

# How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms

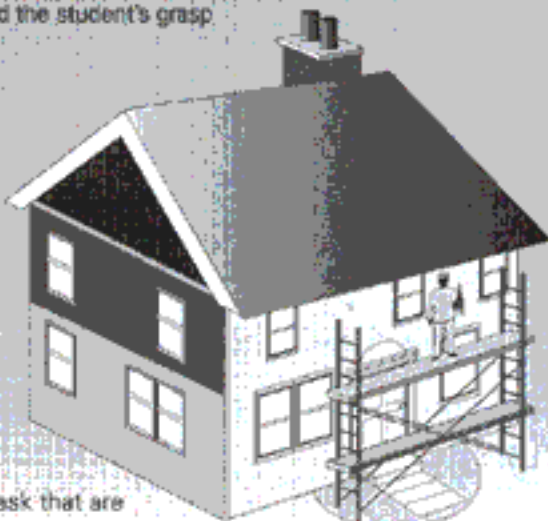
## 2nd Edition

Foreword to the 2nd Edition	v
Introduction	vii
<b>1</b> What Differentiated Instruction Is--And Isn't	1
<b>2</b> The Rationale for Differentiated Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms	8
<b>3</b> The Role of the Teacher in a Differentiated Classroom	18
<b>4</b> The Learning Environment in a Differentiated Classroom	21
<b>5</b> A Look Inside Some Differentiated Classrooms	27
<b>6</b> Strategies for Managing a Differentiated Classroom	32
<b>7</b> Preparing Students and Parents for a Differentiated Classroom	39
<b>8</b> The How To's of Planning Lessons Differentiated by Readiness	45
<b>9</b> The How To's of Planning Lessons Differentiated by Interest	72
<b>10</b> The How To's of Planning Lessons Differentiated by Learning Profile	61
<b>11</b> Differentiating Content	72
<b>12</b> Differentiating Process	79
<b>13</b> Differentiating Products	85
<b>14</b> Grading in a Differentiated Classroom	93
A Final Thought	97
Appendix: A Few Instructional and Management Strategies for Differentiated, Mixed-Ability Classrooms	98
References	107
For Further Reading	109
Index	111
About the Author	113

**FIGURE 4.1**  
**Scaffolding: Providing Support Needed for a Student to Succeed in Challenging Work**

- Directions that give more structure—or less
- Tape recorders to help with reading or writing beyond the student's grasp
- Icons to help interpret print
- Reteaching/Extended teaching
- Modeling
- Clear criteria for success
- Reading buddies (with appropriate directions)
- Double-entry journals (at appropriate challenge level)
- Text-survey type strategies
- Teaching through multiple modes
- Use of manipulatives (when needed)
- Gearing reading materials to student reading level
- Use of study guides
- Use of organizers
- New American Lecture

Note: "Challenging work" means assignments or task that are slightly beyond the student's comfort zone.



classroom, the teacher is constantly raising the stakes for success for any individual, then doing whatever is necessary to help the student succeed in taking the next step. Remember that everyone's next step will not be identical, and that every student needs scaffolding in order to stretch.

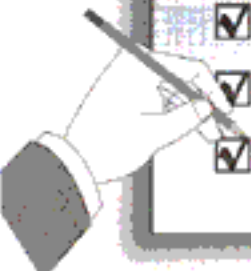
• **A new sort of fairness is evident.** We often define fair in a classroom as treating everyone alike. In a differentiated classroom, fairness is redefined. In this sort of environment, fair means trying to make sure each student gets what she needs in order to grow and succeed. Students and teacher alike are part of the team trying to ensure that the classroom works well for everyone in the class.

• **Teacher and students collaborate for mutual growth and success.** In a differentiated

classroom, just as in a large family, everyone has to take extra responsibility both for their own well-being and for the well-being of others. In this sort of setting, while the teacher is clearly the leader of the group, students can help develop routines for the classroom, make major contributions toward solving problems and refining routines, help one another, keep track of their work, and so on. Different students will be ready for differing amounts of responsibility at any given time, but all students need to be guided in assuming a growing degree of responsibility and independence as a learner and member of a community of learners. Not only is that essential in a differentiated classroom, but it's a huge part of success in life as well.

The teacher sets the tone for the classroom environment. It is a heavy responsibility and a wonderful opportunity to help students shape

### Figure 4.2 Teacher Checklist for Group Work

- 
- Students understand the task goals.
  - Students understand what's expected of individuals to make the group work well.
  - The task matches the goals (leads students to what they should know, understand, and be able to do).
  - Most students should find the task interesting.
  - The task requires an important contribution from each group member based on the student's skills and interests.
  - The task is likely to be demanding of the group and its members.
  - The task requires genuine collaboration to achieve shared understanding.
  - Time lines are brisk (but not rigid).
  - Individuals are accountable for their own understanding of all facets of the task.
  - There's a "way out" for students who are not succeeding with the group.
  - There is opportunity for teacher or peer coaching and in-process quality checks.
  - Students understand what to do next after they complete their work at a high level of quality.

positive lives. Teachers, as all people, have good days and ones they'd rather not duplicate. While none of us will ever do everything in the way of building a positive classroom environment exactly like we'd have chosen to do it if we could have scripted events, we can get better and better at modeling what we want students to learn—joy in work, pleasure in one another, patience, kindness, and a big heart. Those things help students construct sturdier and more rewarding lives. Working toward them helps the teacher become a wiser person and better professional as well.

### Paving the Way for Respect and Success

There are two concrete pieces of guidance that contribute to a positive learning environment in a differentiated classroom that round out the more philosophical guidance offered above. Both suggest students in a differentiated classroom need to collaborate successfully.

•**Continually coach students to be contributing members of a group.** As teachers, we often work in isolation. When that is the case,

## Varied Support Systems

You can make content of varying complexity levels more accessible to your students by using a variety of support systems, such as study buddies, reading partners, audio and video recorders, and peer and adult mentors. These strategies can help many students stretch their capacities as learners.

**Reading Partners and Audio/Video Recorders.** A 5th grader can be great at audio-taping books for 2nd graders who need assistance with their reading. A 3rd grader who records a grade-level book can help create enriching materials for a classmate who has trouble decoding or reading long passages. High school students can create tapes summarizing journal articles on a particular topic to give advanced 6th graders access to materials beyond the scope of their classroom or school library. Some of those 6th graders can help 4th graders learn how to make a speech by making a video on the subject. An advanced 4th grader can make a video on the types of buildings in the community, which could then be used in a kindergarten learning center.

**Note-Taking Organizers.** Some students, even of older ages, find it very difficult to read text or listen to a lecture and come away with a coherent sense of what it was all about. For such students, it can be quite useful to work with a visual organizer that follows the flow of ideas from the text or lecture. Not only might such organizers help them focus on key ideas and information, but they may also help some learners see how a teacher or author develops a line of thought. Remember, however, that students who read independently may find it restrictive to have to use such organizers. The point is always to provide individual learners with a support system that helps the student grow—not one that feels like an impediment.

**Highlighted Print Materials.** A teacher can highlight critical passages in text or supplementary materials, keeping several copies of the highlighted materials in the teacher's desk. When a student has difficulty managing an entire chapter or article, the teacher can easily provide that student with a highlighted version. From the outside, the material looks like everyone else's, but because of the highlighting, the student can expend energy on reading and understanding essential portions of the chapter rather than becoming discouraged with what seems like an insurmountable amount of print.

**Digests of Key Ideas.** Most effective teachers could, with minimal expenditure of time, create a one- or two-page capsule of ideas in a unit. Such a digest can be of great assistance to students who struggle with print materials, lectures, or even organization of information. The digest could be in the form of sentences and paragraphs, a flow chart or concept map of the unit or topic, or a combination. It might also spotlight key vocabulary and provide essential questions the unit is designed to address. Such digests also help teachers clarify their own thinking about the core of a unit or topic.

**Peer and Adult Mentors.** Adults often volunteer to help youngsters who are behind with their work and in need of additional guidance. All learners—not just those who are struggling—benefit from time with adults who can answer questions about shared interests, sharpen their thinking, or give them access to advanced research skills. A bright 5th grader can also be a great mentor for an advanced 3rd grader who shares similar interests. You can create extensive support systems by using the people and technologies in your classroom, school, and community, thus giving everyone a chance to reach higher, learn more, and contribute to one another's learning.