with the text found in this Guide.

Chapter 4 offers a host of additional resources related to the topic of differentiated instruction. All of these materials are available from National Professional Resources, Inc.

Chapter 1

Foundation: Meeting Educational Challenges in Today's Classrooms

The Standards Movement & Unstandardized Students

Education in the United States is at an extremely challenging juncture. In a real sense we have experienced a democratization of schools. Access to education and success for all students are at the top of the agenda. All students are expected to attend school through high school, and all students are expected to learn and achieve. Equity and excellence for all students are the goals. Schools are expected to add value to students' educational experience by providing effective instruction, and opportunities that enable them to achieve at the highest levels. This is a dramatic departure from the expectations of prior generations, and in stark contrast to the expectations that exist in many other countries. To further compound the challenge, at the same time that expectations for achievement have been sharply raised, the student population has changed dramatically, becoming increasingly diverse in many ways. For example, it is not unusual for schools to have students who speak twenty different languages. Many of these children are newly arrived immigrants from countries around the world, many of which are in the throes of war and economic disaster. With the changing family and workplace dynamic in the United States, and the stresses of difficult economic times and heightened work schedules, public schools are expected to fill existing voids and play an ever increasing role in the lives of many students. Yet at the same time, public confidence in public schools has eroded generally and schools are under attack. This is reflected in harsh and relentless media attention, middle class flight from urban schools, and the passionate debate about school vouchers, school choice, and charter schools that ensue in many circles. Partially as a response to this erosion of public confidence in American schools and the clamor for higher standards in education, the new standards movement was born.

The Challenge of a Standards-Based Curriculum in Heterogeneous Classrooms

Though the impetus for the new standards movement was national, the force and momentum of public pressure caused the standards movement to percolate into individual

states of the union. The end result was widespread and sweeping changes in curriculum as individual state departments of education established learning standards, which identified what students must know and be able to do in each content area. As they constructed the learning standards in distinct subject area disciplines such as English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, most states, with varying success, attempted to align them with current research in teaching and learning. They mandated assessments at particular benchmarked grade levels to determine how successful students were in meeting the established performance standards. The goal was to measure progress on the way to meeting high school graduation requirements. Virtually all students, regardless of their educational background were now expected to meet these standards, so teachers needed to bridge the gap between those students who came to school ready to learn, who had been enriched by their environment, and those who had not the same advantage. Maximizing learning for all students so that they might be successful became the key responsibility of schools. Schools in general, and teachers in particular, are still struggling with this monumental challenge.

One of the positive consequences of the standards movement for teachers and students has been the focus on a more clearly articulated curriculum with an increasingly defined scope and sequence. Schools continue to work to ensure that the curriculum that they are offering is aligned with the standards. Teachers on various grade levels and departments have collaborated with their teams and with colleagues in other grades to identify and correct any gaps and redundancies in the curriculum. The objective is to have a well-articulated curriculum in each subject area that scaffolds from grade to grade, with clearly defined concepts and skills.

The High Stakes of Testing

The mandated assessment program which currently exists is often characterized as “high stakes” because decisions about student promotion and graduation from high school may be based upon them. In the current political climate, with highly charged debates about educational methods, success and failures, the data emanating from these mandated assessments are routinely published in newspapers and presented in the media for analysis, comparison of school districts, and unfortunately finger-pointing. Schools and school districts where the majority of students are not meeting the prescribed performance standards can be liable for censure and repercussions.

Recently the federal government has underscored their support for high stakes testing by passing the **No Child Left Behind** legislation which requires schools to administer standardized tests each year beginning at third grade. Data from these tests will be collected, and disaggregated to measure the progress of students in every identifiable group.

One of the goals is to bridge the achievement gap, which currently exists among minority students. There will be early pressure on teachers to develop effective beginning readers, and increased focus on crafting instruction that will ensure that all students are successful.

What Students Need to Be Successful

There exists within the student body of most elementary classrooms today, not only great ethnic, racial, and language diversity, but also marked differences in individual learning profiles. Students come to us differentiated and unstandardized in many ways, and the composite of classrooms reflects this fact. Elementary classrooms, in particular, and often those in middle school too, are heterogeneously grouped with a full range of achievement levels from the slow learner through those who are considered to be average, learning disabled, or gifted. Students also vary in other ways such as readiness, experiential background, interests, and learning needs. They possess preferred individual learning styles, talents and interests. All of these factors affect not only how students successfully learn, but also where teachers need to fill in existing gaps in prior learning, and how much support students will need in order to achieve. So, for students to be successful, teachers must plan lessons and design classroom learning environments that are responsive to the full range of student needs which clearly exist.

Through recent educational research, we have gained much insight about teaching and learning. We know how individuals learn best and how to optimize conditions for learning. We understand that teachers need to tap prior learning so that they can begin at a child's entry point. We acknowledge too, that teachers need to assess what a child knows so that gaps in experience, knowledge and/or skills, which might inhibit learning, can be bridged. Ongoing assessment becomes an integral part of teaching and learning. Assessment is inextricably linked to curriculum and instruction, not just summatively to measure students' progress, but in order to inform teaching practice so that the pace and delivery of instruction can be modified depending on students' needs. We know that students of all ages learn effectively when they can make a connection between the curriculum, their particular interests, and their personal experiential background. They also learn best when learning tasks and opportunities are authentic and applicable to everyday life. In addition, brain-based research indicates that learners must feel emotionally and physically safe and well supported in order to take risks (Jensen, 2000). So, a respectful, comfortable classroom, which operates like a collaborative community, clearly will facilitate successful learning.

It becomes apparent, therefore, that in order for all students to successfully meet the new uniform state learning standards, teachers cannot be uniform and standardized in their instruction. They need to modify and adjust their teaching to meet the needs of their differ-

entiated student body. But despite the fact that recent research has greatly enlightened the field of learning theory, not all schools espouse these understandings and not all classrooms reflect this knowledge in their daily practice. Our challenge then is to incorporate this rich and invaluable research on teaching and learning into our schools to enable all students to achieve. Our goal in this video series is to organize this information in a useful and meaningful way so that it is accessible and practical for administrators and teachers who are working hard to build effective learning communities in their schools. We will explore how teachers can teach a standards-based curriculum while successfully differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms.

Implications for Teaching a Standards-Based Curriculum: Empowering Students Through Differentiated Instruction

There are some today who think that teaching a standards-based curriculum and the challenge of preparing all students for rigorous state assessments means relegating their teaching to uniform practice in test-taking skills. Nothing could be further from the truth, and such teaching will not help needy students accrue the skills and strategies that are necessary for success. For it is only by differentiating instructional practices to meet the myriad needs of students that teachers will be able to empower students to become successful learners. Our first obligation is to be certain that standards-based teaching does not interfere with best teaching practices. Quality First Teaching is essential and classrooms that are grounded in best practices benefit all students. In order for students to be successful learners, teachers need to make modifications in their teaching to accommodate students' needs. Differentiated instruction is not a specific program or methodology, but rather a way of thinking about teaching and learning in which teaching is targeted and customized to the distinct learning needs of the individual students in each diverse classroom (Tomlinson, 1995, 1999).

Getting Started: Teachers Working Together

The concept of customizing or differentiating instructional practice to accommodate the diverse needs of the many students in a typical class is probably thought by most teachers to be a monumental task. The idea of going it alone may seem most daunting. In fact, learning new instructional practices in isolation is not only difficult but also inadvisable. Research underscores the power of teacher collaboration and the value of shared learning not only for teachers, but also for the school, and even for the students.