

Chapter 1

A New American Revolution

“What does it mean to be an American?

Well, to me, it means that no matter who you are or how many problems you have, in America, everybody has a chance.”

—Fourth-Grade African-American Student



A revolution is occurring in public education, and it has generated dramatic changes in our nation's schools and classrooms. This revolution is shattering attitudes and beliefs that have existed for decades and focusing national attention on the need to educate all students effectively. With a high-quality education, almost anyone, regardless of race, gender, social class, or national origin, can gain access to economic prosperity and security. Without an adequate education, the promise of prosperity and security that is the foundation of a democratic society is out of reach. Without a high-quality education, a person can live in the richest nation on earth yet lack adequate job opportunities, housing, and health benefits, and he or she can too easily fall victim to crime, addiction, abuse, and other dangerous behavior. A high-quality education has become so vital that it is now viewed as an essential and guaranteed civil right.

The culture of K–12 public education established long ago is changing in remarkable ways. Local control of schools is being transformed through federal and state policies and sanctions. The old process of sorting students into general education, college preparatory, and vocational tracks—the standard in most of the world's developed nations—has been supplemented by policy-driven mandates for minimal student achievement proficiencies and is giving way to a system designed to provide a single rigorous curriculum for all students. “Slow-learning” tracks and “acceptable dropout rates” are being replaced with the goal of all students meeting proficiency standards and graduating. Bell-curve evaluations are being replaced with mastery learning. Freelance teaching based on textbooks, teacher interest, and personal prerogative is being set aside by a system of carefully planned, aligned, and prescribed instruction. However, as the traditional philosophies that have governed public education for so long have begun to change, remnants of their failed policies will likely linger for some time. While more blatant school sorting practices are being challenged and increasingly eliminated, others, like assigning each student a “class rank,” still reflect the bell-curve mentality and are not likely to vanish anytime soon. We are rapidly leaving the old world of education behind and being swept into a new world driven by an emerging science of teaching and learning, dramatic changes in the economic marketplace and technology, and new state and federal legislation and policies. This educational revolution is unprecedented in the history of our civilization. Has any nation, anywhere and at any time, truly been determined to *leave no child behind*?

Continuing Technological Development

The evolution of increasingly sophisticated job skills demands higher student competencies, and the only technological certainty is that we will experience more change. Public school students must not only master high levels of academic proficiency and complex technological skills, but must also build a sufficiently strong educational foundation for *ongoing* development so that they can continue to explore and learn for the rest of their lives.

The Relationship Between Education and Income

In recent decades, there has been a growing understanding of the relationship between salary and education that further supports the role of education as an individual's civil right. The best way to predict lifetime income levels—to predict those who will live their lives in poverty and those who will enjoy the benefits of the middle class—is education level. Without sufficient education, there is little or no hope for a stable economic life (figure 1.2).

	No High School Diploma	High School Diploma	Some College	4 Years of College or More
Males	\$19,225	\$26,339	\$31,336	\$42,292
Females	\$11,583	\$16,573	\$21,597	\$32,238

Figure 1.2: Predicted Yearly Income Based on Educational Level
(National Center for Education Statistics, 2002, p. 163)

American workers without an adequate education are underemployed, work for minimum wage, often hold two or three part-time jobs, or are unemployed or unemployable. Many of these poverty-level adults may decline into depression and despair and fall victim to drug and alcohol abuse, dysfunctional family life, and socially unacceptable behavior. Large numbers turn to crime and end up in jails and prisons. The number of men and women in prison in the United States has doubled in the past 20 years. For decades, over 80% of prison inmates in the United States have been dropouts; well over 50% are illiterate (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999). In addition, the cost of public education's failures is high:

- The cost of retaining one child is \$6,500 per grade (Shepard & Smith, 1990).
- The cost of special education services per child is \$9,369 per year (National Education Association, 2006).
- The cost of lost taxes, lost wages, and lost productivity over their lifetimes will “cost our nation more than \$260 billion” (Spellings, 2005).

As the economic marketplace of the world has changed in both developed and developing nations, there is an ever-growing disparity between those who have high-quality education and those who do not. Today the differences that characterize and separate the various social classes are more and more dramatic. Simultaneously, the wealth of the most affluent nations has soared to unparalleled heights while a

**Secrets of Success
in High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools
Service Learning**

For the children of poverty, few educational programs have proven as effective as service learning in the school and community. Students who have low self-concepts and feelings of inefficacy often thrive in service learning opportunities, which build resilience and responsibility and strengthen self-concept. Whether it is tutoring elementary students, working in a day care or senior center, or doing volunteer work at hospitals, service learning has a powerful, positive effect on all students, especially those of low socioeconomic status.

Service Learning

“They [students] learn to give back to their community. They learn not to be takers. . . . What you put into life is what you get out of it.”

—Parent, Maryland

Service learning has long been recognized as a powerful learning experience and one of the most effective strategies for reducing school dropout (Schargel & Smink, 2001). For the children of poverty, few educational programs have proven as effective. There is a direct relationship between service learning and positive academic achievement. The value of service learning can be seen in the following evaluations:

- Florida gathered data on service learning for 3 academic years, each year consistently reporting strong improvement in attendance, grades, and conduct. Attendance improved in 83% of reporting sites, 80% had fewer discipline referrals, and 76% of students improved their grade point average. At-risk students showed 89% improved attendance and 89% fewer discipline referrals (Learning In Deed, 2006).
- Service-learning participants scored significantly higher than comparison group members on 4 measures of educational impact: school engagement, school grades (math and science), core grade point average (English, math, social studies, and science grades combined), and educational aspirations (desire to graduate from college) (Center for Human Resources, 1999).
- Among students participating in service learning, 87% reported having learned a new skill that they believed would be valuable in the future (Center for Human Resources, 1999).
- Service-learning participants showed enhanced civic attitudes in terms of social responsibility (Center for Human Resources, 1999).

While service learning may provide practical experience and enhanced motivation, most importantly, it appears to be directly related to academic performance. As one recent report concluded, connecting service-learning activities to core curriculum and requiring children to engage in academic analysis (or reflection) tends to enhance academic performance (Lewis, 1995). In an effective service-learning program:

his colleagues at Johns Hopkins University have reported similar findings (Slavin & Madden, 1989).

Coordinate Vertical and Horizontal Curriculum Planning

Schools and districts effective in teaching poor students have invested considerable effort to ensure that the curriculum is articulated across each subject and grade level. The goal is to carefully determine what each teacher must teach at each grade level and in each subject area. Teachers must be clear about what students are expected to know and ensure that students complete their courses with the essential knowledge and skills expected to be learned in the course or grade level. Vertical planning teams start by using state standards to begin planning at the 12th-grade level and work down to the first grade. This type of “backmapping” is used to break down the ultimate instructional goals so that each grade level is responsible for specific content. Vertical planning requires that teachers for each secondary subject area and elementary grade level work closely together to ensure a thorough K–12 content articulation.

The use of horizontal planning, collaboration, and assessment is absolutely essential in ensuring that all teachers of the same grade level or subject meet regularly to plan and coordinate the instruction and also develop and use regular weekly or bimonthly self-developed assessments that are embedded in the instructional program’s benchmarks. Many collaborative teacher groups require that students pass each of these benchmarks before moving on to the next. Often after a benchmark assessment, students will be temporarily grouped into “those ready for enrichment,” “those who need a little extra support,” and “those who need to be re-taught.” This temporary grouping often moves students between multiple teachers. The goal is to quickly get all students up to benchmark proficiency, either during class time or in before- or after-school programs. This approach encourages an instructional process that is consistent among teachers as well as with the written curriculum.

Secrets of Success in High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools Backloading and Benchmarking

Both horizontal and vertical planning are necessary to ensure that each and every student receives the essential content of the K–12 curriculum. K–12 teachers in each subject area must meet, analyze data, and plan, asking, “If our goal is for every student to pass algebra in the eighth grade, what must students learn in seventh-grade math, sixth-grade math, fifth-grade math, and so on, to make this a reality?”

Horizontal planning teams must then meet and plan year-long courses at each grade level to ensure that all of the necessary content is taught. These courses are then organized into a sequential set of small units, or benchmarks, that all students must master as they progress through every course. The team then works to develop benchmark assessments so that teachers can assess who has mastered the benchmark material, who has almost mastered the requisite learning, and who needs re-teaching. Next, schools must be organized to quickly provide “leveled” instruction for enrichment, remediation, or re-teaching. The goal is for every teacher of every subject and grade level to understand exactly what students will know and be able to do when they arrive in their courses and what they are expected to know upon completing their courses.

Differentiation of Instruction

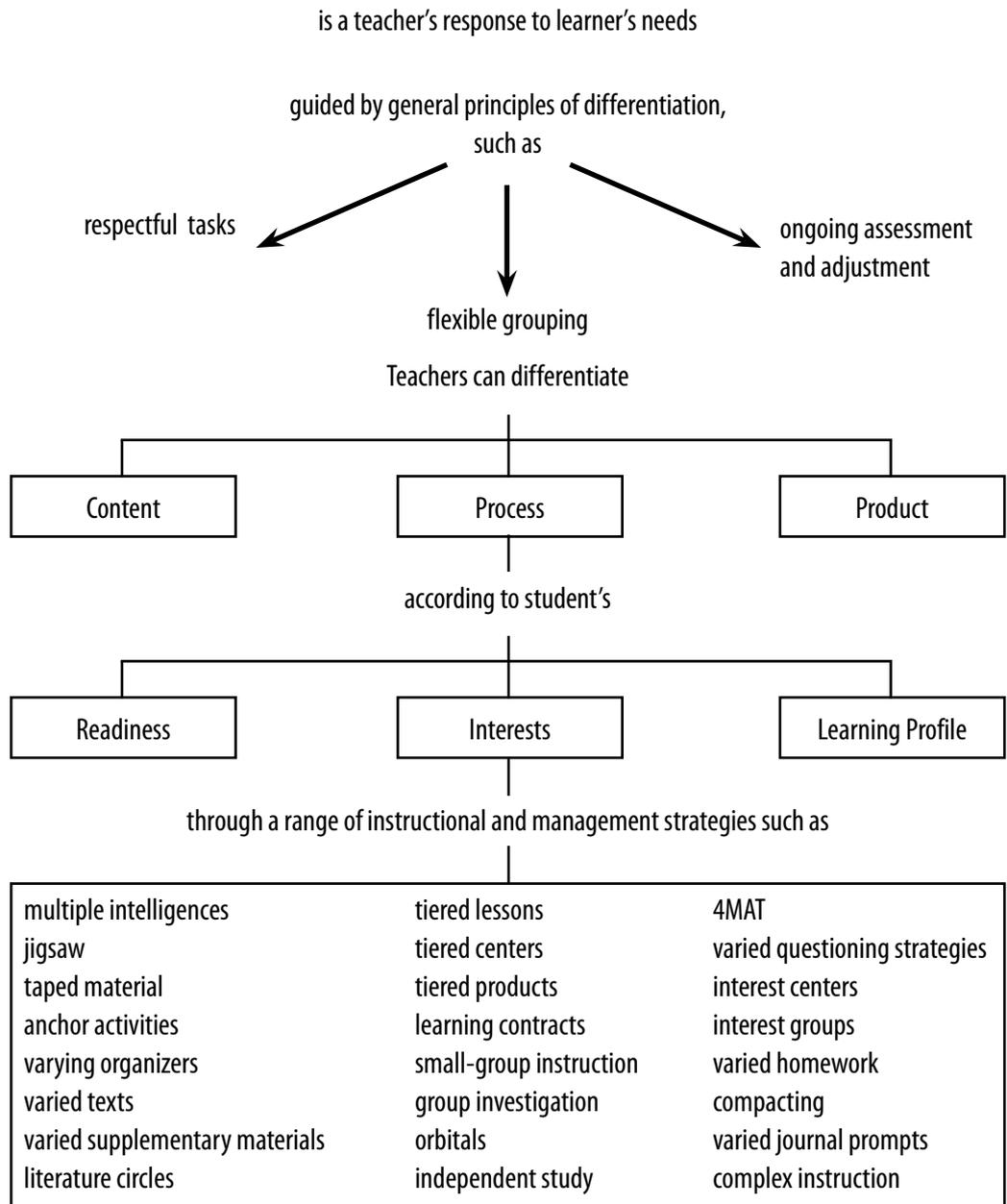


Figure 10.3: Differentiation of Instruction. (From *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms* [2001, ASCD], by Carol Tomlinson [p. 15]. Reprinted by permission. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development is a worldwide community of educators advocating sound policies and sharing best practices to achieve the success of each learner. To learn more, visit ASCD at www.ascd.org.)

Successfully differentiated classroom instruction offers a classroom teacher the means to reach diverse learners and offers an underachieving student of poverty his or her best chance to access the needed support to acquire content and demonstrate learning.