

About This Resource

Why This Resource?

How can teachers meet the growing diversity of learning needs in their classroom? Furthermore, how do teachers meet this challenge in the midst of increasing pressures to master specified content? Differentiated instruction—instruction designed to meet differing learners’ needs—is clearly required. By adapting classroom practices to help more students be successful, teachers are able to honor individual students and to increase the likelihood that curricular outcomes are met. This resource will help you to begin or deepen your use of differentiation strategies.

Trends and buzzwords come and go in education, but the need for differentiated instruction is constant. Our students deserve to have their individual needs met in their classrooms. Learning how to meet such needs is a career-long process, a major part of our professional journey. We know that this has been true for us and we are eager to share our current thinking.

Meeting the Growing Diversity of Learning Needs

Variations in student learning have always existed in classrooms, but some have only been given recent attention. Many educators are also rethinking what it means to learn and teach in this digital age. With information a click away, critical thinking, making connections, and decision making become key to success (Siemens 2005). The rapid development of new knowledge

makes it essential that our students know how to learn and how to make choices. Increased access to social networks increases the need for our students to learn from their interactions with others; to contribute to theory-building within a learning community, and to negotiate among diverse thinkers.

Brain research has given us additional insight into the learning process; for example, it has shown us that there is an explicit link between our emotional states and our ability to learn (Sprenger 2008, Zull 2002, Jensen 2005). Having a sense of control and being able to make choices typically contributes to increased interest and positive attitudes. So we can think of providing choice, and thus control, as creating a healthier learning environment.

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At the same time that we are gaining these insights, the diversity of learning needs in classrooms is growing. The number of English language learners in our schools is increasing dramatically. Classroom teachers need to know ways to help these students learn content while they also learn English. Different values and cultures create different learning patterns among children and different expectations for classroom interactions. Also, our inclusive classrooms contain a broader spectrum of special education needs, and the number of children with identified or perceived special learning needs is growing.

This increase in diversity is happening at a time when our national agenda is clear—all students must meet standards and we must reduce the number of students referred to special education services. As stated in the introduction to the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, “The Standards should be read as allowing for the widest possible range of students to participate fully from the outset, along with appropriate accommodations to ensure maximum participation of students with special education needs” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers 2010, 4). With the testing associated with the Common Core State Standards and the universal screeners associated with Response to Intervention, we are identifying more students who are not meeting benchmarks. It therefore behooves all educators to do whatever they can to increase their abilities to meet a greater range of individual needs found in today’s classrooms.

Do I Have to Differentiate in Math, Too?

Many teachers find that thinking about ways to differentiate literacy instruction comes somewhat naturally whereas differentiation in mathematics seems more demanding or challenging. As one teacher put it, “Do we have to differentiate in math, too? I can do this in reading, but it’s too hard in math! I mean, in reading, there are so many books to choose from that focus on different interests and that are written for a variety of reading levels.” Although we recognize that many teachers may feel this way, there are important reasons to differentiate in mathematics.

There are several indications that we are not yet teaching mathematics in an effective manner, in a way designed to meet a variety of needs. Results of international tests show U.S. students do not perform as well as students in many other countries at a time

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when more mathematical skill is needed for professional success and economic security. There continues to be a gap in achievement for our black, Native American, and Latino students. Gaps exist as well for our English language learners and our students who live in poverty. Many educators believe these gaps are a result of not having access to the curriculum. Last, we are a country in which many people describe themselves as math phobic, and others have no problem announcing publicly that they failed mathematics in high school.

In response to these indicators, educators continue to wrestle with the development and implementation of approaches for teaching mathematics more effectively. For example, current trends stress the importance of a focused and coherent curriculum, clearly identifying the standards that students must meet at each grade level. The way we teach math has changed, requiring students to communicate their mathematical thinking, to solve more complex problems, and to understand conceptually the mathematical procedures they perform. So how might we differentiate the way math is taught?

What's New in This Edition?

This resource is an updated version of *Math for All: Differentiating Instruction, K–2* and *Math for All: Differentiating Instruction, 3–5*. Five significant changes have been made:

1. Integration of *Math for All, K–2* and *Math for All, 3–5*

The two books are now integrated. We decided to combine aspects of both books so that readers have a fuller vision of differentiation across grade levels. We believe the wider lens supports teachers in meeting the broad range of learners in today's classrooms, and better serves colleagues from different grade levels who want to explore these ideas together.

2. Common Core Correlations

Suggestions are aligned with the Common Core State Standards. During the integrative process, we made sure to choose examples that reflect the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. We also added sections to address key components of the Common Core, such as the Standards for Mathematical Practice.

3. Video Clips

To help readers conceptualize more fully how the ideas in this book might play out in the classroom, video clips are included. These authentic examples also provide opportunities for readers to reflect on their own practice.

4. Updated Research

Numerous new references are included for those who wish to read more about particular differentiation issues or techniques.

5. Friendly Format

We included new design features in this edition to help you to focus on ideas of particular interest. For example, the *Lesson Ideas!* features allow you to implement a lesson idea easily from a vignette. Lesson plan callouts help you to find connections to the Common Core; *Take Action!* callouts highlight specific differentiation strategies.

Three Steps to Getting the Most out of This Resource

1. Decide where you are on your journey of meeting individual needs. Although this book is intended to be read front to back, you can address your own interests and wishes by creating your own pathway. For example, if a particular chapter fits your needs right now, start there.
2. Set yourself up to read the text with simultaneous access to the video clips. These clips are intended to be viewed alongside the book. Together, they give you a more complete vision of how differentiated instruction works in the classroom.
3. Identify one or more colleagues to explore this resource with you or to talk with you about its ideas. Although not essential, this collaborative process can deepen your understanding of the content in this resource as well as your awareness of your own practice.