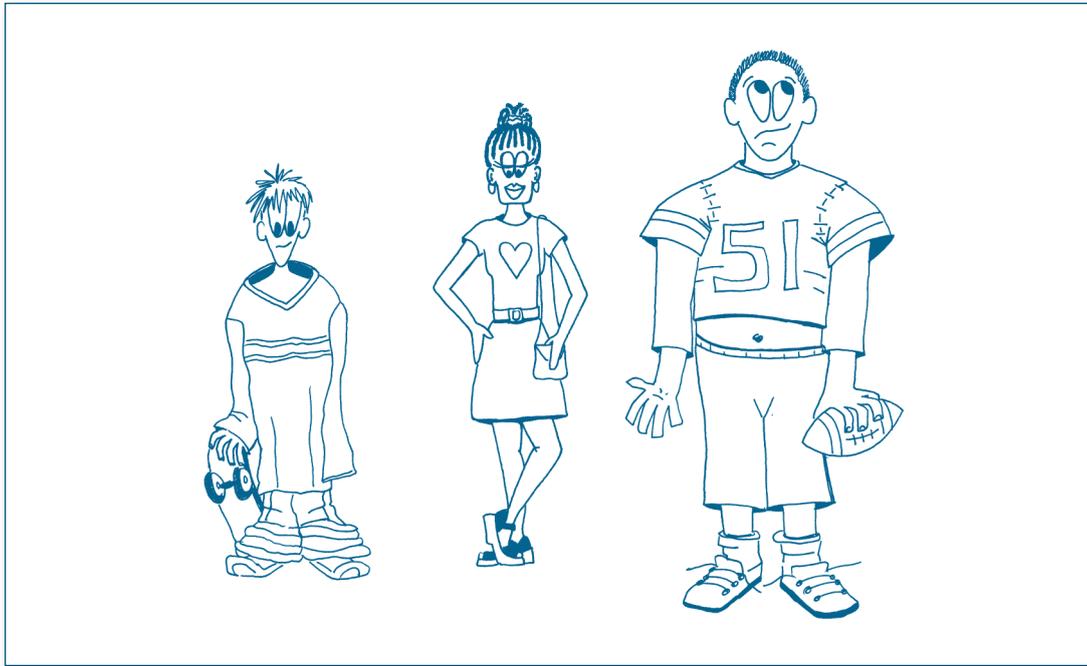

One Size Doesn't Fit All

CLASSROOMS ARE FULL OF DIVERSE LEARNERS IN THIS SECOND DECADE of the 21st century, both culturally and linguistically (Goodwin, Lefkowitz, Woempner, & Hubbell, 2011). Each student is unique. They differ in countless ways, including physical characteristics, personalities, backgrounds, cognitive abilities, experiences, learning preferences, and social development. Teaching experience and recent research tell us each brain is distinctively wired and impacted by previous experiences. With this knowledge, effective teachers know that learners cannot be placed through the same education hoops. Experience and research continue to provide insights about the human brain. Each student is different, they have had exclusive opportunities, and their brains are wired uniquely. So it's only reasonable that everyone learns differently and has different likes, interests, preferences, and needs.

Students bring their interests, personal experiences, and attitudes to each learning moment of every day in a classroom. How does a teacher reach the diverse needs in a classroom today? See each class member as a valuable star! All learners bring differing prior knowledge and skills. To develop deep understanding, they need not only factual but conceptual knowledge. Customized teaching and learning benefits all students with effective lessons that meet the individual needs of each learner. To emphasize this point, consider the purchase of school uniforms. Each one is sized and adjusted for the student's fit and comfort. With this in mind, we can routinely remind ourselves to differentiate instruction because "one size doesn't fit all"!

Yet for years we have planned "The Lesson" and taught it to all, knowing that we were boring some and losing others because they were not ready for that learning. Still, we expect students to adjust to the learning when the learning should really be adjusted to the learners. Adjustments should be based on sound knowledge of the learners. This includes what they know already, can do, like, are like, need, and prefer.

Effective teachers must be familiar with both their students and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or standards in their district or county and the students

Figure 1.1 As With Clothing, So With Lessons: One Size Does Not Fit All

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they teach. The Common Core State Standards were developed to give a national consistency rather than differing standards state to state. They were also designed to be clearer, go deeper, and prepare students to become critical and creative thinkers, college or career ready in a global market. The standards and the needs of students should determine instructional decisions. Programs, materials, and resources should not determine the curriculum and instruction. Specific materials and resources are selected to teach to the needs of the particular group of students and the standards being addressed.

Our quest in schools and classrooms everywhere as well as in the CCSS is to foster success for students in their lives by becoming self-directed, productive problem solvers and thinkers. For years, we have been studying and implementing research and evidence-based instructional strategies and assessment tools that make a difference in student achievement. *Differentiation* is a philosophy or mindset that enables educators to plan strategically in order to reach the needs of the diverse learners in classrooms today so that they can achieve targeted standards. Differentiation is not a set of tools, but a belief system or mindset that educators embrace to meet the unique needs of every learner.

The mindset of teachers who are differentiating in their classrooms embraces the following ideas:

- All students have areas of strength.
- All students have areas that need to be strengthened.
- Each student's brain is as unique as a fingerprint.

- It is never too late to learn.
- When beginning a new topic, students bring their prior knowledge base and experience to the learning.
- Emotions, feelings, and attitudes affect learning.
- All students can learn.
- Students learn in different ways at different times.

By using a variety of differentiated instructional strategies and activities, educators are implementing this philosophy daily in classrooms across the grade levels and content areas. Each time a teacher meets the individual needs of a student, he or she is differentiating instruction.

Differentiating instruction is not new, but it requires a more conscious effort on the teacher's part to analyze available data and make decisions about what is working and what needs to be adjusted. Keep what works. Discard practices that do not work. Change what needs changing. Educators are already doing a great job! More conscious consideration and a greater repertoire of strategies will help them do an even better job.

A 2007 report issued by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development says that “aspects of development—neural, cognitive, social, psychological, physical and ethical—*have far-reaching effects on children's ability to learn.* . . . [Teachers] need access to scientifically-based knowledge concerning student development and learning.”

THE DIFFERENTIATED CLASSROOM

A *differentiated classroom* is one in which the teacher responds to the unique needs of students. Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999) names content, process, and products as components that are differentiated in a classroom. The content is what is taught. The way a learner interprets, adapts, and finds ownership is the process. The product shows the learner's personal interpretation and what he or she knows. Each of these components is constantly assessed to create quality plans to meet the individual needs of students. Differentiated instruction offers a variety of options for successfully reaching the targeted standards in the CCSS. It meets learners where they are and offers challenging, appropriate options for them in order to achieve success.

Teachers can strategically and effectively differentiate the following:

- content
- assessment tools
- performance tasks
- instructional strategies

Differentiating Content

The first step is deciding which Common Core State Standards are to be targeted. Then essential questions are composed and the knowledge, skills, and understandings are highlighted. Depending on the readiness and interests of the students, the content may be differentiated. Teachers also have the added tools available in the CCSS that allow them to look at the learning progressions related to the standards

so that they know what students have been exposed to and what skills they will need at the next grade level. The information to teach and the resources to best teach it are selected strategically. This is implemented by

- using different genres,
- leveling materials,
- using a variety of instructional materials,
- providing choice, and
- using selective abandonment.

Quality differentiated content is relevant to the study, interesting and intriguing to learners, has a defined purpose, and has established learning goals that target the identified Common Core State Standards. The planned assignments are not boring or frustrating, but challenging and timely for learners and will clearly show the student's competency related to the targeted standards. A wide variety of materials and resources need to be accessible for students to explore, discover, and expand their knowledge of the content. The key is selecting the most effective cognitive opportunities that are relevant, engaging, and challenging to ensure learning for each student.

Differentiating Formative Assessment Tools

Many teachers are already effectively differentiating assessment during and after the learning. However, it is equally important to assess knowledge and interests prior to the learning. Understanding what students know about the upcoming topic is essential to planning quality learning experiences. Dispense a blending of formal and informal tools for ongoing formative assessment throughout the learning experience. It is important to interpret the gathered data and use the learned information to plan strategically to meet learners' individual needs. This important learned information determines what to teach and whether interventions or more challenging learning opportunities are needed for individual learners.

Types of formative assessment include a collection of formal and informal tools that are strategically chosen to assess before, during, and after the learning. Teachers are constantly adding new ways to assess levels of understanding and needs. Use the gathered data to plan differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners.

Differentiating Performance Tasks

Students demonstrate their knowledge in many different ways. Teachers should provide various authentic opportunities and choices for learners to show what they know. For example, students can choose how to demonstrate their knowledge by creating a prop, giving an oral report, or engaging in a center experience.

Differentiating Instructional Strategies

When teachers vary instructional strategies and activities, more students learn content and information, and they develop the necessary skills. By targeting diverse intelligences and learning preferences, teachers can label learning activities and assignments in ways that help students choose when to work with their areas of strength and when to work with areas that still need strengthening. Providing options

or choices enables students to learn the material their way or show what they have learned. Using research-based best practices (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012) will help ensure that more students develop the concepts and skills targeted. Rehearsal in a variety of ways helps learning become part of long-term memory.

As with clothing, one size doesn't fit all, so in classrooms one way is not the only way.

WHY DIFFERENTIATE?

We have been faced with more change than ever before in education. Several decades ago, teachers came into the profession with a desire to work with children, a knowledge base, and good intentions. Today, teachers face a challenging landscape that is in constant flux. Many factors influence the constantly changing classroom:

- CCSS-based classrooms: targeted expectations set by states, provinces, and/or nations
- High expectations for all students: no longer can we leave children behind and just “spray and pray” for success
- Multicultural diversity: continuous influx of immigrant children with little or no communication skills or competencies in English
- Student diversity: unique learning preferences and different strengths of multiple intelligences
- New cognitive research on human learning: knowledge of the brain and how it processes memory and makes meaning, and its need for social interaction and appropriate level of stress and challenge
- Rapid societal and technological change: political and economic revolutions that influence what and how learning takes place

The students arriving at school in the 21st century are *digital experts*. Technology has been an integral part of their lives and, for some, a compelling attention-getter. Students today are wired differently because of daily exposure to technology. In *Teaching Digital Natives*, Marc Prensky (2010) explains that students want to live in today's world using today's tools.

Figure 1.2 shows three distinct categories and skills within each that should be embedded in curriculum.

Along with all these issues is the fact that we are teaching students not for our lifetime but for the future, and teachers using the CCSS are also integrating skills for the 21st century:

- Thinking critically and making judgments
- Solving complex, multidisciplinary, open-ended problems
- Creativity and entrepreneurial thinking
- Communicating and collaborating
- Making innovative use of knowledge, information, and opportunities
- Taking charge of financial, health, and civic responsibilities

Schools are expected to build in opportunities within the curriculum for students to practice and develop these skills. However, the balancing act involves dealing

Figure 1.2 Categories and Related Skills to Embed in the Curriculum

<i>Learning and Innovation The 4 Cs</i>	<i>Digital Literacy</i>	<i>Career and Life</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking and problem solving • Creativity and innovation • Communication • Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information literacy • Media literacy • Information and communication technology literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility and adaptability • Initiative and self-direction • Social and cross-cultural interaction • Productivity and accountability

with the CCSS and the reality that classrooms contain diverse, heterogeneous groups of learners. Learners with different cultural backgrounds, experiences, interests, learning preferences, and multiple intelligences are the norm.

Students do not all learn the same thing in the same way on the same day. As educators in classrooms, we need to consider each child in the learning community, based on his or her needs, readiness, preferences, and interests.

We live and work in a global society of high accountability. The legislative notion that any educator would willingly “leave a child behind” is insulting to most educators who view their chosen profession as a mission rather than as a job.

For many decades, educators used a bell curve to rank students. They didn’t expect everyone to succeed. It was more the norm to “teach, test, and hope for the best.” Today, however, we do expect that all students will learn to their full potential and that all teachers will find a way to enable each individual to be successful. Dr. R. L. Canady, of the University of Virginia, has shared that there are three groups of students in classrooms:

- A group of 25% to 37% of students learn “in spite of us.” Those are the students who come ready, willing, and prepared to play the school game in order to succeed. These learners see education as a means to an end, do the work as assigned regardless of preferences, and have the support of significant others in their lives.
- A group of 15% to 25% of students are identified as having some exceptional-ity and receive additional resources.
- A large group of about 37% to 50% learn because of the teacher’s skills and efforts and because of appropriate instruction and assessment aligned with CCSS targeted standards.

Through differentiation, we give all these students the opportunity to learn to their full potential. Throughout this book, we explore the elements needed in the differentiated classroom to engage students and to facilitate learning in order to increase the chances that all learners will succeed. Figure 1.3 organizes these elements in categories, listing tools and strategies that build an inclusive, nurturing classroom and allow teachers to design learning to honor the diversity of the learning population.

Figure 1.3 Tools and Strategies for Designing Inclusive Differentiated Classrooms for Diverse Learners

Climate	Knowing the Learner	Assessing the Learner	Adjustable Assignments	Instructional Strategies and Differentiation	Curriculum Approaches
Safe Nurturing Encourages Risk Taking Multisensory Stimulating Complex Challenging Collaborative Team and Class Building Norms Mindset	Learning Profiles Learning Preferences Sweet Spot Dunn & Dunn Gregorc Silver/Strong/Hanson Multiple Intelligences Using observation checklists, inventories, logs, and journals to become more aware of how students learn Cultural Gender Pop culture	Before Preassessment Formal Pretest Journaling Informal Squaring off Boxing Graffiti facts During Formative Formal Journaling/Portfolios Teacher-made tests Checklists/Rubrics Informal Thumb it Fist of five Face the fact After Formal Summative Posttest Portfolio/Conferences Reflections Informal Talking topics Conversation Circles Donut	Compacting Gifted TAPS Total Group Lecturette Presentation Demonstration Jigsaw Video Field trip Guest speaker Text Alone Interest Personalized Multiple intelligences Paired Random Interest Task Small Groups Heterogeneous Homogeneous Task Oriented Constructed Random Interest	Edu-neuroscience and Differentiation Brain facts Memory model Elaborative rehearsal Focus activities Graphic organizers Compare & contrast Webbing Metaphorical thinking Cooperative group learning Jigsaw Questioning Cubing Role-play Technology	Centers Projects Choice Boards Problem-Based Learning Inquiry Models Contracts

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PLANNING FOR DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

A planning model (see Figure 1.4) can be used to help teachers make decisions about differentiated instruction and assessment. Each phase of the planning model will be explained. Throughout this book, the strategies are clarified using examples.

1. Establish what needs to be taught. First, consider the CCSS, anchor standards and English language arts standards across the content areas, benchmarks, essential questions, or expectations to be taught. It should be clear what the students should know, be able to do, or be like after the learning experience. Determine which formative assessment strategies will be used to collect data (e.g., logs, checklists, journals, observations, portfolios, rubrics). Also create an appropriate final assessment that clearly shows whether students have achieved the CCSS. **Essential questions** may be developed that will be visible and posted throughout the unit so that students can consider the questions as they work on tasks.

2. Identify the **content**, including knowledge, understandings, and essential skills.

3. **Activate**. Determine what students know and what they need to learn next. This accesses prior knowledge that has been stored in the brain's long-term memory. This formative pre-assessment may be done 1 to 3 weeks prior to the unit to allow plenty of time for planning learning activities, grouping students, and raising anticipation and excitement about the new topic. "Emotional hooks" can be used to engage students and to capture their attention as the brain responds to challenge, novelty, and unique experiences.

A strong pre-assessment determines what the students know. The pre-assessment is sometimes formal and sometimes informal. It is essential to select an assessment tool that best shows students' prior knowledge, background experience, and attitudes and preferences toward the information. The interpretation of the gathered data needs to drive planning in order to provide quality learning opportunities.

4. **Acquire**. Decide what new knowledge and skills students need to learn and how they will acquire them to the level of understanding. Also decide whether the acquisition will take place in a total-group setting or in small groups and whether it will be based on readiness or interest.

Now it is time to lay out the plan. Determine how the information can best be taught to this particular group or groups of students. Weed through the resources available, and find the materials that will best meet the needs of these students. Focus on quality materials, and remember that what works for one group does not always work for another group. Also create the formative assessments to be used throughout the learning as benchmarks on the way to success. These will check for understanding or skill level and provide data for next instructional steps. These may not always be graded but will inform instruction.

5. **Apply and Adjust**. Students need the opportunity to practice and become actively engaged with the new learning in order to understand and retain it. Remember, of course, to build in opportunities to use both academic and domain-specific vocabulary and a variety of levels of thinking and complexity as noted in the CCSS. Determine how the students will be grouped and what tasks will be assigned to challenge them at the appropriate levels. The brain needs multiple rehearsals to strengthen the dendritic connections in the neocortex so that new learning is

Figure 1.4 The Six-Step Planning Model for Differentiated Learning: Template

Planning for Differentiated Learning	
1. CORE STANDARDS: What should students know and be able to do?	Assessment tools for data collection: (logs, checklists, journals, agendas, observations, portfolios, rubrics, contracts)
Essential Questions:	
2. CONTENT: (concepts, vocabulary, facts)	SKILLS:
3. ACTIVATE: Focus Activity: Pre-assessment strategy Pre-assessment Prior knowledge & engaging the learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz, test • Surveys • K-W-L • Journals • Arm gauge • Give me • Brainstorm • Concept formation • Thumb it
4. ACQUIRE: Total group or small groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecturette • Presentation • Demonstration • Jigsaw • Video • Field trip • Guest speaker • Text
5. Grouping Decisions: (TAPS, random, heterogeneous, homogeneous, interest, task, constructed) APPLY FORMative assessments ADJUST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning centers • Projects • Contracts • Compact/Enrichment • Problem based • Inquiry • Research • Independent study
6. Summative ASSESSMENT Diversity Honored (learning styles, multiple intelligences, personal interest, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiz, test • Performance • Products • Presentation • Demonstration • Log, journal • Checklist • Portfolio • Rubric • Metacognition

transferred to long-term memory. This can determine the need for interventions to be addressed and which students need to revisit missed segments in the foundation required to learn the new information. Also, the learners who already know the information may need challenging assignments to enhance their knowledge.

6. **Assess.** Have the students demonstrate their knowledge. Consider providing choices for doing so. Select a quality formative assessment tool that will provide the best evidence of the information mastered, needing planned interventions, and the parts that need to be spiraled back through at a later date. Determine what will be the most effective summative assessment and how will it be graded.

All these decisions are made with the intention of honoring the diversity of the students' learning preferences, multiple intelligences, and personal interests. This instructional plan also addresses and honors the differences in the knowledge base and experiences of each learner as students move toward meeting the CCSS.

Remember, the implementation theme of "one size doesn't fit all" proves that there is a need to differentiate instruction. So let's get started exploring the facets of differentiating instruction and offering our students diverse opportunities to succeed.

Chapter 1

Reflections

1. In interest groups or alone, brainstorm ways you meet the individual needs of students. After compiling the list, post it and title it “Ways to Differentiate Instruction.”
2. Differentiated instruction is like _____ (select a noun) because _____ (list the many ways the two are alike). Illustrate, share, and post.
3. In groups of four, jigsaw the four ways to differentiate (a) content, (b) formative assessment, (c) performance assessment, and (d) instructional strategies. Each team member reads the section in the book on his or her assigned topic, takes notes, and adds how he or she currently differentiates in this area. Then each participant shares his or her gathered information while the other group members take notes.
4. Use Figure 1.3 to take a personal inventory of your current use of differentiated instruction. Place a star by the areas that you are implementing. Place a check by the areas that you have used but not very often. Place an X by the areas that you have not used.