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Communities of Practice

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A Study Group Guide
for Differentiated Instruction

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Getting Started
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What is Differentiated Instruction?



Teachers in mixed-ability classrooms face multiple challenges at every grade level.

Carol Ann Tomlinson

Teaching used to be like a bowling game. Teachers would roll the ball hoping to hit all ten pins at once. And if they did, frame after frame, they got a perfect score. But today's classroom requires a different game. Teachers must use different approaches with students who have a variety of learning styles, interests, and abilities. No longer is it possible to hit all ten pins with one ball. Teaching geared to this view is called differentiated instruction.

The idea of differentiated instruction is not new. It simply means teaching that is respectful of the experiences and needs of each learner and teaching that takes place in a classroom where all students feel challenged and confident.

Differentiating instruction is proactive. It begins with diagnosing the interests, learning styles, and ability levels of each learner. This information is used to guide assessment and instruction and to identify multiple learning paths for students.

Differentiating instruction is **not** a program, curriculum, or set of books. It is a blend of proven strategies for reaching **all** learners. The strategies are applied to **content**—what is learned; **process**—how it is learned; and **product**—how students show what they have learned. Differentiated strategies are research-based and can include such approaches as flexible grouping, project learning, interest groups or centers, tiered assignments, and learning contracts.

Participants in this study group will learn practical ways to create a learning environment that addresses the needs of all students in a mixed-ability classroom. This process is differentiated instruction.

What we share in common makes us human. How we differ makes us individuals.

Carol Ann Tomlinson



Why Participate in a Study Group?

Study groups offer teachers focused learning opportunities that can result in improved student achievement. Study groups create a **community of practice** where educators learn new strategies, plan and implement these strategies in their classrooms, and measure the results in student outcomes. Study group participants direct their own learning and form a circle of **critical friends** that values and supports efforts to improve student achievement.

Study groups are meaningful professional development that can be applied **immediately** to each teacher's classroom instruction. Study groups put teachers in the role of expert, reduce teachers' isolation, and cultivate their unique contributions to school improvement.

Using the Study Group Guide

This guide is for a study group facilitator, a study group coordinator, study group leaders, and other study group members as they work together to learn about, implement, practice, and reflect upon the use of differentiated instructional strategies in their classrooms. For details, please refer to the *Roles and Responsibilities* descriptions located in this section.

A facilitator will conduct the **first** and **last** sessions in order to get the group started and provide closure for the group's work. It is also recommended that the facilitator conduct Session 4 to provide samples of the Low-Prep Strategy reading assignments. The facilitator will provide most of the materials necessary for the study group to conduct all seven sessions. All study group participants will receive this *Study Group Guide for Differentiating Instruction* that includes materials (agendas, handouts, forms, etc.) necessary for conducting each study group session. Each member will also receive a book, *Differentiating Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms*, by Carol Ann Tomlinson, to use for reading assignments and group discussions. In addition to the materials provided, participants will be required to bring their curricular materials to specific sessions as noted in the *Session Agendas*. Please refer to the *Materials List* in this section for more information about additional materials or equipment (e.g., AV equipment) needed by each school to conduct the seven sessions.



Organization of the Study Group Guide

INTRO – GETTING STARTED

An overview of the study group process, with scheduling and organizing suggestions, outline of roles and responsibilities, materials needed, and an outline of the seven group sessions.

SECTIONS 1-7 STUDY GROUP SESSIONS: Session Agendas, Handouts, and Study Group Logs

Each of these sections of the *Guide* contains the information necessary to conduct that week's study group session. Each section includes:

- A session agenda with a detailed list of
 - materials
 - activities
 - directions
 - timelines
- Handouts and worksheets for each activity described in the agenda
- A *Study Group Log* to be completed at the end of each session

SECTION 8 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READING

A complete list of the *Study Group Guide* references, recommended reading, and useful websites is included in this section.

SECTION 9 FACILITATOR TOOLS AND FORMS

Included in this section of the *Guide* are the following tools and forms required for specific activities as described in the session agendas:

- Evaluation Form
- Study Group Follow-Up Activities
- DI Strategies I Have Tried Form
- Study Group Follow-Up Query
- Certificate of Completion – *License to Differentiate!*



Scheduling and Organizing a Study Group

The study group process is designed to accommodate groups of **no more than** seven people. If more than seven people are interested in forming a study group, divide the participants into two or more groups. It is more advantageous for groups to have less than seven members, allowing time for individuals to learn, discuss, and share ideas and strategies during each session.

The differentiated instruction study group activities are designed to be completed during seven two-hour sessions. It is recommended that groups schedule their meetings to occur **every other** week. Doing so gives the group members time to try out the new ideas they are learning about in the study group. Teachers implement new strategies in their classroom, and then return to the group to reflect and share their activities and/or lessons, creating a true **community of practice**.

Groups are encouraged to choose a day of the week that is mutually convenient for each group member. Scheduling the study group meetings on the same day of the week provides consistency and helps individuals arrange personal schedules for the course of the study group sessions.

On the following pages you will find:

- Options for scheduling meetings
- Roles and responsibilities
- Ideas for communicating with other faculty
- Steps in completing the study group process
- Materials list
- Session outlines





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Session 4
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Session 4

Time: 2 hours

Materials needed

- Handouts:
 - *Plus, Minus, Interesting Ideas (PMI) Chart*, p. 48
 - *Case Study Student Descriptions*, p. 41
 - *Differentiated Instruction (D.I.) Strategy Mind Map*, p. 49
 - *Content area materials brought in by teachers*
 - *Blank notebook paper*
 - *Low-Prep Strategy Handouts (1–6)*, p. 51-62
 - *Implementation Log*, p. 22
 - *Study Group Log*, p. 63
 - Book: *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms*
 - Sticky notes
 - Chart paper and markers (optional)
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Focus Questions

- What strategies can we use to differentiate instruction according to learner readiness, interest, and learning profile?
- How can we determine the need for such strategies in our daily curriculum and instruction?
- How do these strategies benefit **all** of our students?

Low-Prep Strategy #2: **RESPONSE CARDS**

What are response cards?

Response cards are cards or sheets of paper in various sizes that can be held up by all students in a class at the same time to indicate a response to a question or prompt from the teacher. Response cards can be blank for students to write on; they may be pre-printed with multiple-choice answers; or they may be color-coded.

How to use response cards:

The teacher can use response cards to (a) access prior knowledge, (b) practice and review, and/or (c) assess understanding of a given topic. The teacher asks a question. Each student has a blank, laminated card and a dry erase marker. Students are given time to think, and then they record their answers on the card. When signaled, all students simultaneously raise their cards, showing their answers to the teacher. The teacher takes note of the answers and plans instructional activities accordingly.

Reasons to use response cards:

Response cards are a fun and effective way of engaging **all** students in the learning process. When teachers use response cards as an instructional tool, **everyone** participates, not just the usual suspects. According to Davis and O'Neill, 2004, the use of response cards "resulted in higher levels of academic responses by all students, and group average weekly quiz scores were substantially higher: 88% with response cards, 19% with hand-raising."

Things to consider when using response cards:

Response cards can be used to keep track of progress for individual students. They can be used to provide immediate feedback and help students self-assess their progress toward specific goals. Students with learning disabilities may need instruction and practice on using the cards. For example, they can be given the questions a day ahead of time. For very young children, response cards can have pictures rather than words.

Example of response cards:

Mr. Tolbert, a high school social studies teacher, uses response cards to review a chapter on the functions of the different branches of government. Students each have a response card pre-printed with "Senate" on one side and "House of Representatives" on the other. Mr. Tolbert reads a function out loud and students hold up the card with their selected answer (see sample on next page). Sometimes Mr. Tolbert uses small dry erase boards and markers for students to record answers to questions.

Differentiated Instruction Study Group Log

SESSION 4

Study Group Name _____
School _____
District _____
Date _____ Time IN _____ Time OUT _____

Sign in

Leader _____ Faculty Communicator _____
Time Keeper _____ Other Group Members _____
Recorder _____
Reporter _____ Facilitator _____

● Summary of group discussion and activities:

● What will be implemented in the classroom?

● This session's best practice or idea:

Next meeting Date _____ Time _____

Location _____

Before next meeting Activity _____

Who _____ When _____

Remember: Faculty Communication ideas _____

Please fax a copy of this log to _____ @ _____ .
Also provide a copy of this log to each group member and your school administrator.



D.I. Strategies I Have Tried

Name: _____ Title: _____ Date: _____

School: _____ District: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Complete two or more blocks of the table below and give it to your Study Group Coordinator to receive your final in-service points for the Differentiated Instruction Study Group.

D.I. Strategy 1 *(e.g., Cubing)* _____

How did you use it?

How did it effect student learning?

How do you know?

D.I. Strategy 2 _____

How did you use it?

How did it effect student learning?

How do you know?

D.I. Strategy 3 _____

How did you use it?

How did it effect student learning?

How do you know?

Other comments:

