

Figure 1.1
What Differentiated Instruction Is and Is Not

What Differentiation Is Not	What Differentiation Is	Explanation
Just for students with labels	For every student	Every student has particular interests and learning preferences as well as a readiness level that varies over time and context. Each learner needs appropriate support.
Something extra in the curriculum	At the core of effective planning	Differentiation is not something you do when the real lesson is finished. It's integral to ensuring that each student has access to success with key content goals.
An approach that mollycoddles students—makes them dependent	Teaching up; supporting students in achieving at a level higher than they thought possible	Effective differentiation always enables a student to do more than would be possible without it, not less.
Incompatible with standards	A vehicle for ensuring student success with standards	A goal of differentiation is ensuring that each student succeeds with whatever is important for him or her to know, understand, and do.
Use of certain instructional strategies	Use of flexible approaches to space, time, materials, groupings, and instruction	Flexibility is a hallmark of differentiation, but no single instructional strategy is required to differentiate effectively.
Tracking in the regular classroom	The antithesis of tracking	Effective differentiation requires use of flexible grouping patterns so that students consistently work in a variety of groups based on readiness, interest, learning preference, random assignment, teacher choice, and student choice.
Assigning students to cross-class groups based on assessment data	Within a classroom	When students are removed from their classrooms and placed with students deemed similar in other classrooms, a kind of tracking is taking place. Real flexibility is lost.
All or mostly based on a particular approach to multiple intelligences	Systematic attention to readiness, interest, and learning profile	Learning profile is one-third of the domain of differentiation and consists of learning style, intelligence preference (there are two strong models addressing intelligence preference), gender-related preferences, and culture-related preferences. A single approach to intelligence preferences in the classroom is a narrow segment of the big picture of differentiation.

Figure 1.1—(continued)

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All or mostly based on learning style preferences	Systematic attention to readiness, interest, and learning profile	See note above. Attention to learning style is helpful for some students some of the time and helps teachers learn to be more flexible, but it leaves other needs unaddressed.
Synonymous with student choice	A balance of teacher choice and student choice	There are times when it's important for teachers to assign particular work to students because it will move them forward in key ways. At other times, it makes good sense for students to call the shots and learn about making wise choices.
Individualization	Focused on individuals, small groups, and the class as a whole	Although it is an aim of differentiation to focus on individuals, it is not a goal to make individual lesson plans for each student.
More problems, books, or questions for some students and fewer for others	Varied avenues to the same essential understandings	Struggling students don't often benefit by doing less of what they don't understand, and it's not helpful for advanced learners to do more of what they already know. Differentiation asks students to work with essential understandings at varied degrees of complexity and with varied support systems. Information-based tasks and skills-based tasks should be congruent with students' current needs.
Something a teacher does because it's the thing to do	Something a teacher does in response to particular needs of particular human beings	Differentiation should be responsive instruction, not mechanical instruction.
Something that happens all day every day	Something that happens when there is a need for it	At times, whole-class instruction is important and effective. Teachers need to build community as well as attend to individual needs.
Something a teacher does on the spot when it becomes evident that a lesson isn't working for some students (reactive or improvisational)	Something a teacher plans prior to a lesson based on assessment evidence of student needs (proactive)	The most powerful differentiation is based on pre-assessment and ongoing assessment of student progress toward key goals. The teacher uses the assessment information to make proactive plans to address student needs. Some improvisation is still needed, but it is not a dominant means of differentiation.