

The Seven Building Blocks of Differentiated Instruction

1. Knowing the Learner: Teachers need to know as much as possible about their students to teach them well, including learning styles and pace, multiple intelligences, personal qualities such as personality, temperament and motivation, personal interests, potential disabilities, health, family circumstances, and language preference.

2. Traits of a Quality Teacher: The teacher believes all students can learn, has the desire and capacity to differentiate curriculum and instruction, understands diversity and thinks about students developmentally, is a risk taker, is open to change and well-versed in best practices, is comfortable challenging the status quo, knows what doesn't work, is able to withstand staff dissension that may arise.

3. Quality Curriculum: Curriculum needs to be interesting to students and relevant to their lives, appropriately challenging and complex, thought provoking, focused on concepts and principles and not just facts; focused on quality, not quantity; stress depth of learning, not just coverage. Also, tightly aligns with our mission and vision to (1) succeed in the most prestigious academic settings and (2) live a healthy and physically active lifestyle. That means something different to each student. In addition, being involved in his or her community, which is different for each student as well.

4. Classroom Learning Environment: The ideal learning environment includes a balanced student population, appropriate grade and program placement, priority seating based on student needs, has a reasonable class size, practices positive discipline, arranges furniture to promote group work, uses flexible grouping, and has adequate teaching supplies.

5. Flexible Teaching and Learning Time Resources: Includes team-teaching, block scheduling, tutoring and remediation within school, before and after-school programs, homework clubs, multiage/looping classrooms.

6. Instructional Delivery and Best Practices: Includes flexible grouping, cooperative learning, learning stations and centers, web quests, tiered assignments, individual contracts, literature circles.

7. Assessment, Evaluation and Grading: Includes portfolios, observations, skills checklists, oral and written reports, demonstrations, performances, work samples, models, taped responses, drawings, graphs and posters, quizzes and tests, and standardized tests.

Comparison of Traditional and Differentiated Classrooms

Traditional Classroom	Differentiated Classroom (PCCMS)
Student differences masked or acted upon when problematic	Student differences are studied as a basis for planning
Assessment is most common at the end of learning to see “who got it”	Assessment is ongoing and diagnostic to understand how to make instruction more responsive to learner need
A relatively narrow sense of intelligence prevails	Focus on multiple forms of intelligence is evident
A single definition of excellence prevails	Excellence is defined in large measure by individual growth from a starting point
Student interests infrequently tapped	Students are frequently guided in making interest-based learning choices
Relatively few learning profile options are taken into account	Many learning profile options are honored
Whole class instruction dominates	Many instructional arrangements are used
Coverage of texts and curriculum guides drives instruction	Student readiness, interest, and learning profile shape instruction
Mastery of facts and skills out of context are the focus of learning	Use of essential skills to make sense of and understand key concepts and principles is the focus of learning
Single option assignments are the norm	Multi-option assignment are frequently used
Time is relatively inflexible	Time is used flexibly in accordance with student need
A single text prevails	Multiple materials are provided
Single interpretation of ideas and events may be sought	Multiple perspectives on ideas and events are routinely sought
The teacher solves problems	Students help other students and the teacher solve problems
The teacher provides whole-class standards for grading	Students work with the teacher to establish both whole-class and individual goals
A single form of assessment is often used	Students are assessed in multiple ways