

The image features a classroom scene with a teacher standing at the front near a chalkboard and several students seated at desks. The scene is overlaid with a vibrant, multi-colored background consisting of abstract, textured shapes in shades of green, yellow, orange, and red. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image.

# INCLUSIVE EDUCATION BEST PRACTICE #9 Differentiated Instruction

From *The Inclusive Education Checklist*  
by Richard Villa & Jacqueline Thousand

# What Is Differentiated Instruction?

Differentiated instruction is a process for teaching students who vary in how they learn in the same classroom. It is way for teachers to proactively plan for and respond to individual differences via a process of adapting and modifying materials, learning goals, instructional methods and learning activities, and what students are required to do and produce in a classroom (Universal Design for Learning, 2013).

Stated otherwise, differentiated instruction requires teachers to provide students with:

- multiple means of representation (content differentiation)
- multiple means of engagement (process differentiation)
- multiple means of expression (product differentiation)

To do this requires attention and differentiation at what has come to be known as the four instructional access design points (i.e., facts about the students, content, product, process).

**On the next page, we'll discuss the 4 Access Design Points for Differentiating Instruction. Be sure to checkout the Checklist on Page 4!**

# The 4 Access Design Points for Differentiating Instruction

## Access Design Point #1 Gather Facts About the Students

Educators who differentiate must first gather facts about the differences in students' background knowledge, readiness, language, culture, and learning preferences and interests.

## Access Design Point #2 Content Demands

Given this information about students, educators then differentiate content. Content is multidimensional because it involves not only what is to be taught and differentiated for students, but variations in learning objectives and levels of knowledge and proficiency students need to demonstrate, as well as variations in the materials to be used.

## Access Design Point #3 Product Demands

This product access design point concerns how students show what they know and have learned and how their products are evaluated. Information gathered about student learning preference can be used to enable students to best show what they have learned. Standardized assessments are augmented with authentic assessment processes (e.g., portfolios, curriculum-based assessment, direct observation of performance).

## Access Design Point #4 Process Demands

This process design point requires teachers to consider how best to help students make sense of what they are to learn. Teachers use various lesson formats and arrangements (e.g., discovery learning, cooperative group learning, direct instruction), technology, and evidence-based instructional practices and scaffolds to provide access for every student.

### Differentiated Instruction Summary

Intent: To maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is in the curriculum, and assisting each student to learn via his or her unique learning processes.

D.I. is a way to shake things up in the classroom, changing how teachers teach so that all students have access to powerful and effective learning.

D.I. most easily and naturally occurs when educators collaborate in planning and instruction to not only accommodate the learning differences of students with IEPs, English learners, students considered gifted and talented, and students otherwise considered at-risk (e.g., impacted by homelessness), but to accommodate the learning differences experienced by all students through instructional delivery arrangements such as co-teaching rather than pullout services.

# Inclusive Education Best Practice Checklist Assessment

**Directions:** Based upon your experience, please give each of the following 10 indicators a (zero to 4) rating in response to the question, “To what degree does this indicator occur in my school?”

**0**  
Never

**1**  
Rarely

**2**  
Some of  
the time

**3**  
Most of  
the time

**4**  
Always

## Rating (1 - 4)    **Indicator of Differentiation of Instruction**

1. Instructional personnel understand that they have a responsibility to proactively adapt instruction to accommodate student differences.

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2. Instructional personnel have had explicit and extensive training in and understand what constitutes differentiated instruction.

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3. Instructional personnel gather data (facts) about students from varying multiple sources (e.g., record review, interview, survey, interest inventories, observation, learning styles inventory, formative and summative assessment) in order to differentiate instruction in response to their students’ varying background knowledge, interests, strengths, culture, language, learning preferences, and means of communication (e.g., alternative and augmentative communication).

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4. Within each unit of study, content and materials differentiation routinely occurs, with students being offered multiple options for taking in information (e.g., texts with varying readability levels, text-to-speech/text reader software and apps, auditory and visual input, word walls, graphic organizers, layered curricula, curriculum compacting).

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5. Within each unit of study, product and assessment differentiation routinely occurs, with students being offered multiple ways to express what they have learned (e.g., written products, PowerPoint products, podcasts, summary of interviews, oral presentation) and being graded in a variety of ways (e.g., benchmark assessments, contracts, IEP goal attainment, portfolios).

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6. Within each unit of study, process differentiation routinely occurs to help students make sense of the ideas, concepts, procedures, and principles being taught through the use of multiple instructional formats (e.g., adapted lectures, hands-on, computer and web-based, stations and centers, simulation, role play, thematic unit or lesson, community referenced, service learning, self directed, culturally responsive techniques).

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0  
Never

1  
Rarely

2  
Some of  
the time

3  
Most of  
the time

4  
Always

**Rating (1 - 4)    Indicator of Differentiation of Instruction**

7. Within each unit of study, process differentiation routinely occurs to help students make sense of the ideas, concepts, procedures, and principles being taught through the use of multiple instructional arrangements (e.g., cooperative learning structures, same or cross-age peer tutors, teacher directed small groups, independent study, large group instruction).

8. Within each unit of study, process differentiation routinely occurs to help students make sense of the ideas, concepts, procedures, and principles being taught through the use of multiple instructional strategies (e.g., multiple intelligence theory, integration of the arts, use of taxonomies, research-based strategies).

9. Within each unit of study, process differentiation routinely occurs to help students make sense of the ideas, concepts, procedures, and principles being taught through alterations of the physical environment (e.g., room arrangement, accessibility of materials, preferential seating) and/or social environment (e.g., teaching of social norms, behavior contracts, Positive Behavior Supports).

10. Instructional personnel collaborate to share differentiated lessons and unit plans.

**Total Score (out of 40 maximum):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mean Score (Total Score / 10):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Range of Scores:** \_\_\_\_\_ (low) to \_\_\_\_\_ (high)

The info in this PDF is from the book *The Inclusive Education Checklist* by Richard Villa & Jacqueline Thousand. This comprehensive new book is designed to assist schools, districts, administrators, policy makers, community members and professionals interested in education, as well as parents and youth, to assess, develop, and implement inclusive services for students with disabilities.



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