
Introduction

Overview

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music in which he hears, however measured or far away.

—Henry David Thoreau

D*ifferentiated instruction* is certainly one of the most commonly used phrases in the field of education today. Every professional conference includes multiple sessions dealing with differentiated instruction. Educational vendors are sure to use this term to make the most of their marketing efforts. Differentiated instruction is frequently the topic of conversation at staff meetings and in teachers' lounges throughout the country. In fact, in a recent search on a popular search engine, when entering "differentiated instruction definition" more than 1,060,000 sites are found. Yet despite the frequency with which this term floats through educational discussions, there are still many unanswered questions related to the practice of differentiated instruction.

The term *differentiated instruction* has been around since the 1950s. It was commonly used to refer to providing individualized instruction delivered to meet the needs of each student. This commonly used term created the illusion that differentiated instruction and individualized instruction were one and the same. Unfortunately, this misconception still exists today and often intimidates teachers into thinking that they need to do 20 sets of lessons for each of the 20 students in the class. While individualized instruction is one aspect of differentiation, differentiated instruction offers more manageable and realistic approaches to

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reach the varied needs and strengths of students, and it also addresses the diversity in the classroom.

Carol Ann Tomlinson is considered by many to have promoted differentiated instruction and pushed it to the forefront of educational issues. Her definition is one of the most widely accepted today. She has defined differentiated instruction as a process in which a teacher proactively plans varied approaches to what students need to learn, how they will learn it, and how they can express what they have learned in order to increase the likelihood that each student will learn as much as he or she can as efficiently as possible (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 151).

Defining *differentiated instruction* is not the problem. In many cases, educators are provided with professional development that includes a definition and a description of what it looks like in practice. However, the most common question is still, How can I do it? There have been numerous studies conducted that show that even after receiving a great deal of training on differentiated instruction, most teachers are still not putting it into practice in the classroom. There may be a few different reasons for this. One reason may be that most of the emphasis has been placed on defining the concept and not applying it. Many publications and resources on the topic are often very philosophical or pedagogical in nature. This leaves many teachers able to talk about differentiated instruction yet still wondering how to do it. Differentiated instruction involves lifelong learning and can be very daunting. Educators may acquire a set of strategies to meet the needs of students by providing accommodations; however, this is only one piece of the puzzle. Teachers must be aware that there are multiple domains to consider for any one lesson. These considerations include the levels of complexity, degrees of abstraction, amounts of structure provided, degrees of student independence, and pace of learning, to name a few. Educators may often struggle to take each of these into account when planning or delivering lessons, and they end up overwhelmed.

Educators are looking for a way to put theory into practice. Differentiation is a process—not an event. Much of the work happens behind the scenes in the planning and preparation of instruction. Administrators observing teachers ask how they will know when they are seeing differentiated instruction during their observations. In many cases, there is no way to know if you are seeing it without a conversation about the practices and rationale involved in the instruction.

Differentiated instruction is not a singular, linear process. It is a flow chart with critical junctures and decisions. It is a process used in both planning and teaching. Most definitions agree that it is not just a philosophy but also a practice of meeting students' needs. Ideally, planning for differentiated instruction is best done in collaboration with a trusted colleague or group of professionals. The efforts of multiple people together can outweigh the efforts of each as individuals. Professional conversations can enhance the growth of each individual.

PRINCIPLES OF DIFFERENTIATION

Differentiated instruction is responsive. A teacher who is differentiating instruction is responsive to the students and their needs as well as the context within which the students are learning. The best lesson in the world, with deep thinking required on the part of the students, is still not the best lesson if it occurs the period before a pep rally. The best lesson is one that takes into account the factors of the students and their environment. Differentiated instruction is student centered and therefore an organic, ever-changing process.

Differentiated instruction is based on assessment. Differentiated instruction requires knowledge of and response to the student in relation to the material being learned. Adjustments to instruction are made based on the way the student interacts with the material. Student assessment in any number of aspects related to learning is critical.

Differentiation requires a focus on the big picture as opposed to isolated skills. Differentiated instruction is more than providing accommodations, scaffolding, or pacing. It is the work that goes into the prelesson preparation as well as the ongoing and continuous response to the student's learning process. It goes beyond an acceptance of differences to an expectation of differences.

Differentiation requires an acceptance that everyone is not a master at everything and does not need to be. In all aspects of life, not everyone is as equally good at everything. Different people have different strengths and needs. In differentiated instruction, degrees of mastery of objectives must be established for each learner based on individual strengths and needs.

WHAT THIS BOOK OFFERS

This book assumes that the reader has familiarity with the concept of differentiated instruction, even though there may be some variations in the individual's understanding of the concept. This book offers a process and a set of questions and considerations that can be used to put the definition into practice. It provides both the rationale and concrete steps to take on the practice of differentiated instruction—as a process rather than an event. It addresses the preplanning stages, planning, and implementation of instruction. It provides a concrete guide to be able to not only differentiate instruction but also communicate the rationale for instructional decisions made. Each aspect is based on research and is both conceptual and practical.

In order to begin the discussion of practice, there is a need for a discussion about knowledge and learning. The first part of the book, Chapters 1 and 2, combines both rationale and examples. This is necessary and provides the foundation and rationale for the process of differentiated instruction addressed in the rest of the book.

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Do not flip through this book and go straight to the section on instructional strategies to see what new tools may be there. It is essential to read through the first chapter, which provides the foundation and frame of reference for the rest of the book. Without it, the definition of *differentiated instruction* will be as narrow as looking solely at best teaching practices in an isolated list.

This book is organized around a 10-step process of differentiated instruction. These steps are covered in the chapters of this book. Through each step listed in the process, Jen, a teacher practicing differentiated instruction, shares her thoughts, ideas, and practices. At the end of each chapter, the steps are listed with the step addressed within that chapter highlighted in bold. Following is this 10-step process:

Step 1: Examine standards and objectives to be taught. Determine the type of knowledge demanded of the standard and/or objective.

Step 2: Establish the conceptual understanding related to the facts and skills required.

Step 3: For any fact or skill, determine the level of fluency needed for mastery.

Step 4: Design independent student activities that address the facts and skills that are required, along with accommodations for students who need support in achieving mastery of the facts and skills.

Step 5: Reflect on personal knowledge and attitudes related to resources, the content, and the students.

Step 6: Preassess students in knowledge of facts, skills, conceptual understandings, experiences, attitudes, motivations, and ideas.

Step 7: Determine strategies for instruction at different levels of cognitive processing to include concrete, representational, and abstract processes.

Step 8: Determine the flow of classroom activities to include individual, small-group, and whole-group instruction.

Step 9: Determine benchmarks of student performance, and develop tools for ongoing measurement of progress.

Step 10: Develop selections and criteria for the summative product or performance that accurately reflect the intended outcomes of the unit.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Chapter 1 sets the stage so that subsequent chapters share not just what to do but how to do it. Differentiated instruction is less about the strategies

of instruction and more about the levels of the learners as well as the levels of knowledge of the content being taught. Once there is a framework and systematic process to approach those two aspects of education, the implementation of instruction becomes manageable and systematic as well.

Chapter 2 addresses the issues of differentiated instruction in relation to standards. It builds on the types of knowledge discussed in Chapter 1 and describes the importance of using the standards as a platform from which to proceed. Chapter 2 discusses the compatibility and necessity of standards in differentiated instruction.

Chapter 3 examines the role of the foundational level of knowledge, which is composed of the facts and skills. This level of knowledge, defined in Chapter 1, must be addressed differently than other levels of knowledge. Chapter 3 discusses these differences and provides tools to address this level of knowledge.

Chapter 4 initiates the consideration of true self-reflection on the part of the teacher. The reflection includes areas of personal knowledge, attitudes toward the content, and attitudes toward the learners. There are guiding questions and a reflective tool for preparing to plan instruction.

Chapter 5 moves into the preplanning stages and considers both the fact-and-skill level of knowledge along with the conceptual level of knowledge in the role of preassessment. This chapter looks at multiple dimensions of learners and provides tools to assess students. It presents preassessment considerations that include the learner, as well as the context of the learning.

Chapter 6 contains the topics most commonly addressed in books on differentiated instruction. It provides a framework and a series of steps to take in planning for differentiated instruction. It includes instructional strategies. However, this chapter is different from most texts in that it addresses these topics in a related and systematic approach with a template to guide the process. This chapter provides not only the strategies but also the rationale for using specific strategies of instruction.

Chapter 7 continues the process of planning for differentiated instruction through the consideration of the management of instructional flow. This chapter includes topics of whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, as well as individualized instruction. It addresses the purpose as well as the strengths of and cautions for each model of delivery.

Chapter 8 addresses the process of continuous monitoring of students and their progress. This chapter includes assessing the physical and mental state of the learner, the context, and environment in which the learning is taking place, as well as student expectations. It includes the practices involved in implementing tiered instruction and accommodations. And, it addresses the relationship of differentiated instruction to response to intervention and instruction or RtI.

To complete the 10 steps, Chapter 9 provides information and ideas related to products, performance, and assessment. It provides guidelines

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for developing questions at the highest levels of knowledge and creating opportunities for authentic products and student performances.

Chapter 10 provides a look back as well as a look ahead. It addresses important issues, including the relationship between differentiated instruction and students identified as gifted or as having learning disabilities. It again brings forth RtI as a key partner in the differentiation process and philosophy.

Finally, at the end of the book in the appendix, there are templates, resources, and tools provided to assist with the processes of preplanning, planning, implementing, and reflecting with regard to differentiated instruction. Included is a set of questions for each chapter that lends itself to professional collaboration in the exploration of the concepts presented here. These questions can be used for a book study or other professional learning community. Each of the templates referred to in the chapters are provided as well.

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Types of Knowledge

Information is not knowledge.

—Albert Einstein

Meet Jen

Jen is a teacher who has been teaching fifth grade for the last five years. She is proficient as a teacher. Her students and their parents have always been pleased with her teaching. Her administrator has also given her consistently high reviews. Jen has attended several workshops on the topic of differentiated instruction and is concerned about meeting the needs of each of the students in her class. Jen is looking forward to starting her sixth year of teaching and has new ideas to implement this year. She and the other fifth-grade teachers have some time for planning before the first day of school.

Examining Knowledge

Jen and her team dive into their new science textbook eagerly. After thumbing through the text and related support materials, she begins her work by looking at the state standards and local standards she is required to address during the semester. During the first part of the year, she is focusing on physical science and must teach her students about states of matter. She reads the standard that says, “Students will identify three states of matter and recognize that changes in state can occur.” Jen finds in the textbook where states of matter are addressed. There are two pages of reading and some basic questions at the end of the second page

to focus on the identification of states of matter. The text provides pictures as well. Jen recognizes that the identification of states of matter means that students will simply name and define each state of matter. She also knows that to recognize the fact that changes can occur is fairly simple in nature. She wonders how her students will connect and relate to these standards.

Jen realizes that these standards are mostly a set of facts, and she needs to increase the level of understanding in order to provide a quality learning experience. She knows she must branch out beyond the textbook in order to make the learning meaningful. She asks herself, “Why is it important for students to know this?” and she determines that the real idea here is about states of matter being able to change when conditions change. She asks herself again why that idea is important for her students to learn and how it could apply to their lives. She thinks that she can take an approach or lens for these standards and teach her students the concept that outside factors influence and can create powerful change. She will use matter and states of matter as a way to promote student thinking about change on a broader level. She sees how this idea can connect to events in history, characterization in literature, mathematical functions, team sports in PE, and music history. She is satisfied that now she has something substantial with which to work.

Jen goes back to her standards along with the objectives in the textbook and begins to determine related facts and skills required to understand the standards along with the concepts of influence and change. She comes up with this list:

- There are four states of matter: solid, liquid, gas, and plasma.
- Temperature plays a role in determining states of matter.
- Combining matter can affect the state.
- Data collection is needed to document change.

Now, she can address each of these standards while focusing on the concept that outside factors influence and can create powerful change in multiple areas of life.

Jen shows us that all knowledge is not created equal. It is easy to get caught up in the content of the discipline and forget that there are different levels of knowledge or understanding required from standards. There is a hierarchy of knowledge that must be considered in order to differentiate instruction and prioritize both teaching and learning. There are distinct types of knowledge, and with the different levels or types comes different approaches to instruction.

TABA’S CATEGORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

Early on, Hilda Taba (see Tomlinson, 2002) organized types of knowledge into categories. Her research became the basis for much of the more recent