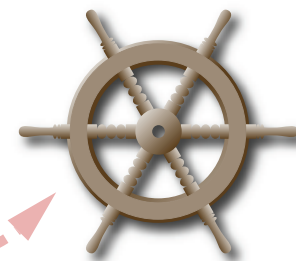


Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Demystifying Differentiation of Instruction and Assessment

BY ANGELA MURRAY, NSTU PUBLIC RELATIONS COORDINATOR

Since no two children are alike, and no two children learn the same way, an enriched environment for one student is not necessarily enriched for another. This is why it is so important to appreciate and embrace differentiation of instruction and assessment. NSTU executive staff officer Betty-Jean Aucoin demystified this concept in late February for NSTU members from the Inverness Local.

At the beginning of the 2009-10 school year, Lauchie MacKinnon, vice president of professional development for the Inverness Local, surveyed his members on topics relevant to their specific professional learning needs. Differentiated instruction and assessment was the number one choice.

Aucoin notes that it is important that all students work with respectful and engaging tasks. She reminds participants that differentiation of teaching is easier when the content, activities and products are based on clear concepts, generalizations and skills rather than on coverage of everything in a text.

"If our learning style matches our student, that's easy, but your preferred style of learning and teaching will not match every student's. So, it's important to include other learning styles throughout a unit."

Through this session she wants teachers to *Know, Understand and Do—KUD*. "The outcome for the workshop is to know the concept of differentiation, understand the steps toward responding to the differentiated classroom and reflect on two areas to work on in supporting such a classroom."

Aucoin reminds participants that, "Students should be the hardest workers in the classroom, focused on achieving the outcomes—not the teachers—you've already got two or more degrees." She stresses that a balance of student-selected and teacher-selected tasks is important when differentiating learning and assessment. Giving students responsibility for their learning fosters independence—an

important learning goal on its own.

She also outlines what differentiated instruction is not. "Teachers, remember differentiated instruction is not a recipe or formula, a new idea in education or incompatible with certain subject areas."

Using what she calls "low tech Senteos®" index cards of red, green and yellow, Aucoin demonstrates something all teachers can use in their classrooms in trying to ascertain if their teaching is being understood. "If your students are flashing too many red cards, when asked if they understand the concept you are teaching, it's time to stop, back up and re-focus on that particular concept or outcome. If there are a lot of green cards, you can go and move on to the next concept. However once the group is engaged you can now work with those students who have questions—yellow cards, or those with red who did not understand." She encourages teachers to use this method when teaching new concepts or reviewing concepts taught. It is also important to discuss the various classroom procedures and group processes you are using with students. They will then understand your expectations and rationale for certain procedures and groupings.

Aucoin outlines the building blocks of differentiated instruction as noted in Carol Tomlinson's research: own the student; varied avenues for learning; flexible classroom routines; assessment to inform instruction; shared responsibility for teaching and learning; building community and teach up. "Teach up, don't teach down giving students a crayola curriculum; remember that writing, reading and numeracy are the critical skills to teach all students," she adds. "It is important to be aware of students' readiness in reading comprehension and complex reasoning and provide them with tasks that are respectful of this readiness."

When talking about differentiated assessment, Aucoin provides the Latin term for assess, which literally means to sit beside, she says. "When we assess for



Clockwise from the left are some of the 27 teachers who attended the Differentiation of Instruction and Assessment workshop held at Dalbrae Academy on February 16, 2009: Jessalyn MacLellan (Inverness Academy), Margaret Coady (Bayview Education Centre), Monika MacLennan and Betsy Jardine (Whycocomagh Education Centre), and Lorna MacDonald (Inverness Education Centre).

learning, we need to use class time to sit beside our students supporting them in achieving concepts and skills taught." The analogy she uses to differentiate between Assessment *for* Learning and Assessment *of* Learning helps to simplify the concept. "Think of the drama teacher and the rehearsals that take place for months in preparation for opening night—the blocking, the learning of lines, the development of sets and costumes—that's Assessment *for* Learning. Opening night—the play must go on without on stage assistance—that's Assessment *of* Learning."

She ends the presentation with a quote from Carol Tomlinson, the author of *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of all Learners and Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom*. "Differentiated Instruction is responsive instruction. It occurs as

teacher become increasingly proficient in understanding their students as individuals, increasingly comfortable with the meaning and structure of the disciplines they teach, and increasingly expert at teaching flexibility in order to match instruction to student need with the goal of maximizing the potential of each learner in a given area."

Throughout this workshop Aucoin uses differentiated instruction and assessment to demonstrate and model the very concepts she is exploring with participants. Teachers are provided with Monday relevant strategies for procedures, teaching, grouping and assessment, which they can take back to their classrooms.

For more information about this workshop and the many other PD workshop offerings of the NSTU, contact Gail Doucette at gdoucette@nstu.ca.



Email your name, home address, and school or campus with PD in the subject line to theteacher@nstu.ca by October 12 to be eligible for the draw.

This month's PD give away is *The Multiple Intelligences of Reading and Writing* by Thomas Armstrong. The book will appeal to all educators who work in supporting the development of reading and writing skills at all levels. This book combines research of Howard Gardner and recent brain research on reading and writing. Thomas showcases how educators can engage students by infusing the study or words with imagery, logic, physical activity, emotion, music, social involvement and nature experiences.



The June winner of the PD book

21ST CENTURY COMMUNITIES

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