

**NYC Task Force For Quality Inclusive Schooling**  
**“Creating an Inclusive Environment for All Students”**  
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Differentiated Instructions 101

*Submitted by Mayer Reiz & Natalie Katzourin*

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**Presenter’s Background:**

David Connor specializes in general classroom inclusion. Mr. Connor is an active member of various organizations, both academic and non-academic. He is passionate about inclusion as well as diversity within the classroom setting, and places a great value on friendships with diverse individuals. Mr. Connor has been working in education for the past nineteen years. He has worked as a professor part time for nine years, and this past year he took on a full time position.

**Topical Outline**

- The A-Z of flexibility
- Defining differentiated instruction: Is it just “good teaching”?
- Why differentiate?

- What are some key ways to differentiate?
- Looking for evidence in classrooms
- Reconnecting and ‘playing’ with the idea of differentiation.

**Content of Session:**

Mr. Connor began the session by engaging the group in a brainstorming activity, which involved thinking about ways of providing “good flexible instruction” using the alphabet. The group came up with many methods such as Ability grouping, Cooperation, Multi-sensory, Variety, and more. Mr. Connor explained that using good flexible instruction is a key element for providing differentiated teaching.

Mr. Connor continued the discussion with an explanation of what differentiated instruction is not. It is not individualized instruction, it is not chaotic, and it is not just a way to provide homogenous grouping. He then described that it is an organized but flexible method of adjusting teaching and learning to reach kids at their level and help them reach their full potential as learners. It is about being proactive by thinking about the various ways that the learners can be reached. To provide good teaching, one must also consider the students’ interests as well as their readiness, strengths, and weaknesses. Differentiated instruction is a more qualitative approach in that there is more emphasis on the nature and quality of the work rather than the amount. In addition, differentiated instruction provides multiple approaches to content (what is being taught), process (the way it’s taught), and product (the evidence of learning). It is student-centered, and it is a combination of whole-class, group, and individual instruction.

Within the booklet that was handed out there are methods and ideas for providing differentiated instruction, which Mr. Connor briefly explained. He then emphasized how

differentiated instruction could be used in any classroom, as there will always be different students at different levels. He also explained that differentiated instruction could also be used with any age group. He then explained that we would be watching three video clips of teachers using differentiated instruction. He suggested that during the clip the group should try to think about which aspects of differentiated instruction they could pick out, with an emphasis on content, process, product, student interests, student readiness, and student learning profiles.

The first video was of a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class learning about plants. This video clip showed different children doing different activities relating to each child's interests and abilities in a practical way and then connecting it to life experiences. The broad concept of plants was studied in depth with different activities, which related to this concept such as measuring, reading, and writing. The second video was of a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class learning about the human body. In this setting students were divided into teams that were "experts" in specific areas. Using this method everyone becomes an "expert" and had the responsibility of bringing his/her expertise to the next group where everyone gets to shine in their own way. The third video was a 9<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class. This clip explored presenting information in different ways to help students learn. The focus was on engaging students in learning with bringing an important and meaningful aspect of the topic to each person. These video clips demonstrated how differentiated instruction can be used with different age groups and how helpful it would be if this approach was used in the classroom.

**Relevance to Inclusion:**

Teachers can create an inclusive learning environment through using differentiated instruction. This session began with an introduction to the concept of differentiated instruction and then examples of differentiated instruction were provided which looked at various age groups, various educational topics, and various methods of teaching that could be utilized within inclusion classrooms. By using differentiated instruction, teachers can reach out to students who have different learning needs all at the same time. Thus, differentiated instruction provides an integrated learning experience for all students within a classroom by giving the students the power of choosing the method in which they would like to learn. This type of teaching method helps to pave the way of ensuring that “no child is left behind”, as teachers use differentiated instruction to make sure that every child in the classroom has the opportunity to learn.

**Goals, Concerns and Issues for Future Work:**

The objectives of this session were to discuss the necessity of differentiated instruction, observe classrooms in which differentiated instruction takes place, learn various ways to approach differentiation, and apply the concept of differentiation to classrooms. Dr. Connor would like to see disability viewed differently in the world, stating that, “it would be wonderful to see all the labels disappear and everyone be seen the same in each other’s eyes”.