
Prologue

Margo and I are in the teacher's lounge grabbing a cup of coffee before our prep period is over. We have been working on the school newspaper, and as usual, there are many changes to make before Friday's deadline.

Janice, our new fourth grade teacher, comes into the room and is visibly shaken.

She blurts out, "I don't know what I'm going to do with those kids. I teach and teach and nothing seems to work! I stay up late working on my lesson plans. They're organized. They're complete. They're at grade level. They're just like the ones I designed in my college classes. It's got to be these kids, or maybe I'm not cut out for this job."

Her tears start to fall. It's 1994, and I quickly think back to when I took my position in 1989. There were many nights I walked out of here in tears. It took three years, research, and several classes for me to get it figured out. Margo and I had spent many evenings on the phone talking things through. Our classes in this school were so diverse, much more so than my classes seemed in the 1970s and earlier in the 1980s. What were the differences?

I return to the present. "Okay, Janice, we need to sit down and talk. Margo and I worked on this problem for years, and we've figured a few things out. There are some strategies that we can share with you. It's a bit different in the real world than in those college classes. And we have a unique situation here. We're an inner city parochial school. That means we have a very diverse population. We have students who have been expelled from public schools. They are behavior problems, and many of them became behavior problems because they weren't academically successful. We have students who come from generational poverty, and we have students whose parents did not want them labeled as needing special education, so they brought them here where we don't have the special classes. We have kids whose parents are divorced or separated. They share custody, and sometimes these kids don't know whose house they'll be sleeping at. They often don't have homework and supplies for

that reason. On top of that, we have the middle-of-the-road kids and some very gifted children. Is it any wonder that your one-size-fits-all lesson plans aren't working for everyone?"

Margo nods in agreement and says, "Janice, pull yourself together, and act confident. We'll walk you through this. You're looking at 40 years of experience between the two of us. We can probably help you make your classroom more fun for you and the kids, too."

Janice smiles and wipes her tears. "Thanks, this really means a lot to me."

"Don't give it a second thought," Margo replies. "Your students will be our students next year—we want them coming to us with a solid background. Our future is at stake here, too!"

We arranged for Janice to observe several of our classes. She took lots of notes, asked lots of questions, and kept saying, "You do things so differently than I do. Why do you do things that way? Why are those kids working together? And why is she working alone? Are they all working on the same stuff? You have learning centers in the upper grades? Aren't those just for primary kids?"

THE WAY WE DO THE THINGS WE DO

Margo always had better discipline than I did. I envied her power and control. And her students loved her for her consistency and kindness. She was already at the school when I joined the faculty. The classroom from hell was mine, but once a day she had these kids. She controlled them while I had a terrible time. When I started doing research and applying it, I saw a difference in the way my classroom ran. With some brain-compatible strategies, the students began to change. They started learning. Margo became curious, took some of the same classes I had taken, watched what I was doing, and started applying some of the same techniques. She still had power and control, but the kids were learning more than ever before.

It wasn't enough. We realized that there had to be more instructional strategies and theories that teachers were using. Margo took a workshop day and visited other schools. She returned with more information. We walked into the teacher's lounge each day smiling. We shared what we were planning, gave each other suggestions, and regrouped when necessary.

We were happy because we had a plan. The plan was simple: Keep things moving, teach in a variety of ways, let kids teach each other, help kids feel like they belong, and when things don't work—try a different approach. You can't expect to teach in the same way and get different results.

We were making some changes with content, but mostly we were making instructional changes. We also changed assessment. We wanted

our students to be involved with their learning and have the ability to share that learning in a comfortable style. We still had standard paper-and-pencil assessments, but we knew we had to prepare our students for those in an atypical way.

We were differentiating, but we didn't know it. We were designing rubrics, but we didn't know that either. What did we think we were doing? Surviving. Helping kids. Making sense of what we were doing. And having fun along the way.

Differentiation is doing the best that you can to meet the kids where they are and take them to the necessary levels to meet and exceed standards. Differentiation is the way the brain learns best!

In this second edition, I have added several things:

- Reflect and Connect questions are provided at the beginning of each chapter. This is to access prior knowledge and give you the opportunity to think about what you are currently doing in your classroom.
- Exit cards are provided at the end of each chapter. The use of exit cards is a great differentiation strategy. Some call these "tickets to leave." They are quick assessments to see what you have understood and remember from the chapter. In a differentiated classroom, exit cards can be easily used to group students according to their readiness levels.
- Preassessment strategies are presented for each learning style.
- Current research on memory has been added.
- Suggestions for differentiating content, process, and product are provided.
- Several charts and figures have been added.
- Boxed statements have been pulled out of the text to help the reader get a quick overview of the chapter.