

A Case Studies Approach

Differentiating Instruction

for Gifted Learners

**Christine L. Weber, Ph.D.,
Wendy A. Behrens, M.A. Ed.,
and Cecelia Boswell, Ed.D.**



Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Foreword	vii
Introduction: Why Read a Book on Case Studies for Differentiating Instruction?	1
Chapter 1	7
<i>Implementing Case Studies to Support High-Quality Professional Development</i>	
Chapter 2	15
<i>Utilizing Case Studies to Promote Teacher Preparation Standards</i>	
Chapter 3	21
<i>Case Studies: Differentiated Instruction in a Regular Classroom</i>	
Chapter 4	109
<i>Case Studies: Differentiated Instruction in a Cluster Classroom</i>	
Chapter 5	151
<i>Case Studies: Differentiated Instruction in a Full-Time G/T Classroom</i>	
References	173
Appendix A	181
<i>NAGC-CEC Advanced Standards in Gifted Education Teacher Preparation</i>	
Appendix B	189
<i>NAGC-CEC Teacher Preparation Standards in Gifted and Talented Education</i>	
About the Authors	201



Introduction

Why Read a Book on Case Studies for Differentiating Instruction?

A teacher's role is often formal and ongoing, carried out at a school or another place for educating students. In many countries, including the United States, an aspiring teacher must first obtain specific professional qualifications or credentials from a university or college. These professional qualifications often include the study of pedagogy or the science of teaching. Teachers, like other professionals, may have to continue their education after they qualify to teach in a process known as continuing professional development. Alternatively, teachers may choose to attend a university to further their teaching credentials with a master's degree or new certification.

Thus, a teacher's professional duties may extend beyond formal teaching. Standards from various stakeholders including the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) and the Council for Exceptional Children, and The Association for the Gifted (CEC-TAG) all have clearly articulated knowledge and skill standards for teachers specifically working with the gifted. These standards guide the level of expectations in many areas for educators working with gifted children. Many educators in gifted education also continue their professional growth toward mastery of advanced professional standards to help prepare them for leadership roles in gifted education. The NAGC-CEC

Advanced Standards in Gifted Education Teacher Preparation (2013a; see Appendix A) lay out the knowledge and skills that teachers in gifted education should master as part of their preparation for advanced professional practice.

The purpose of this book is to provide case studies that (1) present opportunities for teachers and other education professionals working in various Pre-K through grade 12 instructional settings (e.g., cluster classroom, regular classroom, and full-time placement) to analyze the role and purpose of differentiation in classrooms targeting high-ability and gifted learners, (2) explore common issues related to implementing differentiation, (3) promote an application of best practice in teaching (e.g., flipped classrooms, 21st-century thinking skills, Common Core State Standards [CCSS]) for advanced and gifted learners, and (4) improve services to gifted learners by encouraging educators to reflect on their beliefs or philosophy associated with implementing differentiated instruction in their classrooms. This book details learning scenario narratives, each with a brief overview that introduces the case. Within each case, *things to consider* guide the reader's thinking without imparting an explicit action, recommendation, or solution. *Discussion questions, activities, extensions,* and suggestions for *additional readings* support the standards of excellence set forth in the revised NAGC-CEC Teacher Preparation Standards in Gifted and Talented Education and the NAGC-CEC Advanced Standards in Gifted Education Teacher Preparation. The goal is for educators to draw from these case studies, which situate learning in authentic and meaningful contexts for the purpose of improving services and programs for gifted and talented students.

Currently, there is one book developed by the authors that provides working cases on issues related to identifying and educating gifted learners including differentiation (Weber, Boswell, & Behrens, 2014), but no other resource of its kind exists. Many schools and districts espouse differentiation, supporting the need for ongoing professional development. Providing a book of cases for analyzing various strategies and their uses encourages teachers to create classrooms where every student belongs, every student is valued, and every student is nurtured. The cases facilitate conversations about children and their unique individual needs. This resource can be used in a variety of professional development settings as a vehicle to stimulate ideas and evaluate policies and procedures for improved services for gifted and advanced learners. The cases also provide an opportunity for teachers to imagine themselves in settings they might not otherwise have encountered.

What Will You Learn From Case Studies?

Students have preferred styles of learning, different interests, and different rates of learning with no two students alike. This classroom makeup requires that every preservice and in-service teacher be trained to meet the diversity of student needs. The days of teaching one traditional lesson plan and hoping that all students “get something from it” are long past. One size does not fit all (Gregory & Chapman, 2013). Teachers who vary instruction, curriculum, resources, assessments, and the classroom environment are working to provide an optimal education setting for the diversity of learners in their classrooms. Although you may have heard terms associated with differentiation such as *readiness*, *learning profile*, *interests*, *depth*, *pacing*, and *complexity*, what exactly do they mean to you and the students you teach? With research supporting the effects of differentiation (Olenchak, 2001; Smutny, 2003; Tomlinson, 2000), embracing the challenge of implementing the strategies requires a philosophy about differentiation. Consequently, providing professional development opportunities for teachers to strengthen their skills in this area is crucial to making a positive impact in the classroom. Consider the following statements by Gregory and Chapman (2013) with regard to the role of the teacher:

In order to achieve truly differential education for students, teachers must modify standard classroom offerings in several areas. These areas include but are not limited to pacing and sophistication, depth, complexity, and personalization. The speed with which students’ progress through the curriculum must be accelerated or decelerated according to student need. Students must be encouraged to delve as deeply into content as is challenging for them and then to try and delve even more deeply. Learning activities must allow for student choice at levels of complexity that are most appropriate; in other words, assignments must be tiered to take into account different ways to meet the same goal. Finally, students must be provided with reality-based opportunities to interpret and express what they are learning in ways that are personally relevant and meaningful. It is essential that we be able to distinguish between the notions of “different” and “differentiated.” (p. 6)

Trying to meet the needs of individual learners in the classroom can seem overwhelming. What does a differentiated classroom look like, sound like? How does one manage a differentiated classroom? Does one need to differentiate assessments? By providing an opportunity for educators to explore issues related to differentiated curriculum and instruction for gifted and advanced learners in diverse school settings using a case studies approach, we support

How Do Case Studies Support High-Quality Professional Development?

The National Network of Eisenhower Regional Consortia and Clearinghouse stated:

Effective professional development experiences provide opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues and other experts in professional learning communities to improve their practice. When continuous learning is a part of the school's norms and culture; teachers are rewarded and encouraged to take risks and to learn together. (as cited in Mundry, 2005, p. 14)

The analysis of a case study lends itself to a workshop format within the school setting, such as PLCs, thus empowering staff with decision-making strategies. Wiggins and McTighe (2006) emphasized the importance of focus for a PLC:

For a school to be a model learning organization, all faculty members should be professional learners: They should engage in deep, broad study of the learning they are charged to cause. What works? What doesn't? Where is student learning most successful, and why? Effectively tackling these questions is what the "professional" in "professional practice" means. (para. 3)

The use of case studies in this setting provides an opportunity to change individuals' knowledge, understanding, behaviors, values, and beliefs. Consider collecting data during these meetings to guide personal professional growth as well as the professional development of the teachers. Case discussions and examination of student work have been shown to develop teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical reasoning skills and to increase student achievement (Barnett & Tyson, 1999). Finally, remember that professional development sustained over time is more closely linked to improved student learning than are short-term or one-time experiences (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000).

The learning scenario presented in each case study provides an *introduction*, followed by a detailed *narrative* of a particular problem or set of issues related to teaching gifted and talented students. Each scenario narrative encourages reflection on the key issue or issues. The *things to consider* section of each case provides the reader with essential information for careful consideration before

Miss Parker

Introduction

As a new teacher working in an inclusion classroom, there are many challenges to differentiating the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to meet the needs of diverse learners. Unpacking the standards means developing a better understanding of what you are teaching your students, but not necessarily how you are teaching your students. Follow Miss Parker as she develops a lesson on verbs, teaches her lesson, assesses her students, and finds that sometimes things don't go exactly as planned.

Miss Parker is a first-year teacher assigned to an inclusive first-grade classroom in a suburban school district. A number of children walk to school, ride their bikes, or are driven to school by their parents. Many parents are involved and a vital part of the school environment. Walking through the halls each day, one is likely to find a number of parents helping in various classroom and school settings, providing a strong support base for the teachers and staff. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) also has 90% parent involvement. The school is high achieving, receiving an "A" rating from the State Department of Education for the past several years. Also, the school is home to the Exceptional Student Education programs for the district, with more than 150 students in the programs offered.

There are a total of 783 students attending the school, with 4% of the student population identified as African American, 3% Hispanic, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Multiracial, and less than 1% considered Alaskan. The remaining 86% of the student population is White/Non-Hispanic. Less than 1% of the students in the school are considered "limited English language proficient." Less than 1% of the student population participates in the free and reduced lunch programs that are offered by the school. The student to teacher ratio is 14:1.

Miss Parker's class is a mainstream first-grade class that contains 19 students, with one student who has a disability and is in a wheelchair, one student on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) who has Asperger's syndrome, and two students identified as academically gifted. She is responsible for providing meaningful learning opportunities for all students in the classroom. This includes differentiating her instruction and assessment instruments to fit the needs of each and every diverse learner in the classroom. One of Miss Parker's lessons has the following objective from the CCSS, ELA-Literacy.L.1.1c: Use singular and plural nouns with matching verbs in basic sentences (e.g., He hops; We hop). (*Note.* The following lesson plan has been used by permis-

sion of Amanda Allen, former student intern, Cunningham Creek Elementary School, St. Johns, FL.)

Miss Parker introduces the lesson by telling students that they are going to learn about verbs and then play a game of charades to show how well they know how to use verbs. Students are asked the following questions:

- ⊙ Who can tell me what a part of speech is?
- ⊙ What parts of speech have we already learned about?
- ⊙ How can we use parts of speech in our writing? Why are they important to our lives and how do they help us become better writers?
- ⊙ What is a verb? How do we use it in our writing?

Students are then given an example of a verb—“run”—and asked: “What kind of word is ‘run’? What is happening in a story when we read the word ‘run’?” Students reply that “run” is an action word, and that verbs tell us what a person or thing in a story is doing. Students are then asked to provide examples. “Why would you call that word a verb? What makes it an action word?”

Singular nouns with a matching verb and plural nouns with a matching verb are listed on a chart with clarifications provided about plural versus singular. Students are asked to give examples of sentences using singular and plural nouns with matching verbs. For each example, students put a matching verb into a sentence, using a singular or plural noun, for example, “The dog runs.”

Miss Parker asks, “What if we wanted to say more than one dog runs? How would we say that?” The children reply, “The dogs run” for a plural noun, because there would be more than one dog in that example.

Things to Consider

- » Some students require less time than others to master a particular understanding or skill.
- » Learners in classrooms vary in degree by their readiness, interest, and learning profile.
- » Opportunities need to be provided in order to support a diversity of learners and maximize their potential.
- » There are many strategies for differentiation that support a range of individual differences in the classroom.

The lesson proceeds with the students playing “Verbs Charades,” with students taking turns picking a verb out of a bag and acting it out for the class. Students are called on to guess the action. For each guess, the guessing student puts the verb into a sentence, using a singular or plural noun to match the verb. The following verbs are used in the game:

- ⊙ Run
- ⊙ Walks
- ⊙ Skips
- ⊙ Jumps
- ⊙ Blink
- ⊙ Swims

Dr. Ochoa's Cluster Classroom

Introduction

Dr. Ochoa's third-grade classroom accommodates learners of all types. Although she has a cluster of gifted and bright students, they do not all have the same learning strengths or interests. She modifies instruction to meet their needs through differentiated content and processes. Knowing when to push and when to pull students' learning creates dilemmas for both Dr. Ochoa and her students.

This case illustrates how differing needs and interests of third graders may be met. This case study introduces two of Dr. Ochoa's students who exhibit diverse learning strengths and interests that are influenced by age, home environment, and school environment. The case is told from the point of view of Dr. Ochoa, the students, and the parents/guardians of the students.

Mountain Crest Elementary School

The Mountain Crest Elementary School is one of 20 in the district, with 450 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The school has long been recognized as high achieving. It is supported by a local university through internships of student teachers, who will receive a combination teaching certificate in gifted and talented and elementary education. Until this year, the Mountain Crest campus was a neighborhood school. Due to issues at a high-poverty neighboring school, approximately 20 students per grade level are being bused to the school this year. The 20 students per grade level have been divided among three teachers per grade level.

Dr. Ochoa

Dr. Ochoa has been teaching for 20 years, the last 10 years at Mountain Crest Elementary School. Many parents moved to this school zone because of Mountain Crest's reputation of achievement, especially that of Dr. Ochoa's students.

Dr. Ochoa recently completed a Ph.D. in gifted education. Her dissertation is based on her own teaching to illustrate how she addresses differentiation within her classroom. She preassesses all students in the four core subjects so that she knows in which academic level to place them. She differentiates throughout the day with centers that address the four core subjects, mathematics, social studies, science, and English/language arts. Each content area center addresses the varying needs of the students. Dr. Ochoa always has one center in which she works directly with small groups. For the most part, differenti-

ation is based on content and, to some extent, process. Product and affect are often the same for all students unless an independent study center is used for students who are beyond their peers in an area of study.

Natalie

Natalie is bilingual. She speaks Spanish at home, but also is proficient in English. She did not speak any English when she came to kindergarten at Mountain Crest, but quickly mastered English and enjoys manipulating language. Based on her love of language, Dr. Ochoa created a center for Natalie to learn to read and write in Spanish and to learn the history of Guatemala, her parent's homeland. When Natalie's preassessment shows that she understands the current learning concept or when she completes her work, she works at the center Dr. Ochoa created for her.

Natalie's Parents

We are excited for Natalie to learn to read and write in Spanish and to learn about Guatemala. We know how to read and write in Spanish, so we help her at home. We hope that she is able to complete a project about our homeland.

We are also happy that Natalie is able to learn at her own speed. Once she learned English, some of her classes moved too slowly for her. We try to help by taking her to the library and letting her have time to check out books and use their computer. We are saving money to buy a computer for our home.

Things to Consider

- » When parents' perspectives are the same as the teacher's, the student's growth is optimal.
- » Dr. Ochoa must carefully consider the diverse instructional needs of all students within her classroom.
- » Teachers who meet individual student needs must have time and support for planning.

Charley

Charley's parents are both doctors. His father is a medical doctor and his mother has a Ph.D. and teaches at a local university. They are both involved in research and even though they are very busy with their own research, they include Charley when they can. Charley has a nanny who takes care of him most of the time during the school week. When his parents are busy, she comes to teacher meetings and attends all of Charley's activities at the school.

Charley is academically beyond many of his peers. His tested IQ is 148 and his Torrance Test of Creative Thinking-Figural is 130. Charley is an amazing