



# The Trillium

Recognized as ASCD's *Most Improved Affiliate Newsletter* in 2001

June 2002

Ontario Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

## Differentiated Learning

### **Take Note!**

#### **Ontario ASCD's Second International Conference**

*The Art and Soul of Teaching*

Toronto

October 16-18, 2003

#### **Ontario ASCD Wins Another Award**

Ontario ASCD won ASCD International's *Outstanding Affiliate Special Publication* award for our 2001 Conference Brochure.

#### **Ottawa Symposium on Classroom Management**

Tuesday, October 1, 4:15 - 8:00 PM

*Keynote address by Ronald Morrish*

*Grade Level Panel Discussions*

dinner included

#### **Northeast Affiliate Conference**

December 6 - 7, 2002

Boston, Massachusetts

### **President's Message**

#### ***A Conversation on the Learning Needs of Our Students***

To what extent have we as a profession truly implemented systematic, practical teaching strategies that reach all of our learners?

Differentiated instruction represents a fundamentally important conversation that brings together ongoing discussions on such topics as learning styles, multiple intelligences and brain research. Many of the teaching strategies associated with differentiated instruction are not new. Indeed, teachers will see their own classroom practice in the current literature on this topic. Writers like Carol Ann Tomlinson and Gayle Gregory have caused us to re-examine our teaching methodology in light of the needs of an increasingly diverse and challenging student population. Differentiated instruction presents teachers with an opportunity for dialogue on the practical "nuts and bolts" of how we impart knowledge and skills in an inclusive way that will maximize the potential of all students. We hope to address this issue, and many others, next year at our Second International Conference.

Mary Nanavati  
President, Ontario ASCD

### **Web Sites**

**Ontario ASCD:** [www.ascd.ca](http://www.ascd.ca)

**ASCD International:** [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)

**Ontario ASCD, a diverse learning community that promotes excellence in education, is dedicated to supporting the growth and success of all learners.**

## ASCD in Action

### ASCD Networks

<http://www.ascd.org/aboutascd/cr/networks/network.html>

On occasion we highlight some of ASCD's many "Networks" that serve to bring educators together. Each Network is concerned with a particular theme, issue, or purpose. They are wonderful opportunities to exchange ideas, share resources, solve problems, grow professionally, and establish collegial relationships. More extensive information about and contacts for each ASCD Networks can be found at the website above.

### Differentiated Instruction Network

This network works at showcasing and promoting to educators, parents, and community members, the varied ways that learning environments can be devised to support the differing learning needs of all learners. The network works to facilitate communication about Differentiated Learning concepts through the Web Page, newsletters, and regional conferences. A major ongoing project is the development of a resource manual highlighting "Best Practices" .

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### Classroom Management Symposium

**Ottawa, October 1**

Keynote by Ronald Morrish (author of "With All Due Respect"), Panel Discussions, *and* Dinner  
E-mail [nicola.benton@ascd.ca](mailto:nicola.benton@ascd.ca) or [tom.conklin@ascd.ca](mailto:tom.conklin@ascd.ca) for details.

## Ontario ASCD's 2nd International Conference

**The Art and Soul of Teaching:**  
*supporting communities that learn*

**October 16-18, 2003**

International Plaza Hotel & Conference Centre  
Toronto, Ontario

Speakers already confirmed include:

<i>Art Costa</i>	<i>Tom Guskey</i>	<i>Richard Strong</i>
<i>Michael Fullan</i>	<i>Carol Rolheiser</i>	<i>Michael Tudor</i>

## Capturing the Essence of Curriculum Differentiation

**Deborah E. Burns, Ph.D.**  
Cheshire, Connecticut Public

**Jeanne H. Purcell, Ph.D.**  
& Connecticut State Department of Education

In 1949 Margaret Wise Brown wrote a children's picture book entitled, The Important Book. The premise of the book is that every idea, object, and event has numerous defining characteristics and features. Through the use of familiar examples and appealing illustrations, Brown and illustrator Leonard Weisgard teach readers that the most essential features of an object or idea are often related to the object's or idea's core purposes, characteristics, and principles. For example, from Brown's perspective, the important thing about a fork is that you eat with it; the important thing about rain is that it is wet; the important thing about the sky is that it is always there; and the important thing about children is that each and everyone of them is a unique and special individual.

*The important thing about children is that each and everyone of them is a unique and special individual.*

This latter set of principles, that each child is unique and deserves to be treated as such, is also essential to the concept of curriculum differentiation. As an idea and an innovation, curriculum differentiation attempts to improve student achievement and narrow the achievement gap among specific sets of students by paying careful attention to students' unique characteristics. In many cases, it is the distinctive nature of each child's cognitive, academic, social, and emotional characteristics that explains differences in academic achievement. It stands to reason then, that knowledge of these differences (e.g. students' prior knowledge, learning styles, cognitive skills, learning rate, interests, preferences, effort, and motivation) provides the justification for modifying various curriculum components accordingly.

Teachers who practice curriculum differentiation analyze information about various student differences to identify those variations that are most likely to impact student achievement. This analysis, and its accompanying hypotheses, support teachers' decisions to add more alterna-

tives and options or add greater or lesser degrees of depth, abstraction, or sophistication to related curriculum components. The most frequently differentiated curriculum components include the following: a lesson or units' content; the representative topic; the introductory activities; the teaching methods; the learning activities; student and teacher resources; student assignments, tasks, and products; and the assessment procedures and formats. Differentiation then, is a proactive attempt to enhance student achievement by improving the match between learners' unique characteristics and various curriculum components.

As important as it is to define differentiation, to describe its purpose and its process, these elements alone provide an incomplete explanation of what is important about differentiation. To provide a complete picture, we must also identify and describe the various support systems that explain the success or failure of a differentiation initiative. In most cases, these factors also predict the impact and longevity of differentiation as a curriculum innovation.

During the last ten years numerous teachers, administrators, graduate students, professors, researchers, consultants, and professional education organizations have been closely involved with various differentiation initiatives. As a result of their efforts and collaborations at least ten different facets have been identified as powerful factors in predicting the success of differentiation initiatives.

School board personnel can use these same factors as the focus of an ongoing needs assessment. By documenting the strengths and needs of a local differentiation initiative, teachers and administrators can take appropriate action to improve the "health" of the initiative.

*This article is continued on Page 4.*

## Capturing the Essence of Curriculum Differentiation *continued*

These ten factors are listed and explained in the following set of bullets. Consider reading them, one at a time, and pausing to assess the strength of each factor, as it exists in your school board, with your differentiation initiative. The use of a 0-3 rating scale (0=Not Confident, 1=Somewhat Confident, 2=Moderately Confident, and 3= Extremely Confident) also helps school boards identify which factors are in greatest need of attention in order to enhance the effectiveness of a differentiation initiative. How confident are you that your school board incorporates the following factors within their differentiation initiative?

### ❑ **Data Analysis**

- The review of student assessment data (formal or informal) to identify potential curriculum areas or subject area strands in greatest need of attention or enhancement
- The disaggregation of student data by achievement levels, gender, ethnicity, special education status, gifted education status, cognitive ability, age, or grade to identify specific sets of students in greatest need of curriculum differentiation
- The use of aligned pre and post assessments and rubrics to identify differences in students' prior knowledge and measure the impact of the differentiation initiative on student growth and expertise

### ❑ **Differentiation Vision and Mission Statements**

- A locally and collaboratively developed definition of differentiation that provides a concise and clear explanation of the concept, its purposes, and procedures

### ❑ **Strategic Planning**

- A commitment to a sustained, supported, and proactive approach to differentiation that strategically identifies relevant subject areas, appropriate procedures, and likely student differences that will be the focus of the differentiation initiative
- The collaborative development of annual, three year, or five year plans that describe the goal(s) of a differentiation initiative; the actions needed to reach the goal, the timeline, and the people responsible for each action in the initiative; the evidence that will be used to measure the success of the initiative; and the guiding questions that will be used to conduct the evaluation

### ❑ **Appropriate Configurations for Various Subject Areas**

- The analysis and use of research studies and best practices research to identify the most effective ways to modify and differentiate curriculum in specific and varied subject areas
- The awareness and appreciation of the fact that best practices for curriculum differentiation may vary by subject area, grade level, and the nature of essential student differences
- The development of specific frameworks that support differentiation in specific subject areas

### ❑ **Professional Development**

- Presentations, training, study groups, demonstrations, action research, peer coaching, lesson study, collaborative lesson study, and collaborative reflection opportunities that supports teachers' and administrators' individual professional learning goals and learning styles as they relate to a differentiation initiative
- The identification of local facilitators, peer coaches, and coordinators with sufficient experience and expertise to guide and lead a differentiation initiative

### ❑ **Learner Profiles**

- Planned and deliberate activities and procedures that gather, summarize, and analyze information about each student's prior knowledge, cognitive skills, learning rate, interests, preferences, learning styles, motivation, talents, and effort

### ❑ **Teacher Evaluation**

- Professional standards; observation and work sampling protocols and criteria, best practices summaries, and rubrics that measure teachers' current and future expertise and proficiency with assessment, differentiation, and curriculum development

*This article is continued on Page 5.*

## Capturing the Essence of Curriculum Differentiation *continued*

### ❑ Time Allocations

- An examination of various alternatives and timeframes that permit students to learn assigned content in accordance with their varying learning rates
- The development of in-school, afterschool, summer, and weekend programs that provide additional opportunities for differentiated instruction, student enrichment, and support

### ❑ Within and Between Class Grouping Arrangements

- An examination of various grouping formats and scheduling strategies (e.g. flexible small groups, between class grouping, cluster grouping, leveled classes, tutoring, etc.) that support curriculum differentiation and make it more manageable
- The use of specific management strategies (e.g. contracts, centers, agendas, student orientation, rules and consequences, room arrangements, schedules, etc.) that support the use of flexible small groups

### ❑ Curriculum Development and Modification

- The proactive analysis, evaluation, and revision of existing curriculum units, lessons, and tasks to support curriculum differentiation
- The reconfiguration of content goals, representative topics, introductory activities, teaching methods, learning activities, student and teacher resources, student assignments and products, and assessment procedures to support curriculum differentiation
- An improved alignment between content goals, dynamic assessment and learner differences

Currently, many school boards' professional development plans and activities offer teachers an opportunity to examine the numerous ways that various aspects of the curriculum can be reconfigured to match the student differences in our classrooms. This is important and as it should be. However, we must also remember that in addition to curriculum revision and modification, nine other factors are also needed to explain the essential and vital aspects of differentiation.

What is important about differentiation? The important thing about differentiation is that it attempts to increase student achievement. The important thing about differentiation is that it is proactive. The important thing about differentiation is that it demands the reconfiguration of various curriculum components. The important thing about differentiation is that it requires appropriate professional development, planning, classroom management, and changes in grouping arrange-

ments. But the most important thing about curriculum differentiation is that it respects and responds to student differences. And the important thing about our students is that each and every one of them is a unique and special individual who, with our help, will grow to be adults who make unique and special contributions to our world.

For more information about differentiation, its components, factors, and processes, consider reading or viewing the numerous articles, books, professional development modules, and videos authored by Carol Tomlinson and published by ASCD. A complete list of these resources is available by viewing the ASCD web site: [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org). Information about ASCD's on-site professional development opportunities is available by contacting Sally Chapman or Leslie Kiernan at ASCD headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia (1.703.578.9600 ext. 5677).

**6th Annual Northeast ASCD Affiliate Conference**  
***Schools That Succeed, Students Who Learn***  
**December 6-7, 2002**  
***Boston Park Plaza Hotel***

Please visit the conference website at [www.maineascd.org/neac](http://www.maineascd.org/neac) for details.

### Ontario ASCD Regionals

There are currently three regionals associated with the Ontario affiliate. Contact people are:

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### Ontario ASCD Membership - new or renewal

Please send this form and your membership fee (\$30) to the Membership Coordinator at the address above.

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