

third edition

strategies for

Differentiating

Instruction

best practices for the classroom

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CHAPTER 1



One-Size-Fits-All? You've Got to Be Kidding!

The key to school success is to be found in identifying or creating engaging schoolwork for students. —Phillip Schlechty

Imagine a one-dish dinner, the cook's favorite, lovingly prepared with the freshest ingredients. Great attention is put into not only the choice of the meal itself, but also into shopping for its perfect ingredients. Every part of the dish is prepared according to the recipe with special consideration to the cooking verbs involved (we don't want to fry instead of sauté!) and the sequence of preparation (the sauce must come last). Even the table itself undergoes scrutiny as the cook decides whether the white china or the dark green pottery will make a better presentation of the dish and if the centerpiece calls for fresh daisies or the more formal roses. At last, with everyone seated, the cook dances out of the kitchen with the dish in hand—ready to satisfy the appetites of all!

Now imagine the vegetarian who inwardly winces at the smell of chicken emanating from the table, and the lactose-intolerant person evaluating the amount of cream in the sauce. Think of the guest with food allergies who tries to quietly discern whether the green is the palatable spinach or the hive-inducing kale. Note the diner with the gluten allergy steering clear of the noodles. Look at the diabetic mentally calculating the amount of insulin to take after the meal. Consider the reaction of the diner who had the exact same meal 2 days earlier and its warmed leftovers the day before! And, what about the child who whines, "Eww, it's all mixed together. I don't like it, and you can't make me eat it!" Granted, several people around the table eagerly spoon helpings on their plates, devouring the food, admiring the presentation (although one sneezes from the roses), and complimenting the cook. The cook, pleased with herself, notices the

second helpings of some—but she doesn't notice the chicken cut up but left on the plate, the scraped-off cream sauce, the spinach (kale?) spread around the china to give the impression that some of it is gone, or the barely-touched plate. As for the child, she dismisses the reaction, rationalizing that the child will eat it when he's good and hungry or he can just starve! When the guests are gone, she puts away the leftovers and congratulates herself on a job well done. She then pulls out the recipe book for the next dinner party.

Because the focus of this book is on learning, this dinner party really isn't a dinner party at all—it's a metaphor for teaching. The teacher (cook) has a specialty area (favorite dish) and thoroughly enjoys sharing that passion with others (hosting the dinner party). She consults the standards (recipe book) and follows their guidance carefully. She gathers her teaching materials carefully (ingredients), and then considers how best to present the material (flowers and china). She really wants to do her best because she genuinely cares about her students (invited special guests), and she loves her content (her favorite dish). The intent is honorable. Because there is only one person obviously displeased (the "Eww" child)—"there's one in every crowd"—she mistakenly believes that everyone learned something (the plates looked as if they'd been eaten from). The silent sufferers (from food and gluten allergies or lactose intolerance) take what they can from the lesson without complaint. They may very well need additional learning on the topic later (just as some guests may swing by a fast-food restaurant on the way home). The student who already knew the material (the diner who had leftovers the day before) groans about the repetition and tires of not learning new material. If she feels compliant, she may participate in the lesson (eat the food again); however, if she's not compliant, then she just might not participate or the lesson may be rejected (and the plate may be broken on the floor or left untouched—plus she'll probably refuse a repeat invitation to dinner). The complaining student may well have learned the content if it had been presented in pieces instead of the whole (perhaps if the chicken were to the side of the green vegetable).

Think how much more successful the lesson would have been for everyone if the teacher had questioned herself about the learners. Who already knows the material (the one eating the dish for the third day in a row), and what can be done to continue the learning (perhaps serve a dish that's new to her)? How does each student learn best? (The "Eww" child needs food—i.e., concepts—separated into parts.) What learning differences do the students have? (The vegetarian may have enjoyed the meal if the meat had not been included, and the diabetic could have come prepared with her insulin if she had been notified of what was being served beforehand.) How can the teacher best address the different needs of her students? (Just because a person is allergic or lactose intolerant doesn't mean he can't eat and enjoy new foods, as long as some accommodations are made.) Yes, learning went on, but think how many more children and young people could

have been a part of that learning if the students' interests, strengths, and levels of readiness were taken into consideration. (Kids would have been so hungry for more that leftovers would not have been possible!)

The focus of this book is on *differentiating* for students so that learning occurs. More specifically, the book will help teachers implement strategies that allow all students to learn on an ongoing basis—in other words, strategies that remove the learning ceiling and allow each student to make continuous progress. You'll see the phrase *continuous progress* several more times, because that's what learning is all about—students learning each day they are in school.

Who should read this book? The target audiences are teachers who want to differentiate but really don't know where to start and preservice teachers who are learning their craft. This book describes the basics of differentiation—the essentials that make differentiation defensible. Chapters will explore strategies teachers can use to tier learning experiences to address students' varying levels of knowledge and readiness to learn so that all students are learning new things every day (i.e., continuous progress). Strategies will address the interests students have in the topic being studied and strengths of students in order to motivate them to produce their best work. We also provide convenient electronic access to a selection of forms included in this book at the following URL: http://www.prufock.com/Assets/ClientPages/strategies_for_differentiating.aspx. Notice that we haven't mentioned writing new curriculum. We believe that basic differentiation is concentrated on *making modifications* to the curriculum rather than writing curriculum that differentiates. For experienced teachers, that means taking a unit you've already designed and "tweaking it" (via one of the strategies presented in the book) so that it becomes a differentiated unit intentionally designed to address the interests, strengths, or readiness levels of your students. This book will prepare you to tier learning experiences to provide challenge and give you the confidence you need so that you can move on to one or more of the numerous books that examine differentiation at more sophisticated levels and from other perspectives. This book, however, is designed for those just beginning the differentiation adventure.

The easiest way to prepare to teach a class is to make one plan that will work for all students (remember that one-dish marvel). The problem is that the one-dish-pleases-all or the one-size-fits-all theory doesn't work with all students in a classroom. In order for *all* students to make continuous progress, differentiation strategies must be used. Students who are the least likely to make continuous progress when one plan is used are those who need more time to learn and modifications of the content, as well as the ones who already know the content (or know most of it) and those who benefit from learning it in greater depth or complexity.

Consider a class that includes Antoine, Maria, Jamie, Jimmy, Clarissa, and Walker.

Antoine is very interested in science. He and his father spend time outside of school pursuing scientific interests and questions. Antoine is an excellent reader, one who is fascinated with factual books. He loves long-term projects that allow him to explore a problem in depth.

Maria is uncertain about school. At home, her mother and grandmother speak Spanish, so Maria is learning English at the same time she is learning social studies, science, mathematics, and language arts. Sometimes she is very frustrated and wonders if she isn't very smart.

Jamie is a very good reader and loves to write. She is especially interested in dance and drama. She spends most of her time after school taking ballet lessons, playing with neighborhood friends, and reading and writing plays.

Jimmy likes to come to school even though reading continues to be a challenge for him. Resources that are too difficult are frustrating to him. He thoroughly enjoys time involved in playing team sports. When involved in sports, Jimmy is at his happiest.

Clarissa has many interests—writing, piano, math, and art. She becomes very engaged in learning experiences when they include one of her passions. Clarissa works hard when she finds the learning experience interesting; otherwise, it is difficult for her to be motivated. When motivated, she does her best work.

Walker would prefer to stay home rather than come to school. There, he can watch television most of the time. His favorite times at school are lunch and recess. Occasionally he is intrigued by a project in art.

Classrooms everywhere are filled with students like Antoine, Maria, Jamie, Jimmy, Clarissa, and Walker, plus many other students who also differ in their experiences. Their varied backgrounds impact their interests, strengths, and levels of readiness in relation to the content to be learned. A single, daily lesson plan cannot address the various reading levels and interests of these six students, much less 18 or more others in the classroom. Learning experiences must be differentiated if Antoine, Maria, Jamie, Jimmy, Clarissa, and Walker are to learn what each needs to know in order to advance. Antoine cannot learn what he already knows. Jimmy cannot read resources beyond his ability to read. The lesson that is stimulating and challenging for one will be a disaster for another. A plan with differentiated experiences could accommodate the wide range of learner needs.

And, needs come in all shapes and sizes—from reading three grade levels behind, to reading three grade levels ahead, from not speaking English at home, to being limited by learning opportunities prior to starting school. Most of us consider needs to stem from our weaknesses or inabilities. Please remember that needs for students who are gifted and talented are created by strengths rather than deficiencies. They really don't look needy, but their needs are real—just as real as other learning needs.

DIFFERENTIATION: WHAT IS IT?

Differentiation is a popular term in education today, and it is a term with multiple meanings. Roberts and Inman (2013) define differentiation as being the match of the curriculum and learning experiences to learners. A teacher who differentiates effectively matches the content (basic to complex), the level of the cognitive (thinking) processes, the sophistication and choice of the product, and/or the assessment to the student or cluster of students. The purpose for differentiation is to facilitate ongoing continuous progress for all students. The long-term goal for differentiation is to develop lifelong learners. Differentiation is the key focus, so it will be developed and elaborated upon in all of the chapters in this book. Each chapter will add information and examples to help you plan and implement differentiated instruction in your classroom.

TO DIFFERENTIATE OR NOT: THE BIG QUESTION

To differentiate or not is a huge question that needs to be answered before a school year begins. Stop and ask two questions: What are all the reasons teachers don't differentiate and what are all the reasons teachers should differentiate? Those two questions will lead to the realization that all of the reasons not to differentiate are about *teachers* and all of the reasons teachers should differentiate are about *students*. Now that realization should provide the motivation to read on.

Whether we're preservice teachers or veteran teachers, we all know we need to differentiate. So, why don't teachers differentiate their lessons? A study of differentiation practices (Westberg, Archambault, Dobyms, & Salvin, 1993) showed that teachers do not use strategies that differentiate very often; in fact, they hardly do at all. Ten years later Westberg and Daoust (2003) repeated the study with similar results. Teachers reported that they didn't differentiate often, if at all. Why is that?

REASONS TEACHERS DON'T DIFFERENTIATE

Several responses seem to appear frequently when teachers describe factors that work against differentiating. Do one or more of these reasons resonate with you as you reflect on your school or your classroom?

TIME

The number one reason teachers don't differentiate is time. No doubt it takes more time to plan learning experiences that will take into account students' interests, strengths, and levels of readiness than to plan one set of experiences for the entire class. It takes time to find resources, time to modify the curriculum, and time in class to make it happen. You may think that you don't have time to preassess, but Chapter 4 will highlight that preassessing actually saves you time because students don't spend time on concepts and skills they have already mastered.

RESOURCES

The second reason relates to resources. Varied resources (rather than one text) support a differentiated classroom. Often it takes time to gather the resources that will allow all students to be learning. You may have a range of reading levels that could stretch from three to four levels below grade level to three to four levels above grade level. That huge range of reading levels calls for having varied resources available to learn in your content area as well as books, journals, and online resources to allow learning on specific topics of interest to students who are studying in your content area.

LIMITED PREPARATION

The third frequently cited response is that teachers have had little or no instruction about how to differentiate or even why differentiation is important. Little attention is given to this topic during preservice classes or during professional development, especially as to how it relates to advanced students.

FEW ROLE MODELS

The fourth reason is that there are few role models for differentiating. It is so useful to watch differentiation in action. Visiting classrooms in which teachers are differentiating instruction is a great way to learn about doing so. Visitors can often learn about what works and what doesn't work by interviewing (discussing the topic and process of differentiating) the teacher.

CONCERNS WITH CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The fifth reason involves classroom management. A classroom in which every student is doing the same thing will likely seem easier to manage. Chapter 9 discusses management issues to make differentiation doable for both the teacher and the students.

"ADVANCED STUDENTS WILL BE FINE" MYTH

The sixth reason relates to the mantra that gifted students will "make it on their own," so there is no need to make extra effort for students who have already learned most of the grade-level curriculum. This statement is truly a myth, because students who do not learn how to study and to meet (and hopefully enjoy) an academic challenge are unprepared to tackle rigorous coursework whenever they may encounter a challenge. Teachers often expect to modify instruction for students who need more time and more basic instruction to reach class learning goals but often don't have the same expectation for planning modifications for students who need a faster pace and more complex content.

LACK OF ADMINISTRATORS' KNOWLEDGE OF OR SUPPORT FOR DIFFERENTIATING

The seventh reason that mitigates against differentiation is an administration that places emphasis on grade-level learning as opposed to students learning what they are ready to learn. Administrators may want to support differentiation but lack preparation for doing so—just like many teachers do.

The list of reasons why teachers don't differentiate is long and convincing, but not for educators who know and invest in the reasons why they must differentiate.

REASONS TO DIFFERENTIATE

CONTINUOUS PROGRESS

Of course, the primary reason to differentiate instruction is to enhance learning. Remember, students go to school to learn, and all students making continuous progress is the chief reason to differentiate. Effective differentiation allows each student to learn on an ongoing basis. Let's repeat that for emphasis' sake: Allowing each student to learn on an ongoing basis is the reason to differentiate. Let's even rephrase it for greater emphasis: *Differentiation allows continuous progress for all students!* Student needs provide the motivation for teachers to differentiate instruction.