From Correspondence with Dr. Ross Greene

“In my estimate, 70 to 80 percent of behavior problems at school can be traced back to academics.”

Sept. 22, 2017

Questions for this session:

What is Differentiated Instruction?

Why does it have a positive impact student development?

Let’s start by looking inside a differentiated classroom...

In Judy Rex’s Classroom...

Look for:

The variety of students in her class,
The nature of the learning environment,
The teacher's beliefs about teaching & learning,
Ways in which she understands and addresses learner variance,
The way the classroom and its elements are organized,
How & why these things make a positive difference for her students.
So What is Differentiation??

And why does it help young people find “balanced lives” in the classroom?

-DIFFERENTIATION is not a particular instructional strategy, a collection of strategies, or a teaching model. It’s a way of thinking about teaching and learning that advocates beginning where individuals are rather than with a prescribed plan of action that ignores student variance."

Carol Tomlinson (2014) The Differentiated Classroom (2nd Ed.)

Artful Teaching as a Love Triangle
At its most basic level, differentiating instruction means “shaking up” what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn.

Differentiation is planning for the unpredictability of a classroom.

Learning Outcomes
Differentiation is a sequence of common sense decisions made by teachers with a student-first orientation.

Adam Hoppe, 2010

The Common Sense of Differentiation

- Ensuring an environment that actively supports students in the work of learning.
- (growth mindset, student-teacher connections, community)
- Absolute clarity about a powerful learning destination.
- (KUDs, engagement, understanding)
- Persistently knowing where students are in relation to the destination all along the way.
- (pre- & formative assessment, emphasis on feedback, used for student and teacher planning)
- Adjusting teaching to make sure each student arrives at the destination and, when possible, beyond it.
- (responding to student readiness, interest, learning profile)
- Effective classroom leadership & management.
- (leading students, managing routines)
3 Bedrock Principles of Differentiation

That Directly Support Positive Student Behavior and Achievement

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Principle #1

Teacher belief in the worth and capacity of each student
- Growth mindset
- Teacher emotional support
- Teacher acceptance of responsibility for student success
- Teacher-student partnerships
- Proactive planning for student success (academic, emotional, behavioral)
A person is someone who loves you as you are and pays you the compliment of expecting more.
Principle #2

Teaching for student engagement and student power
- Teaching Up
- Learning goals rooted in understanding
- Connecting curriculum with students' lives
- Teaching the attitudes, habits, and skills of success

Teaching for Understanding & Power

Teaching in response to student readiness, interest, and learning profile
- Beginning where students are
- Options for working conditions
- Formative assessment used to support both teaching and learning
- Classroom routines that balance stability and flexibility
- Respectful tasks
- Emphasis on student voice
Students do not simply store knowledge they hear; each student learns in a particular, personal way. Each child gives personal shape to his or her understanding and to the way that he or she comes to understand things.

The teacher may be teaching a class of 35 students; but it is always important to remember that all learning is ultimately an individual process.


Sustaining learning requires a balanced success to effort ratio.

Struggling Learner Imbalance

Great Effort

Little Success

Great Success

Advanced Learner Imbalance

Great Effort

Little Success

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A key focus of differentiation is keeping students’ success-to-effort ratios balanced.

That’s important for developing self-efficacy, motivation to learn, growth mindsets, and achievement!

"Being learner-centered, then, involves paying attention to students’ backgrounds and cultural values, as well as to their abilities. To build effectively on what learners bring to the classroom, teachers must pay close attention to individual students’ starting points and to their progress on learning tasks. They must present students with "just manageable difficulties"—challenging enough to maintain engagement and yet not so challenging as to lead to discouragement.

They must find the strengths that will help students connect with the information being taught. Unless these connections are made explicitly, they often remain inert and so do not support subsequent learning."


“You can’t get where you’re going without being where you are…”