



Introduction

Few Americans realize that the U.S. educational system is one of the most unequal in the industrialized world, and students routinely receive dramatically different learning opportunities based on their social status. In contrast to most European and Asian nations that fund schools centrally and equally, the wealthiest 10 percent of school districts in the United States spend nearly ten times more than the poorest 10 percent, and spending ratios of three to one are common within states. Poor and minority students are concentrated in the less well-funded schools, most of them located in central cities and funded at levels substantially below those of neighboring suburban districts.

—Linda Darling-Hammond and Laura Post

We have written this book for the 35 million and counting who live in poverty in the United States alone. We have written this book for all those children who go to school undernourished; who don't have the means to buy mittens to wear on a cold morning; who, because of where they were born, may not have the same vocabulary skills as the middle-class children in their classrooms; who may enter kindergarten already significantly behind them in background knowledge, vocabulary, and experience, resulting in a gap in achievement even before they begin. We have written this book because we think inequality in education is shameful in a country that is abundantly wealthy. While the United States Supreme Court made equal access the law of the land in *Brown v. Board of Education*, it did not make equal access to *quality* the law of the land. We think it is time to change unequal quality in education for good. As teachers, we have the power to do that more than any other group. And when we do, we don't just change education. We change communities, we change the quality of life for all of us, and we strengthen the weakening middle class.

Both of us have lived in poverty, and both of us have extensive experience working with children and teens who live in poverty, but we did not write this book from personal experience. We based it on hard evidence and extensive research into the strategies that truly make a difference in student learning for diverse learners—for students living in poverty, students from diverse cultures, and students new to the United States, especially those from the African American and Mexican American communities.

In chapter 1, we provide the most current data about poverty and the power of culture. We explain why we are presenting not a deficit model but a model that values the assets children bring to the classroom. We will introduce the steps of a new differentiation model that accomplishes two educational goals simultaneously: improving achievement *and* closing the gap for diverse learners.

Chapter 2 provides the rationale for an innovative differentiation process and an overview of its components. Here we introduce a research-based model for children living in poverty and from diverse cultures based on four steps:

1. Building teacher background knowledge
2. Planning to differentiate
3. Differentiating instructional delivery
4. Differentiating assessment

In sum, this chapter describes a model that provides research-based information that is immediately usable in the classroom. How do we become “turnaround teachers” who provide intervention strategies to students at every age and grade level? And what do those intervention strategies look like?

In chapters 3 through 7, we look at each of the steps of our model in turn. Chapter 3 discusses the key ideas necessary to shift our beliefs and instructional practice and also discusses the critical background knowledge needed by teachers. Here, we assist educators in comprehending the significance of the distinction between collectivist and individualist value systems. We show the power of vocabulary to increase achievement and build background knowledge. We provide the rationale for creating culturally responsive classrooms in order to close achievement gaps. And we explain what educators need to do in diverse classrooms to

promote a no-excuses approach to holding high expectations so that all children can succeed.

In chapter 4, we introduce the components to consider when planning to differentiate to meet the needs of children of poverty and diverse cultures. We explore examples from both elementary and secondary classrooms that incorporate planning to preteach vocabulary, contextualize content and the classroom environment for culture, modify effective instruction, and plan to provide opportunities for students to work together.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7, we show how to differentiate instructional delivery. We do this in three parts. Chapter 5 discusses the first way to differentiate instruction: for context. We address what effective teachers in a culturally responsive classroom are like and what they do. We explain how to create a culturally responsive classroom, and we furnish two examples—one for African American students and one for Mexican American students—so that you can see what differentiation looks like for the two largest minority cultures represented in American schools. Finally, we provide research-based and culturally responsive instructional strategies that teachers can use immediately.

Chapter 6 discusses the second way to differentiate instruction: for content and product. What kinds of products do we want our students to be able to create? What levels do we expect them to accomplish? How can we ensure that all children are getting the quality education they deserve and that all children can work at a quality level? We answer these questions by attending to the three *r*'s: relevance, rigor, and relationships (with a particular focus on relevance). We will not leave any room for shoddy or unfinished work or for anything below what our students can do. Chapter 6 also examines the classroom for bias and incorporates ideas for content that are relevant to the experiences of all learners. The ways in which students demonstrate their learning—student products—can also be differentiated to meet the needs of diverse learners, and we will provide specific examples on ways to accomplish this.

In chapter 7 we show the final way we differentiate instruction: through process. Here we discuss the most effective ways to assist students in creating personal meaning in the content or standards you are teaching in the classroom. We tie process to the systems of thinking, through which all learning tasks are processed by the brain.

The language arts lessons she has planned for her students meet the following standard:

Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts

Here are the third-grade learning expectations for the standard:

- Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres (for example, fairy tales, folk tales, fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, fables, fantasies, historical fiction, biographies, autobiographies, chapter books)
- Understands the basic concept of plot (for example, main problem, conflict, resolution, cause-and-effect)
- Makes connections and comparisons between characters or simple events in a literary work and people or events in his or her own life

Mrs. Jones has identified three learning objectives for her students based on these standards:

1. Know the defining characteristics of various literary genres.
2. Be able to connect events and people from a story to their own lives.
3. Understand the basic concept of plot.

As Mrs. Jones plans this lesson, she wants to meet the unique needs of the diverse learners in her classroom. In order to do that, she must incorporate in her planning how she will differentiate for the cultures represented in her classroom, and how she will provide the means for all of her students to learn these objectives.

Preteaching Vocabulary

The first task for Mrs. Jones is to identify the essential vocabulary that her students will need to accomplish her learning objectives. As an initial source for the essential vocabulary, she explores the language of the standard she has selected. She determines that the following terms need to be taught:

- Autobiography
- Biography
- Folklore
- Genre

inherent in poverty disappear. But we *can* foster in our students the resilience to succeed academically in spite of those obstacles.

Henderson & Milstein (1996) developed a model that suggests that resilience is made up of twelve factors internal to the child:

1. A good, strong sense of selflessness, or giving of one's self
2. The possessing of life skills, such as good decision-making, self-control, and assertiveness
3. An ability to be sociable
4. A sense of humor
5. An internal locus of control
6. Autonomy
7. Orientation toward a positive future
8. Adaptability and flexibility
9. An interest in and connection to learning
10. Self-motivation
11. Personal competence in one or multiple areas
12. Some element of self-worth or self-efficacy

As teachers, we can assist in fostering resilience by establishing nurturing, culturally responsive environments for our diverse students, rather than focusing on programs that concentrate on their academic deficits. In fact, a common finding in resilience research is the quality of the teacher's input. Benard (2003) talks about the practices of "turnaround teachers," teachers who build resilient students in the face of overwhelming odds. These teachers establish caring relationships, hold high expectations for *every* student, and provide opportunities for student participation and contribution for all children. Benard states, "These three protective factors are so powerful because they are how students—and everyone else—meet the basic human needs for love and belonging; for respect, power, accomplishment, and learning; and ultimately for meaning" (2003, p. 125).