

**Diane Heacox, Ed.D.**

Foreword by Rick Wormeli

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# Making Differentiation a Habit

How to Ensure Success in  
Academically Diverse  
Classrooms

Updated  
Edition

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## Praise for **Making Differentiation a Habit**

“I loved the first edition of this book, yet find this updated edition to be even better! Diane does a masterful job of citing essential educational research and joining it with practical differentiation strategies for classroom teachers and school administrators. I particularly appreciate her focus on gifted students and students with learning difficulties, since these are the most likely groups to need differentiated instruction. Additionally, Diane connects Response to Intervention (RTI) and ways to implement personalized learning as parts of the differentiation habit. The most significant part of the book for me, however, is the chapter entitled ‘Using Ethical Grading Practices.’ Grading in a differentiated classroom seems to be the greatest challenge for many teachers when they begin to differentiate their instruction. Diane offers several excellent strategies for dealing with this issue. I recommend that this chapter be carefully read and discussed in every school.”

**Carolyn Coil, Ed.D.**

Educational Consultant and Author

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## **Dedication**

To my husband, John Bloodsworth, who is always willing to be there and take on tasks that enable me to do my “schoolwork.” I wouldn’t or couldn’t be what I am today without your continued support and love. To my daughter, Kylie, my very best friend. You are the light of my life and always will be.

## **Acknowledgments**

My friends in “gifted land” have continued to challenge my thinking and excite me with their innovative ideas, scholarly work, and intellect. I am grateful for their support and encouragement.

Special thanks go to Rick Wormeli, whose inspiring work and passion for teaching has resulted in new insights for educators and huge benefits for the students in their classrooms.

Thanks also go to Richard Cash, who always answers his phone when I need a word of advice or support . . . and makes me laugh! Richard’s reflective thinking, in-depth knowledge, and creativity have made our collaborative work a joy.

In addition, I’d like to acknowledge Meg Bratsch, my editor, whose kind words, support, keen eye, and thoughtful, insightful work helped make this book “shine.”

Finally, I extend my gratitude to all the teachers, principals, and school leaders across the United States and Canada, as well as those in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and South Africa, who have shared their enthusiasm for and commitment to doing whatever is necessary to help all students be successful in learning. You and your students will continue to be the inspiration for my work.

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# Foreword

by Rick Wormeli

Most schools aren't set up to teach. They are institutions, and as such, they establish uniform policies and practices to perpetuate the accepted schematics and agenda. A lot of energy, time, and money is spent on protecting the institution's status quo; in some cases, more than what is spent on the school's primary objective: student learning.

As humans, we like schematics; we want corners squared and elements classified. It tends to make us feel like we know what we are doing and are making progress. The problem, though, is that human development, by nature, is messy and inexact. As a result, we grow frustrated as educators, attempting to impose order on a disorderly enterprise. We're professionals, too, which means that we're expected to know what we're doing. To list our ambiguities, admitting that education is an imperfect system run by imperfect people, makes us uneasy.

For teachers, striking gold is finding a coherent set of practices that reconciles this nonuniform human nature of students with the institution's goal of providing individuals with sound educational backgrounds from which to launch meaningful lives. In this new edition of *Making Differentiation a Habit*, these practices run deep, and we are richer for it.

No single book, presenter, DVD, blog, podcast, app, or webinar can provide all the strategies needed to respond successfully to every unique teaching situation; but wow, this one comes closer than most. And it gives us launch pads of our own: insights to construct solutions and clear places we can retrieve additional ideas when we're stuck. Skillfully, Diane Heacox weaves together two important facets of her extensive experience with differentiation that are not commonly found in the same book: vast scholarly research and complete, sensitive knowledge of everyday classroom realities. *Making Differentiation a Habit* puts the negative "ivory tower" stereotype of teacher guides to rest and embraces the informed practicality that comes from an intelligent educator who has walked both paths.

The new edition is still all about the mindset and tools of differentiation, but what an update it is! Diane

has added sections on higher-order thinking opportunities; differentiated grading (including how to grade gifted and advanced students in the regular classroom); digital tools; new ways to scaffold for students who need it; fresh ideas on tiering by readiness, challenge, complexity, openness, abstraction, and multiple intelligences; and what all this means for blended and personalized learning models for those who are implementing them.

Diane is keenly aware of the motivational aspects of differentiation—including student choice—without sacrificing focus on curriculum standards, and she threads those ideas into each section. She even includes downloadable PDFs and a slideshow for us to use for professional development, and yes, she still has our backs, offering plenty of ideas for RTI applications, integrating differentiation with national standards, and thinking reflectively about our own differentiated instruction efficacy, even when we struggle. Additionally, she provides new ideas for leaders on shifting school culture toward a differentiated mindset.

This new edition is among the top three books I recommend to anyone differentiating for the first time or for those looking for ways to reinvigorate their practice and take it to the next level. Diane answers the "show me what it looks like" plea and provides ways for educators to add their own ideas. She explains not only how to differentiate, but *when* to differentiate as well, providing template after template, idea after idea. But rather than a simple list of recipes or paint-by-number paintings, we are given tools to be active, not passive, in our lesson design, and to tweak the strategies to meet our unique classroom needs. This is a thinking teacher's manual for differentiation.

Throughout, Diane incorporates a wide variety of subjects and grade levels, from kindergarten-level mathematics to high school-level literary and historical analysis, so readers will see themselves in her ideas. One of the most helpful designs in the book remains the Differentiated Learning Plan (DLP), a user-friendly structure appropriate for all subjects and grade levels

that incorporates the best principles of differentiation into a step-by-step process for creating an effective, differentiated lesson plan. She also includes guidelines for how to create and use flexible grouping, classroom routines that enable smooth transitions, and ideas for what to do when we discover something new about a student's learning, answering the anxious "What do I do if . . . ?" question.

Differentiating instruction, assessment, and grading requires the courage of our pedagogical convictions. There is unusual pressure in many schools today to march students through packaged curriculum sequences to "teacher-proof" the curriculum from any error of inequity committed by a rogue teacher trying something different. Teachers are called to "maintain fidelity" to the curriculum, but this is a vivid insult to a well-trained, thoughtful professional. Sure, many planning guides are written by experienced teachers who provide rich resources, deep thinking, and alleviate the need to reinvent the wheel, and we should follow their lead. But mechanisms should be built into those plans to deviate as warranted, depending on the needs of the students we serve. After all, our first allegiance

is to the *students*—those quite advanced and those still struggling—not the institution.

Diane demonstrates courage and professionalism on every page, and she gives us the instruments to counter uninformed cynics who attack differentiation based on myths and misconceptions. She helps us assess our own teaching philosophies in relation to differentiation, and she pushes us to be so conscientious in our efforts that we're willing to step outside of our comfort zones, become articulate ambassadors for successful teaching, and make a positive difference in our students' achievement.

In the past two decades, demand for teacher training in differentiated instruction has exploded as school districts recognize how critical differentiation is to their missions. While it's just another name for high quality, eclectic teaching, differentiated instruction includes some universally effective protocols that enable flexible responses to students' needs. Some practices are more effective than others, however, and we need a trusted expert to lay out the best options. After reading this updated edition, no one will lack for helpful ideas or the impetus to use them. *Making Differentiation a Habit* is destined to be cover-worn, dog-eared, margin-marked, and text-highlighted for years to come. I look forward to meeting the students of teachers who embrace its courageous and adroit pedagogy.

**Rick Wormeli**

Author of *Fair Isn't Always Equal* and  
*Differentiation: From Planning to Practice*

# Introduction

In the years since the first publication of *Making Differentiation a Habit*, I have had the privilege to work with teachers both in the United States and internationally. I've had opportunities to meet face-to-face or via technology with educators in public schools both large and small, charter schools, independent schools, and international schools abroad. And regardless of where educators work for the success of all learners, the questions and concerns these teachers raise about differentiation seem to be similar.

“How do I make differentiation more doable given the limitations of time and resources? How do I develop greater independence and responsibility in my students so that differentiation can be more easily managed?”

“With all the ‘tips and tricks’ publications on differentiation, how do I know I am implementing research-based strategies in my classroom?”

“How can differentiation inform the work that I do with students who are struggling academically in my classroom?”

“Are the needs of gifted learners being appropriately addressed with classroom-level differentiation?”

“Is grading different in a differentiated classroom?”

“How does differentiation fit with new initiatives in our school such as personalized learning, web-based technologies, problem- or project-based learning, student directed inquiry, or blended learning?”

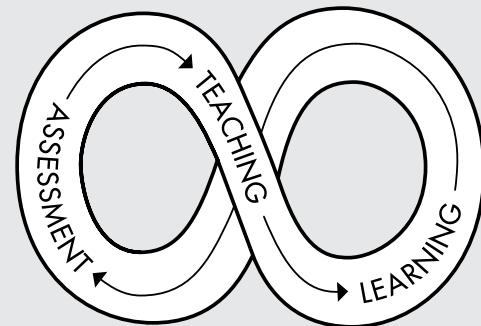
The purpose of *Making Differentiation a Habit* is to respond to the burning questions of teachers and school leaders as they work in differentiation. This book's intent is to help teachers make differentiation a routine part of their work with students. When differentiation becomes a habit, it becomes the way in which we go about “school.” The teaching and learning process becomes fluid and flexible as we consider the differences in our classrooms and plan for them.

When teachers effectively differentiate instruction, there is a continuous flow in the processes of teaching, learning, and assessment. These components operate not as steps that we follow, but rather as a continuous cycle, each process informing the next. **Figure 1** shows this cycle.

The purpose and goal of teaching is student learning. The cycle typically begins with formal or informal pre-assessment in the **assessment** phase. Based on what you learn about your students' needs, you plan and enter the **teaching** phase. At this point in the cycle, students are engaged in **learning**. While the students are engaged in learning, as well as after the learning sequence, you again enter an **assessment** phase, this time using formative assessment strategies. You reflect on whether the students have accomplished learning goals. At this point in the cycle, you may need to enter another phase of teaching and learning utilizing additional strategies in differentiation. Or, if goals are accomplished, you move into a new cycle with new goals. Each phase of the cycle informs your responses to and plans for your students. This book provides strategies for each of these cycle phases.

FIGURE 1

## The Cycle of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment



## Critical Elements for Success in a Differentiated Classroom

Much has been written about differentiation as teachers take on the challenges of academically diverse classrooms. Critical to effective responses to student learning

differences is an understanding of what differentiation *is* and *isn't*. It is assumed that teachers recognize that the academic diversity in their classrooms and standards/goals-based education demand authentic differentiated approaches to increase the likelihood of student success in learning. But what do these differentiated approaches look like? Following are the 12 critical elements for success in a differentiated classroom. These provide the framework (and 12 chapters) of this book.

Authentic differentiation requires you to:

1. Identify learning goals, or KUDOs (what your students need to **Know**, **Understand**, and be able to **Do**).
2. Examine your professional practices in light of your students' needs.
3. Apply practical, doable, and valid assessment strategies.
4. Create differentiated learning plans.
5. Use choice opportunities to motivate student learning.
6. Prescribe tiered assignments and use flexible grouping as necessary and appropriate.
7. Maintain flexibility in your planning and teaching.
8. Develop student responsibility and independence.
9. Use ethical grading practices.
10. Differentiate instruction for gifted students with their particular and specific learning differences in mind.
11. Integrate differentiation strategies with academic interventions for students who struggle.
12. Commit to a leadership framework for differentiated classrooms in your school.

## About This Book

This book provides specific ideas, strategies, templates, and formats that reflect authentic differentiation. The ideas in this book evolved from my professional practice as a classroom teacher and facilitator of opportunities for gifted learners, and from my work with academic under-achievers. Some strategies come from the practical ideas of teachers I have had the pleasure to work with. The specific goals of the book and chapter descriptions follow.

### What's New in This Update?

Since its initial publication, the following elements have been added to or expanded upon in this new edition:

- Revised planning templates that reflect the new language and definitions of Bloom's Taxonomy
- Practical scaffolding strategies for increasing the success of learners who struggle
- Digital tools and apps for assessment
- Strategies for designing summative assessments with rigor in mind
- Expanded strategies for grading gifted students in fair and equitable ways
- Guidance for using ideas, strategies, and tools in the book with personalized learning models

## The Goals of Making Differentiation a Habit

- To identify critical elements for success in academically diverse classrooms
- To distinguish authentic differentiation from random teaching tips and tricks
- To provide a format for writing learning goals that increases your clarity about what you want your students to know, understand, and be able to do
- To examine professional practices that enable educators to plan for the next step in developing the habit of differentiation
- To present practical, informal assessment strategies
- To present a differentiated learning plan that is essential for success in academically diverse classrooms
- To examine the ways in which choice can motivate student learning
- To provide simple, time-saving techniques for designing differentiated activities, including tiered assignments
- To develop flexible lesson routines that respond to learning differences



- ▶ To provide strategies and routines that promote greater independence and responsibility in students
- ▶ To explore grading practices in academically diverse classrooms
- ▶ To distinguish the ways in which differentiation for the gifted and talented varies significantly from strategies used for other learners
- ▶ To add strategies and techniques to teachers' tool kits for addressing the needs of learners who are struggling.
- ▶ To provide guidance to teacher leaders and administrators to support differentiation in their classrooms and schools

**Chapter 1** presents the first critical element: identifying your learning goals. The chapter describes the connections between standards-based education and differentiation. Many teachers working with state standards or provincial goals in the classroom put goals into the practical language of KUDOs: what students will *know*, *understand*, and be able to *do* by the end of the unit or a lesson. KUDOs, the critical first step of differentiation, are explained and examples in a variety of curriculum areas are provided. Finally, a process for thinking through when and how to differentiate is presented to clarify the flow of actions from standards to summative assessment.

The second critical element, examining your professional practices, is addressed in **Chapter 2**. In this chapter, you will thoughtfully reflect on the curriculum practices and strategies for differentiation you currently use in your classroom. You will have an opportunity to examine your practices in light of a continuum of teacher development in differentiation. You will also be provided with a survey to help you recognize the different needs of your students.

**Chapter 3** addresses the critical element of assessment. A variety of practical strategies for preassessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, and student self-reflection are offered. Distinctions are made between formal and informal methods of assessment. The chapter includes a list of digital tools and apps for assessment and highlights strategies for designing summative assessments with rigor in mind. The special focus of the strategies presented in this chapter is on quick, informal assessment.

The fourth critical element, the differentiated learning plan, is introduced in **Chapter 4**. In today's diverse classrooms, the lesson plan structures developed in the past no longer work. The previous one-size-fits-all model doesn't provide the planning flexibility that is essential to respond to learning differences. This chapter presents a nine-step process to think through and design differentiated learning plans.

**Chapter 5** extends your understandings and application of the fifth critical element: student choice. Although many formats that offer student choice are being used in classrooms, not all of them meet the standards of authentic differentiation. For example, distinctions must be made between a differentiated tic-tac-toe board and a randomly assembled collection of activities. Essential characteristics of differentiated choice boards are described. Additional formats and templates are introduced and ideas for best managing the use of choice in the classroom are offered.

Your understanding of and practices in tiering assignments and using flexible instructional groups will be extended in **Chapter 6**. This sixth critical element describes the most prescriptive strategy in differentiation and encourages you to try new ways to tier assignments. Two templates are offered to make designing tiered assignments quick and easy to do. Criteria for well-designed tiered assignments are also presented.

**Chapter 7** describes the importance of maintaining flexibility in planning and teaching, the seventh critical element. It asks you to examine your lesson routines and then suggests ways to plan for differences by modifying your routines.

Increasing student responsibility and independence is a crucial endeavor in a differentiated classroom. **Chapter 8** addresses this critical element by providing procedures, management structures, tips for flexible use of space, and strategies to get your students working in ways that take less time, less direction, and less supervision from you.

**Chapter 9** examines the grading dilemmas of differentiated classrooms. This critical element is discussed through responses to 10 burning questions about grading. In this chapter, you will explore your values, beliefs, and practices related to grading and explore the challenges of grading gifted and talented students in a classroom where every student is not doing the same task. How do you set up learning that challenges and

excites gifted students and goes above and beyond what is appropriate for most other learners? Suggestions are provided for grading gifted learners, and all learners, in fair and equitable ways.

**Chapter 10** explores the challenges of differentiating for gifted learners. Because of their particular and specific learning differences and needs, differentiation for gifted learners varies significantly from strategies used for most other students. Templates, formats, and strategies are offered that link best practices for gifted learners to your practices for differentiation.

**Chapter 11** focuses on differentiation strategies for learners who are struggling. Schools have implemented response to intervention or response to instruction (RTI) procedures for students who are having academic difficulties as well as for students who might be experiencing behavioral issues. The strategies for differentiation form the foundation of instructional interventions for learners who are struggling. This chapter includes ideas for scaffolding instruction to increase the likelihood of success in learning.

**Chapter 12** discusses the final critical element: providing a leadership framework for differentiated classrooms and schools. A variety of tools, including classroom walk-through protocols, are provided to allow a teacher leader or school administrator to gather specific data about differentiation. In addition, an action-planning format is offered that can be used with members of a school's faculty or with a school's leadership team.

Finally, the **Conclusion** reviews all 12 critical elements of differentiation and offers examples of ways to make differentiation a daily habit and routine.

The **digital content** (see page 178 for how to download) includes all of the reproducible forms from this book as PDFs. If you wish to use this book in a professional learning community or book study group, a free PLC/Book Study Guide with chapter-by-chapter discussion questions can be downloaded at [freespirit.com/PLC](http://freespirit.com/PLC).

## How to Use This Book

*Making Differentiation a Habit* presents critical elements for success in academically diverse classrooms. Its focus is to extend the work of my previous book, *Differentiating*

*Instruction in the Regular Classroom*, as well as to address questions and concerns from teachers I have worked with over the years.

My intent is to support the work of classroom teachers, gifted and special education specialists, and those in school leadership positions, such as curriculum directors, building principals, teacher leaders, and professional development trainers. I also hope that this book will become a valued resource for college faculty working with preservice teachers. The habit of differentiation should begin before our first teaching position.

You may choose to go through the book chapter by chapter, examining your practices and adding new ideas and strategies. Or you may want to target an area for professional growth and go straight to that chapter. For example, if you want to extend your practices in tiered assignments, you might go immediately to Chapter 6.

If you are in a specialized role, you may wish to review chapters with the greatest practicality and concern for you and your school. Do you need to know where and how gifted learners “fit” into a differentiated classroom? Does your school need to set up a building-wide plan for moving toward a more comprehensive implementation of differentiation? Are you looking for ways to respond to some teachers' apprehension about grading in academically diverse classrooms? You will find your answers within these chapters.

## Personalized Learning and Differentiation

All varieties of personalized learning are instructional in nature.<sup>1</sup> The range of instructional methods used in personalized learning is broad: personal learning plans, portfolio demonstrations of learning, blended learning, community-based learning, computer-based adaptive technology, student-directed inquiry, project- and problem-based learning, independent study, dual enrollment, inquiry-based learning, flexible pacing, station rotation, targeted instruction, short topic seminars by teachers, student-created learning profiles, flexible learning spaces, personalized homework, online learning management systems, web-based technologies, virtual learning sessions, and technology-based learning

1. Carol Ann Tomlinson, “Let’s Celebrate Personalization: But Not Too Fast,” *Educational Leadership* 74, 6 (March 2017).



support. Any one or several of these components may define personalized learning in a school. However, there always is an emphasis on student voice and choice in content, process, and product.

At its most autonomous level, personalized learning can mean “anything, anywhere, anytime student-designed and student-determined learning.” At any level of complexity, personalized learning should reflect a move from a prescribed to a more individualized curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

For purposes of this book, we will define *personalized learning* as a competency-based instructional model designed around individual learners’ readiness, strengths, needs, and interests, where students are active collaborators in planning learning paths, monitoring their own progress, and determining how they will demonstrate their learning. Personalized learning recognizes that the pace of learning, depth and complexity of content, and most effective methods of instruction are likely to vary from student to student and therefore requires specific and targeted differentiation in response to these differences.

As author Carol Ann Tomlinson states: “Personalization is a kind of differentiation . . . or perhaps multiple kinds.”<sup>3</sup> The foundational beliefs of differentiation clearly parallel those of personalized learning (see “The 20 Foundational Beliefs of Differentiated Classrooms,” page 163), as evidenced by the following:

- Differentiated classrooms are also personalized classrooms in which the focus is on the *success of all students* and the development of *autonomous learners*.
- At the heart of personalized learning are the beliefs that *all children can learn* and that *individuals differ significantly as learners*.
- As stated in the foundational beliefs of differentiation, *learning should be about individual growth and progress*.
- In both differentiation and personalized learning, the role of teacher as facilitator, coach, or consultant is to:
  - prepare students to *accept greater responsibility* for their growth and learning progress
  - assure that all students *work at the edge of their competencies*, engaged in rigorous learning

experiences that provide voice and choice yet *require individual effort*

- always provide *challenging learning experiences*; there should be no “low road”
- hold the vision of *what learning can and should be* for individual learners

## How to Use This Book in Personalizing Learning

**Chapter 1** presents a process for unpacking academic standards and “translating” them into language understood by students: By the end of this learning experience, what will I know? What will I understand? What will I be able to do? At this writing, it is unclear if student learning goals will continue to reflect the Common Core State Standards. However, most likely, all states will continue to offer state-level learning goals and conduct some sort of statewide assessment of learning. Therefore, whether learning goals are determined project by project by the teacher, co-determined by teachers and students, or generated by the student, learning goals will likely remain the foundation of personalized learning environments.

**Chapter 2** provides opportunities for educators to engage in critical reflection. The “Continuum of Levels of Teacher Development in Differentiation” on pages 16–19 outlines teaching practices that represent the evolution of teacher thought and action over time. Embracing the paradigm of personalized learning is a journey for both educators and students. You do not arrive there immediately; if you did, it would be like having less competent swimmers jumping into the deep end of a pool. Your own practices and your students’ competencies for independent work develop gradually and with careful reflection and guidance. As with any initiative, those deeply rooted in practice demand time to plan, grow, reflect, and readjust based on new information and experiences. Level three of the teacher development continuum best reflects the practices of an educator in a personalized learning environment.

One of the most important components of personalized learning is the students’ understanding of themselves as learners. Chapter 2 also offers a student survey for teacher use that, when paired with student-initiated learning inventories, provides information about learners

2. Tomlinson, 2017.

3. Tomlinson, 2017.

from both the teacher's and learners' own perspectives. In what ways do the teacher's perspectives reflect the strengths, challenges, and ways of learning self-reported by the student?

Blended learning uses technology to differentiate with greater precision. As you personalize learning, technology plays an instructional role, delivering content and assessments on a flexible basis as students are ready. **Chapter 3** shares digital tools and apps that can be used for formative assessment. The chapter also reminds us that rigor is a necessary element in summative assessment and provides guidance for what to look for when examining or designing assessment formats.

**Chapter 4** suggests that “exit points,” where student choice and voice come into play, may occur at any of three levels during the learning process. You can take personalization deeper at the *content delivery level* (how students engage with topics), the *application level* (how students practice and apply their learning), or the *independent application level* (how students share evidence of their learning). Each of the three levels provides opportunities to “open up” the learning experience to student choice, which is a foundational element in personalized learning.

**Chapter 5** offers a variety of formats that provide support and guidance when students are just beginning to make instructional choices. Students with little or no experience in making their own instructional choices need to start with well-supported and finely designed options facilitated to yield student success and build their experience and confidence over time.

The intent of tiered tasks in **Chapter 6** is to provide “just right, right now” learning experiences for all students. To optimize time, teachers often facilitate tiered tasks in flexible small groups (**Chapter 7**), putting together students with like-learning patterns, preferences, or needs. Keep in mind that sometimes it is an

individual, and not a small group, who is most in need of a particular learning experience. Some personalized learning environments advocate for teacher-facilitated seminars when students are “ready” for particular content, skills, or processes, or the use of technology-enabled instruction. However, I'd suggest that providing individual support on-demand may be a challenge in many personalized learning models. Careful thought and planning, as well as a reality check about what is possible, is necessary for on-demand learning to happen.

**Chapters 10 and 11** focus on the needs of gifted learners and students with learning differences that may result in struggles in traditional school settings. **Chapter 10** provides a lens to examine the learning experiences of gifted students. Individual pace and progress provided by personalized learning models certainly benefit these learners; however, it is also critical that their learning experiences reflect complex thought and in-depth exploration to keep them actively engaged.

**Chapter 12** walks school leaders through an action plan to reexamine the readiness of a school community to embed a particular education initiative into daily practice. Such a reflective process may be advantageous for schools initiating personalized learning models. I trust you will find the ideas, thoughts, strategies, formats, and templates in this book helpful as you embark on your journey into personalized learning.

Although practical in its intent, *Making Differentiation a Habit* strives to deepen your understandings of differentiation and extend your practices for the benefit of your students. I hope this book becomes a trusted resource for you as you develop the habit of differentiation. Enjoy browsing its pages for what will make differentiation more doable for you and ensure success in your academically diverse classroom!

**Diane Heacox, Ed.D.**

## CHAPTER 1

# Identifying Your Learning Goals

## Differentiation and Content Standards

I am frequently asked how differentiation fits into standards-based education. Differentiation is all about working within the framework of your state's standards or province's goals. Educators recognize that not all students are at the same readiness level or learn at the same pace or in the same way. Differentiation is what we do to enable more students to meet their state's standards or province's goals. It is the way in which we respond to learning differences as students engage in daily activities in our classroom. As such, we cannot even begin to think about differentiation (how we teach, how our students learn) without first considering our standards (*what* they will learn). Therefore, any work in differentiation must begin with your state standards or provincial goals well in mind.

## Know Your KUDOs

All states and provinces have some form of academic or content standards to guide the learning goals of students in their schools. Academic standards, however, are most often written in “edu-babble,” the language of educators. If you are going to talk about learning goals with students and share them with parents, it is important that you put the standards into language that can be clearly understood. A learning goal should be written so that there is little room for different interpretations of its meaning.

Today, many educators are writing learning goals—whether they are at the course, unit, or lesson plan level—as “KUDOs”: What do I want my students

to Know, Understand, and be able to Do? All academic standards can be sorted into either *know*, *understand*, or *do* goals. Goals written as KUDOs relate the following:

### Know

- ▶ What facts, vocabulary, dates, rules, people, places, and so on do I want my students to know by the end of this course/unit/lesson?
- ▶ *Knows* are usually written as a list of things we want students to memorize. They are facts related to a study.

### Understand

- ▶ What concepts, principles, and generalizations will my students understand by the end of this course/unit/lesson?
- ▶ *Understandings* are typically written as sentences describing the “big ideas” of the course/unit/lesson. In writing understandings, it helps if you use the phrase “understand that . . .”

### Do

- ▶ What will my students be able to do independently by the end of the course/unit/lesson?
- ▶ *Do's* are skills and processes. They are applications of learning and encompass both critical and creative thinking. Think of them as life skills that apply beyond this particular course/unit/lesson.
- ▶ *Do's* are written as statements beginning with a verb, usually a verb associated with Bloom's Taxonomy, such as compare, contrast, formulate, predict, classify, describe, summarize, or distinguish.<sup>1</sup>

1. Benjamin Bloom et al., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain* (New York: Longman, 1984).

As an example of how to write KUDOs from academic standards, here are sample state standards and the KUDOs the teacher might write in describing the learning goals for a unit on desert biospheres.

### Science Academic Standards

**Grade:** Elementary

**Unit:** Desert Biosphere

- The student will *recognize* that plants and animals have life cycles.
- The student will *understand* that organisms live in different environments.
- The student will *describe* the features of plants and animals that allow them to live in specific environments.
- The student will *recognize* that plants and animals have different structures that serve various functions.
- The student will *understand* that an organism's patterns of behavior are related to its environment.
- The student will *recognize* that changes in a habitat can be beneficial or harmful to an organism.
- The student will *recognize* that organisms interact with one another in various ways besides providing food.

### KUDOs for an Elementary Unit on the Desert Biosphere

Students will:

Know

- Plants of the desert
- Animals of the desert
- Definitions of: *life cycle, habitat, environment*

Understand

- Plants and animals live in different environments.
- Desert plants and animals have particular ways of behaving that relate to their environment.
- Food chains link desert animals and plants.

Be able to

- Describe the life cycle of a desert plant and animal.
- Describe the particular characteristics (functions and structures) of desert plants and animals that allow them to live there.
- Identify how desert plants and animals interact with each other in ways other than as part of a food chain.
- Determine how changes in the desert habitat affect its animals and plants in good and bad ways.

Additional examples of KUDOs follow:

### KUDOs for Elementary Geometry

Students will:

Know

- Definitions of: *line, line segment, angle, triangle, quadrilateral*

Understand

- Geometric shapes have specific properties.

Be able to

- Identify and describe geometric shapes in their environment.
- Construct geometric shapes and identify their properties.

### KUDOs for High School Economics

Students will:

Know

- Definitions of: *recession, depression, economic boom, monopoly, monopolistic competition, oligopoly, perfect competition, scarcity*

Understand

- Market forces affect the economy.

Be able to

- Determine how the principles of supply and demand affect the economy.
- Compare and contrast concepts of competition and monopoly and predict the consequences of each.

- ▶ Analyze the economic role of government in a free market economy.
- ▶ Determine the effects of competitive forces on businesses.
- ▶ Utilize data analysis in making decisions.

### Helpful Hints for Putting KUDOs Into Practice

Be careful as you write *Do*'s that you write goals, not activities. For example, "create a model of the food chain of a desert animal" sounds like a *Do*, but it is actually an activity that the students will engage in to work on an *Understanding*. When we consider the activity, we need to ask what the students will learn by making the model. Thus, the goal for this activity is: Students will understand that food chains link desert animals and plants."

Consider KUDOs to be a roadmap for your course, unit, or lesson. If you do not pay attention and follow your roadmap, you are not only going to lose instructional time but you might also move into curriculum topics or student activities not focused on your learning goals.

KUDOs enable you to critically consider the student activities you currently use in a unit and those you could potentially use. *All* student tasks within a unit must work toward a goal.

- ▶ Consider each activity.
- ▶ Determine whether the activity works on a KUDO.
- ▶ If it does not, eliminate the activity.

Using this process clearly aligns all instructional activities with your unit's KUDOs. The essential first step in planning or differentiating a course, unit, or lesson must be identifying your KUDOs.

KUDOs should be shared and posted in the classroom to provide students with an understanding of the goals of a course or unit, as well as what they will be held accountable for in each unit's summative assessments. KUDOs can be shared with parents in class newsletters, at conferences, or at informational meetings. KUDOs are also used as a method for developing the goals for your lesson plans. Ask yourself: "By the end of today's lesson, what will my students know, understand, and

be able to do?" Read more on this use of KUDOs in Chapter 4: Using a Differentiated Learning Plan.

## Thinking Through the When and How of Differentiation

One of the results of standards-based education has been a greater alignment of learning goals, curriculum, assessment, and instruction. **Figure 1.1** on page 10 shows the flow of actions from standards to summative assessment. It also shows the integration of differentiation into the flow of actions. Following is an explanation of each action.

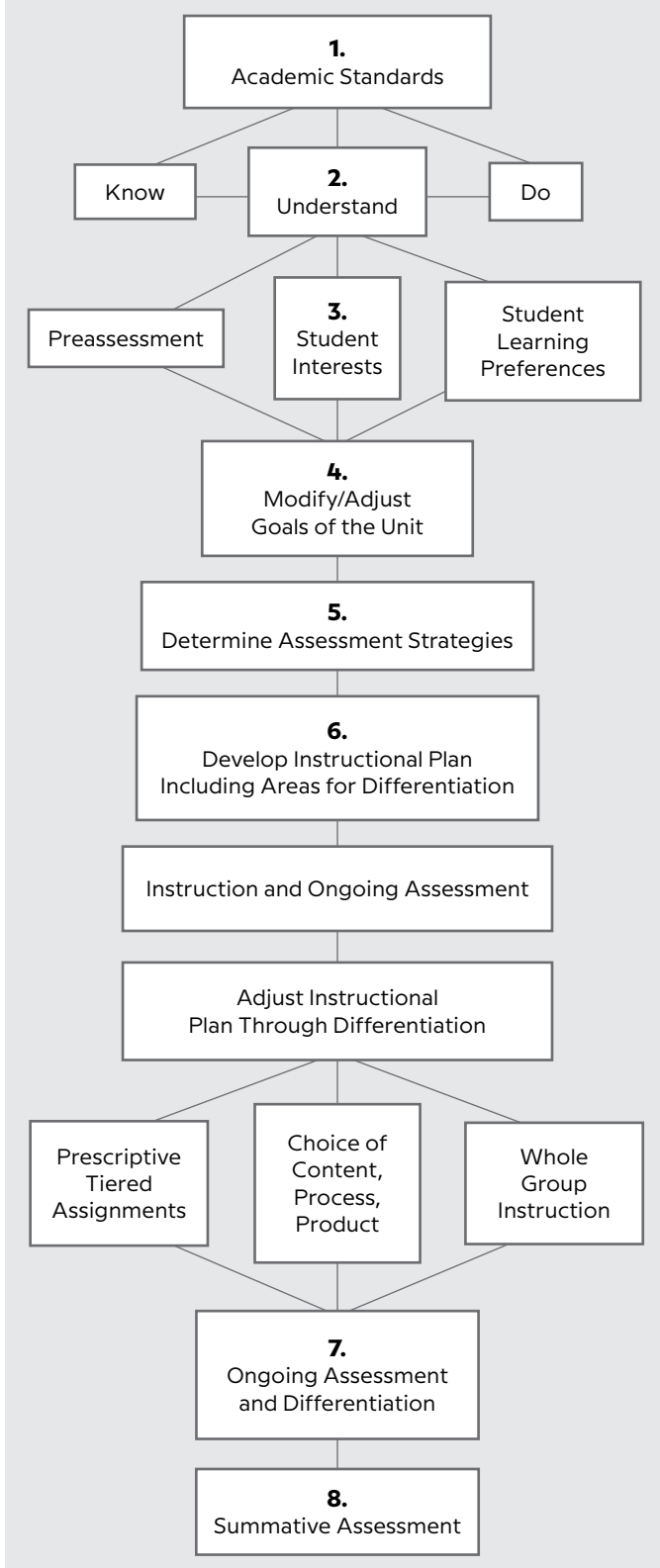
1. Review your state or province's **academic standards**. Using your standards, establish your unit's topic or theme. Then think about "shopping" the standards in other curriculum areas for those that may also be addressed in your unit. You might collect standards from a variety of curriculum areas to create an interdisciplinary unit. Also, remember that standards in most states and provinces are the "floor" not the "ceiling" for learning goals. You must work on the prescribed standards, *but* you can also go beyond and above the standards to add more depth or challenge to your unit and to respond to the needs of the learners in your classroom.
2. Rewrite your standards as KUDOs to increase the standards' clarity and provide a more accessible presentation of the goals to your students and parents.
3. Gather information about your students as it relates to your unit. Use either formal or informal **preassessment**. Also, reflect on your **students' interests and learning preferences** (based on the theory of multiple intelligences) to begin to think about the ways in which you may differentiate the unit. For examples of student inventories of interests and learning preferences, see the "Interest Inventory" and the "Projects, Presentations, Performances" forms in *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom*.<sup>2</sup>
4. Based on the data you have collected in step 3, begin to **modify your unit goals**. In considering the readiness of your class, you may need to include additional goals if students are missing prerequisite content, skills, or processes. You may also add more advanced or complex goals if you

2. Diane Heacox, *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom: How to Reach and Teach All Learners* (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2012).



FIGURE 1.1

### From Standards to Summative Assessment



discover through preassessment that your students have a stronger knowledge or experience base than you expected.

You may need to consider modifying or adapting particular goals for students with special needs based on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). For gifted learners, you may replace goals they have already attained with more complex or advanced goals.

Also, revisit your students’ interests. What topics will motivate their learning based on their interests? In what ways might you respond to students’ curiosities yet keep the primary focus on the required standards and goals?

5. An early consideration in designing your unit is to **determine strategies for assessing** your students’ attainment of the KUDOs. What will be evidence that the students have learned the concepts, processes, and skills outlined in your KUDOs? Deciding on assessment strategies early in your planning rather than at the end of a unit clarifies the kinds of instructional activities that will need to be part of the unit plan. Called “backward design” by *Understanding by Design* authors Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, the process starts with the end in mind (the desired results or goals), considers the evidence of reaching the goals (assessments), and finally determines the teaching needed to prepare the students to reach the goals and perform the assessment task (instructional plan).<sup>3</sup> What will be taught is directly related to the goals and the ways in which the goals will be assessed; therefore, assessments need to be determined in your initial planning.

6. At this point, you have determined your learning goals (KUDOs); gathered information concerning your students’ readiness needs, interests, and learning preferences; and determined the ways in which you will assess their learning. The next action is to **develop your initial instructional plan** and include areas for possible **differentiation**. You are now ready to consider, design, or redesign the teaching and learning elements of the unit.

Begin to lay out tasks that your students will engage in as they work on the KUDOs. You consider the content, skills, and processes needed by all students and plan for **whole group instruction**. If prerequisite content, skills, or processes are missing, determine the ways in which these will be retaught or reinforced. If you discover that some students already have considerable understandings of unit concepts, skills, or processes, think about how and when it may be necessary to insert

3. Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2005).

**tiered assignments** and flexible instructional groups into the unit's plan. In addition, consider whether any students might benefit from activities above and beyond the unit because of advanced knowledge or skills.

Consider how you can respond to the interests and learning preferences of your students as you design the teaching and learning activities for your unit. Will you offer some **choices** to your students? Will they have an opportunity to choose to engage in an activity that reflects their learning preferences or interests?

7. Preliminary planning of your unit and consideration of when and where differentiation may be needed is important. However, your plans must remain flexible. **Ongoing, formative assessment** of your students' learning will likely indicate instances when you need to spend more time on a concept, skill, or process; reteach in a new way; or extend

and enrich learning to address the specific needs of your students. Differentiation is an ongoing, reflective process. You differentiate instruction based on student learning needs, which often emerge during the process of teaching and learning.

8. Finally, utilize **summative assessment** strategies. Analyze student results and report to your students. Based on the student results, determine the next appropriate steps in your instructional plans. Will further work be needed with some students on particular content, skills, or processes? Will the skill or process "spiral" back into the curriculum at another point so that students will have an opportunity to learn it again later on? Planning for student needs does not end with summative assessment, but rather continues to evolve based on data.