

Preface

Formerly a middle school teacher, I now consult with K–12 teachers in areas of curriculum and instruction, such as curriculum mapping, differentiation, curriculum design, instructional strategies, and so forth. In my experience, I have encountered teachers who labor arduously to perfect their craft and want support to further their professional learning. Additionally, I have mentored teachers who are anxious to work hard but have not been exposed to the proper resources and materials to know where to put their energy in creating meaningful, differentiated curriculum. Often I coach or present to teachers who are forever seeking ways to engage students and make learning fruitful. It could be that the teacher is unaware of how to differentiate, so she teaches to the middle and fails to entice those at the other ends of the learning spectrum. Or it could be (a) that the teacher conducts lessons and activities in isolation so the students cannot make connections for the greater purpose of their work, (b) that she does not have at her disposal a variety of instructional strategies to make learning varied and engaging, or (c) that she has an arsenal of instructional strategies but wants an infusion of new ways to present material. For whatever reason teachers come to me, the overriding common denominator is that they are on a constant search to improve and refine what they do so all students are challenged and enlightened.

I am also a mother of two children—a daughter in middle school and a son in high school. They couldn't be any more diverse in their approaches to homework and school. My daughter dashes to complete her homework the minute she gets home from any extracurricular activity. Her social time with friends after school revolves around homework as she and her friends all conscientiously complete their assigned tasks amidst handfuls of popcorn and some giggling mixed with chatter. My son, on the other hand, takes an eternity to finish his homework and finds any excuse to delay the dreaded undertaking. He will prolong a mediocre dessert pretending it is a luscious treat, or he will insist that a shower is imperative and extend the typical time it takes to wash just to postpone homework. “Stop dawdling and get to work,” my husband repeatedly tells him with irritation punctuating each word. The differences among my kids are not unlike the differences we all experience in the classroom. It is a reality at home and in the classroom. The experience I share with you is as a former teacher, a consultant, and a mother who is acutely aware of the challenges in the classroom to make learning innovative, meaningful, and differentiated.

This book is intended to help teachers write and deliver more meaningful lessons in fourth- to ninth-grade classrooms and differentiate the curriculum to appeal to all levels, interests, and characteristics of learners. Students should leave a classroom energized about what they learn, understand the implications of the unit at hand, and make connections. If it is a worksheet that a teacher assigns, then that worksheet needs to have some valuable meaning and connect to something greater. If vocabulary or concept words are part of an assignment, then those words should be used repeatedly in many contexts to make students own and use them naturally in speaking and writing. If it is a particular skill a teacher wishes to impart, then students should see how it connects to what they are learning in this or other classes or the world at large so it isn't a skill taught in isolation. Each and every assignment and activity should have a greater meaning, and students should leave a classroom knowing the answer to that meaning and its application at whatever level they are able.

Classrooms are filled with opportunities for rich curriculum. It is my hope that through this book, teachers will develop a stronger sense of how to craft differentiated lessons so they can impart knowledge in a more thoughtful, effective manner to help all students find value and meaning in that curriculum. Conducting lessons that stimulate thought and intrigue students can help put an end to blank stares and noncommittal shrugs. Although, being a former teacher myself and a mother of school-age children, it is often hard to ignite passion where there is much competition at stake for teachers. Unfortunately, educators have to work harder to craft and deliver enticing, meaningful curriculum because many students at this age have a multitude of preoccupations in their lives.

The work presented here is culled from my sense of how to differentiate from reading and studying the works of various experts in this field and from my teacher clients. I have learned a great deal from Carol Tomlinson and also from Carolyn Chapman, Susan Winebrenner, Lynn Erickson, Pattie Drapeau, and others. Since I interface with teachers most days, I am fortunate that my work goes into immediate action in the classroom. I help teachers differentiate their lessons and revise after they have learned what happens in the trenches. This process of working with them and hearing their feedback also fuels me with knowledge. This book takes you through what I have learned to do after researching, teaching, talking with teachers, and observing student work and students. I have my own method for how to differentiate lessons that I present to you here along with what I've gleaned from others. What I have written is based on sound research from the experts in differentiation and curriculum I've created that teachers have implemented. I think all teachers have levels of expertise. What I propose is to bring each teacher's level of expertise up several rungs.

Inside these pages, you will find components of curriculum design and numerous lessons for upper-elementary to ninth-grade curriculum that (1) incorporate the tenets of sound lesson planning, (2) include differentiation, (3) follow a lesson template, and (4) can be adapted to fit the

goals of your particular curriculum. As you read this book, my hope is that you grow professionally and become more astute as you do the following and even more:

- Teach lessons in this book and critique what worked and did not work, then adapt accordingly.
- Critically look at curriculum you have crafted to ask yourself how it can be more meaningful for all students.
- Ask yourself how you can specifically differentiate particular lessons you teach to better meet students' needs.
- Review lessons you teach and identify the concrete reasons for teaching them. In other words, articulate the overarching standards and essential questions that guide your curriculum, identify and create various assessments that allow students to demonstrate what they have learned and provide information for differentiating, and conduct differentiated activities and lessons that link to the lesson and unit goals.

Below is a brief overview of what each chapter entails:

- ***Chapter 1: Differentiated Instruction and Strategies***—Differentiation is clearly defined as well as the rationale for using it. Various strategies for the types of differentiation are presented along with cursory ideas on how to use each one. This is a foundational chapter for the entire book and can be used as a reference after reading.
- ***Chapter 2: Differentiated Lesson Design***—This chapter features a lesson template and comprehensive, differentiated lesson examples for core content areas. Peruse all examples even if you do not teach a particular content area of a lesson shown. It will give you exposure to differentiation in action that you can possibly apply.
- ***Chapter 3: Standards, Concepts, and Guiding Questions***—In this chapter, I define guiding questions, illustrate how to use standards and concepts to create these questions, and provide a number of examples. In short, the focus for this chapter is intertwining the trio of questions, standards, and concepts as the basis for creating sound curriculum.
- ***Chapter 4: Assessment in a Differentiated Classroom***—The focus for this chapter is on several assessments that can be used in lesson and unit design. I provide many concrete examples in addition to ideas for how to use, adapt, and differentiate the featured assessments.
- ***Chapter 5: Additional Lesson-Planning Components for Differentiated Curriculum***—The remaining lesson components from the initially presented lesson template of Chapter 2 are featured here. I explain each component, provide examples, and suggest ways to differentiate.
- ***Chapter 6: Closing***—This brief chapter brings closure to the book and a call to action for teachers interested in differentiating instruction.