
Session #1

Differentiated Instruction: An Introduction

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By watching Video Program #1 and completing this session's learning activities, you will:

- Understand the scope and sequence of this course.
- Explore the key concepts that the course will address.
- Reflect on your current teaching practices and the degree to which they are differentiated.
- Establish a course goal to improve the level of differentiation in your teaching situation.

READING ASSIGNMENT:

Please read the introduction and chapter 1 in the course text.

PREPARATION:

In order to focus your thinking as you begin this session, please read the following excerpt from Dr. Carol Tomlinson's book, "The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners."

Rethinking How We Do School – and for Whom

Carol Ann Tomlinson

Some may think that differentiating instruction is a recently hatched idea from what-

ever it is that educational "innovations" begin. Actually, it is a natural outgrowth of a burgeoning understanding of the ways children learn. A brief background on the evolution of teaching and learning over recent decades is useful for understanding what we now call "differentiated instruction."

Think back to 75 or 100 years ago. Now, fast-forward to today. In many ways, those years reflect more change for humans than all the years before in recorded history. Think about farming 100 years ago—and today. Think about the practice of medicine 100 years ago—and today. Imagine transportation 100 years ago—and today. Consider the 20th century's changes in engineering, clothing, and communications. The transformation is dizzying! While most of us succumb to occasional nostalgia for the "good old days" few of us would opt for yesterday's physicians, communication systems, or fashion.

Although we think of school as a static enterprise, the field of education has grown and changed, too. Today we understand many things about teaching and learning that we had no way of knowing a century, or even a few decades, ago. Some of these insights stem from psychology and the science of the brain. Others come from continuing observation in classrooms. Whatever their genesis, these educational changes are every bit as revolutionary as moving from the pencil to the typewriter to the personal computer...

Despite [this] compelling new knowledge, classrooms have changed little over the past 100 years. We still assume that a child of a given age is enough like all other children of the same age that he or she should traverse the same curriculum in the same fashion with all other students of that age. Further, schools act as though all children should finish classroom tasks as near to the same moment as possible. A school year should be the same length for all learners.

To this end, schools generally adopt a single textbook; give students a single test at the end of the chapter, and another test at the end of designated marking periods. Teachers use the same grading system for all children of a given age and grade, whatever their starting point was at the beginning of the year.

The curriculum is typically based on goals that involve having children accumulate and retain a variety of facts and skills that are far removed from any meaningful context. Drill-and-practice worksheets are the chief educational technology, and teachers tell students things they must then tell back, a legacy of behaviorism rooted firmly in the 1930's. Teachers still largely "run" classes, and they are likely to work harder and more actively than students much of the time. To the degree that we focus on developing intelligence in schools, educators seem convinced that only narrow, analytical slices of verbal and computational intelligence are important. This is almost the same as nearly a century ago when the public believed that a bit of reading, writing, and computation would serve learners well in an adulthood dominated by assembly line and agrarian jobs. Schools still prepare children for tests more than life...

Many observers have written wisely and well about why schools seem so resistant to change... The point here is while the rest of the world seized upon progress over the last century, the *practice* of education remained static. To overcome this, we need to begin our investigation of how to differentiate instruction for a diverse student population with some important assumptions.

- Students differ in experience, readiness, interest, intelligences, language, culture, gender, and mode of learning. As one elementary teacher noted, "Children already come to us differentiated. It just makes sense that we would differentiate our instruction in response to them.

- To maximize the potential in each learner, educators need to meet each child at his or her starting point and ensure substantial growth during each school term.

- Classrooms that ignore student differences are unlikely to maximize potential in any student who differs significantly from the "norm." This is an issue even in "homogeneous" classrooms where student variance is inevitably great.

- To ensure maximum student growth, teachers need to make modifications for students rather than assume students must modify themselves to fit the curriculum. In fact, children do not know how to differentiate their own curriculum successfully.

- Best practice education should be the starting point for differentiation. It makes little sense to modify practices that defy the best understanding of teaching and learning. As noted educator Seymour Sarason reminds us, any classroom efforts that aren't powered by an understanding of what keeps children eagerly pursuing knowledge are doomed to fail.

- Classrooms grounded in best-practice education, and modified to be responsive to student differences, benefit virtually all students. Differentiation addresses the needs of struggling and advanced learners. It addresses the needs of students for whom English is a second language and students who have strong learning style preferences. It addresses gender differences and cultural differences. It pays homage to the truth that we are not born to become replicas of one another.

As Howard Garner suggests, even if we could figure out how to make everyone a brilliant violinist, an orchestra also needs top-quality musicians who play woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings. Differentiation is about high-quality performance for all individuals and giving students the opportunity to develop their particular strengths.

Used by permission. From Rethinking How We Do School (Chapter 3) in The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners by Carol Ann Tomlinson – Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 1999. 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.

PREPARATION:

Please consider the following questions with respect to the above article. If you are taking this course as a member of a study team, discuss your answers with your colleagues. If you are taking this course as an individual, consider the implications your answers might have for your teaching situation.

1. Dr. Tomlinson states, “Despite compelling new knowledge, classrooms have changed little over the past 100 years.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement. What evidence can you give to support your position?
2. In today’s inclusive classrooms with special needs students, do you believe differentiated instruction is appropriate? Why? Why not?
3. Consider Dr. Tomlinson’s statement “To maximize the potential in each learner, educators need to meet each child at his or her starting point and ensure substantial growth during each school term.” How do you (or

could you) meet each child at his or her starting point? If you do not believe this is practical, give your reasons.

4. To carry Dr. Gardner’s analogy further, even though an orchestra is made up of diverse musicians playing various instruments, are they not all required to play the same music? In terms of Dr. Tomlinson’s article, what is your reaction to this?

VIDEO PROGRAM:

View the video program for this session entitled, “**Differentiated Instructional Strategies: An Introduction.**” The running time for the video is approximately 28 minutes.

VIDEO PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

This video introduces the major themes in the course and presents a preview of the remaining sessions and accompanying videos.

Session #1: Differentiation: An Introduction

The scope and sequence of the course are described along with key concepts to be explored.

Session #2: Differentiation and Choices

Teacher Shellie Dumas shows how she provides choices to her second grade students as part of her approach to differentiating reading instruction.

Session #3: Differentiation and Assessment

High School teacher Ken Puccio differentiates his assessment of student’s understanding of a play, with a game of Jeopardy.

Session #4: Differentiation and K.W.L.

First grade teacher Laurie Country demonstrates the differentiated strategy: K.W.L. by determining what her student Know, Want

to know, and have Learned about addition and subtraction.

Session #5: Differentiation and Tiered Learning

Teacher Lisa Letteman demonstrates how to differentiate a lesson so that all students work on the same subject but at different levels of complexity.

Session #6: Differentiation and Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers are often used to differentiate instruction and teacher Angela Lester shows how she uses them in a science lesson about animal classifications.

Session #7: Differentiation and High School

This is a two-part video about how to differentiate instruction at the high school level. In the first part, teacher Juan Caballero uses simulations in a world history class and in the second part teacher Maria Jacobis uses a form of cooperative learning to differentiate her lesson.

Session #8: Differentiation and Learning Centers

This video shows learning centers and how they are used in a kindergarten class team taught by Thenell Hanggi and Jan Mohler.

Session #9: Differentiation and Problem-Based Learning

This video visit the class of Mary Foster at East Elementary School in Kansas City to see how she uses a brain teaser with multiple possible solutions to challenge her students problem solving skills.

Session #10: Differentiation and Learning Options

Ronald Reagan Elementary School in California is the location to see how teacher Theresa Kent groups her students so that all are appropriately challenges in a lesson on fractions.

Session #11: Differentiation and Multiple Intelligences

In a lesson on fractions, we will see how teacher Kimberly Tice teaches a lesson designed to accommodate intelligences preferences that include logical-mathematical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and special.

Session #12: Differentiation: Jigsaw and Centers

This is a two-part video. In the first part we will visit the class of Janet Valadez for an example of the Jigsaw strategy. In the second part first grade teacher Rich Shepler explains how he has structure learning and interest centers for his students.

Session #13: Differentiation and Flexible Grouping

In this video we will visit the classroom of Stefany Kerr for an example of flexible grouping, a strategy that places students in groups based on their performance levels in order to maximize learning.

Sessions #14 Differentiation: Self-Select Study Topic

With this session, you will select one of the foregoing videos to view a second time and study in more depth.

Session #15: Differentiation: Participant Planning for Future Use of Course Concepts

With this session, you will reflect upon your learning experiences throughout the course and plan for the future use of your new knowledge and skills.

VIDEO AND READING FOCUS QUESTIONS:

Please consider the following questions with respect to the information presented in the reading assignments and video program for this session. If you are taking this course as a member of a study team, discuss your answers with your colleagues. If you are taking this course as an individual, consider the implications your answers might have for your teaching situation.

1. Consider Dr. Tomlinson’s use of the Taming of the Fox metaphor as applied to differentiated instruction. Do you agree that it is a proper metaphor for education? Why? Why not?

2. Dr. William Glasser (The Quality School, Every Student Can Succeed) has stated that a trusting relationship with students is critical for effective instruction. How does this apply to the Taming of the Fox metaphor?

3. Consider this statement in the course text, “The concept of differentiation for varied learners has its roots in the belief that we teach best when we accept the need to tame the fox.” What implications does this statement have for your own instruction?

4. Review the outline of videos in the **Video Program Overview** above. Which of sessions, 2-15 do you believe will be most applicable to your teaching situation? Why?

5. With respect to your answer to #4, what would be a reasonable, reachable goal for you to achieve by the end of this course? How could you determine whether that goal was achieved?

APPLICATION ASSIGNMENT:

Your application assignment for this session is to refine the goal you have set for yourself in response to the **Video and Reading Focus Questions**.

First, write your goal here:

Survey:

The next part of this assignment will help you identify the degree to which your current approach to instruction is differentiated.

Next, please read and respond to each of the following statements using the following scale.

0 = neither disagree or agree

1 = strongly disagree

4 = somewhat disagree

7 = somewhat agree

10 = strongly agree

Early in the school year, I take an inventory of my students’ learning preferences.

0 1 4 7 10

I consider student learning preferences and styles when planning my lessons.

0 1 4 7 10

I view assessment as an on-going and diagnostic process that helps me make my instruction responsive to students’ learning needs.

0 1 4 7 10

I often guide my students in making interest-based learning choices.

0 1 4 7 10

I use my students’ learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles to shape my instruction.

0 1 4 7 10

I make frequent use of peer tutoring and peer assistance.

0 1 4 7 10

I often offer students choices in how to complete assignments.

0 1 4 7 10

I work with my students to help them set individual learning goals.

0 1 4 7 10

I guide students' work on course projects by asking questions, exploring options, and suggesting alternative ways to do things.

0 1 4 7 10

Developing the ability of students to think and work independently is an important goal of mine.

0 1 4 7 10

My students help each other and me to solve problems.

0 1 4 7 10

My learning activities encourage students to take initiative and responsibility for their learning.

0 1 4 7 10

I assess my students' progress in multiple ways.

0 1 4 7 10

I often solicit student input about how to improve my teaching and their learning.

0 1 4 7 10

Students set their own pace for completing independent and/or group projects.

0 1 4 7 10

I view excellence in large measure as individual growth from a starting point.

0 1 4 7 10

Now review your scores. The higher your scores, the more you are using differentiated teaching approaches.

Survey Analysis:

What are your areas of teaching strengths suggested by the survey results? (Statements with higher scores.)

What improvements are suggested by your survey analysis? (Statements with lower scores.)

Refining Your Course Goal:

What existing strengths can you capitalize on to help you achieve your course goal?

How can this course address areas where improvement is needed?

Who can provide support that will help you reach your goal?

How will you know you achieved your goal (observable indicators)?

PROGRESS REPORTING

To conclude your learning activities for this session, please turn to the Progress Report form for Session #1. Progress Report forms for all sessions are placed together at the back of this Course of Study book for easy removal and evaluation.

SESSION NOTES:

