

# Differentiated Curriculum: The Perspectives of the Special Educationist

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the perspectives of the special educationist on differentiated curriculum. It has already been established that in helping the individual student to fully access the curriculum, each element in the curriculum can be modified to accommodate the characteristics of an individual or group of high ability learners as well as individuals with special needs. The content, process, and product take place in the learning environment should be carefully programmed to help the individual student succeed. Adaptation and modification are important factors. In adapting the curriculum, is to consider the use of a variety of response modes for the students with special needs. Providing many different options will increase the likelihood of success. Mainstreaming and inclusion has encouraged efforts to help special education students who spend at least part of the day in regular classrooms to master the curriculum. The curricula must be designed to meet the particular needs and characteristics of the individuals who are to learn various contents. Based on the unique characteristics of the individual, differentiating the curriculum will be of enormous benefits to the special needs individual

**Keywords:** curriculum, special needs, learning environment, differentiated curriculum

## 1.0 Introduction

A curriculum is considered the “heart” of any learning institution which means that schools or universities cannot exist without a curriculum. With its importance in formal education, curriculum has become a dynamic process due to the changes that occur in our society. Therefore, in its broadest sense, curriculum refers to the “total learning experiences of individuals not only in school, but in society as well” (Bilbao, Lucido, Iringan & Javier, 2008).

Having a consistent value of teaching is always important for a good education system. Therefore, curriculum can always be found in both eastern and western education system. However, with different interpretations towards the term “curriculum”, attitudes and values towards pedagogical approach may vary, which in turn affects how students learn in schools. We, as student teachers, could take them as reference and think about what kind of teachers we would become in the future. This paper is geared towards the perspectives of the special educationist on differentiated curriculum for individuals with special educational needs. The above purpose notwithstanding, it is important to take into consideration, the meaning of the term curriculum.

## 2.0 Meaning of “Curriculum”

The term “curriculum” has different interpretations among scholars. According to Kelly (1999), curriculum is negatively viewed as a “syllabus which may limit the planning of teachers to a consideration of the content or the body of knowledge they wish to transmit or a list of the subjects to be taught or both” (p. 83). In other words, simply convey subject knowledge is insufficient to be an effective curriculum. It should offer much more than a statement about the knowledge-content in order to be a productive curriculum.

But in the Hong Kong Yearbook published in the year of 2006, curriculum is more positive in nature, which could achieve the objective of motivating learning, enhancing knowledge and abilities and developing positive values or even attitudes. These elements could help achieve whole-person development of students. These two ideas are polarized, yet they are not contradicted with each other in a sense that they just view curriculum in either macro or micro level. For the first one proposed by Kelly (1999), possibly he comments it in micro level.

In the words of Oliver cited by Hama (2003) curriculum is a plan or programme of experiences which learner encounters under the directions of the school. In designing the curriculum, there is the need for curriculum planners to identify the needs of the society and factor those needs in the curriculum.

## 3.0 Identify Issues/Problems/Needs (Needs assessment)

Curriculum development was described as the process of determining who will be taught what and how (Bilbao *et al.*, 2008). The needs assessment and analysis step in curriculum development systematically focuses on learning about an issue or problem and the people who are directly affected by it. A needs assessment provides the information to determine outcomes (educational objectives) based on a factual foundation and learners needs. A needs assessment also provides baseline data to evaluate the achievement of intended outcomes. The goal is to have those who are most directly affected by issues and problems define them, isolate the contributing factors, and suggest solutions.

Wentling, Lai, Khor, Mohamed, Escalada and Teoh (1993) defines a problem (issue) as the gap between desired behaviour (what should be known and/or done) and actual performance (behaviour). The needs assessment process identifies the nature and scope of the gap. An underlying principle is to "start with what people already know and build on what they already have." The first task then is to establish what the target audience knows, their attitudes about the issues and contributing factors, and their practices. Without this information, intended outcomes and content are unlikely to address the needs of the target audience.

The needs assessment is method used to study for the aims, vision, principles, goals, learners' key competencies, desirable characteristics, learning standards and indicators that showed all of the components in curriculum from the needs assessment. Information obtained during the needs assessment can be used to decide the important contents to students. This will make the decisions about curriculum and instruction was correct, believable, ensuring for development of the curriculum, and built on the principle of reasonableness, explained without bias, no trial and error, and save for the time and resources (Sarnrattana, 2012). The main point of the needs assessment in addition to information and the needs were ranked by prioritization of needs to solve the problem in time.

#### **4.0 Definition of Curriculum Development**

According to Bilbao *et al.* (2008) *curriculum development* is defined as planned, purposeful, progressive, and systematic process in order to create positive improvements in the educational system. Every time there are changes or developments happening around the world, the school curricula are affected. There is a need to update them in order to address the society's needs.

To illustrate this contention, let's trace back history. During the ancient times, people taught their children knowledge and skills in order to survive by catching fish or hunting animals for food. They had no formal education during that time, but their children learned and acquired the knowledge and skills for survival. So, during that time, they already had a curriculum which other educators call as, *the saber-tooth curriculum*. This type of curriculum refers to a kind of curriculum that existed during the ancient times in which the purpose of teaching was for survival.

However, when the effects of discoveries and inventions became inevitable, ancient people's way of life had changed for the better. As a result, education became formal and curriculum development evolved as systematic, planned, purposeful and progressive, even today.

#### **5.0 Importance of Curriculum Planning**

Curriculum development has a broad scope because it is not only about the school, the learners and the teachers. It is also about the development of a society in general.

In today's knowledge economy, curriculum development plays a vital role in improving the economy of a country. It also provides answers or solutions to the world's pressing conditions and problems, such as environment, politics, socio-economics, and other issues on poverty, climate change and sustainable development (Bilbao et al. 2008).

There must be a chain of developmental process to develop a society. First, the school curriculum particularly in higher education must be developed to preserve the country's national identity and to ensure its economy's growth and stability. Thus, the president of a country must have a clear vision for his people and for the country as well.

If universities have curricular programs that are innovative and in demand in the local or global markets, many students even from foreign countries will enroll. Higher number of enrollees would mean income on the part of the universities. As a result, if the income is big, it can be used for teachers' promotion, scholarship and remuneration. It can also be used in funding research and development endeavors, and in putting up school facilities, libraries, and laboratories.

We believe that the country's economy can improve the people's way of life through curriculum development. And in order to develop it, curriculum experts or specialists should work hand in hand with the lawmakers (parliamentarians), the local government officials, such as governors, mayors, and others; the business communities and industries; and stakeholders to set implementing rules and policies for educational reforms.

Societal needs serve as a contributing factor in developing/planning the curriculum. Since human race differ in so many ways for instance our capabilities, perceptions, attitudes, skills etc there is the need to differentiate the curriculum.

#### **6.0 Differentiated Curriculum**

A general education teacher working with students with special needs, you will be heavily involved in teaching curriculum. It is therefore important that you understand the many factors that may sometimes interfere in the ability of these students to perform up to their ability while in school. Children are faced with many pressures

every day, and these pressures may play a role in their ability to concentrate fully in school. What you notice as a general education teacher may only be symptoms of these pressures (e.g., procrastination, avoidance, resistance, lack of completion of a task, lack of attention, etc.). However, you should know the real reasons behind these behaviours so that you can, along with the special education teacher, make accommodations or adaptations to the curriculum to help these students succeed. In trying to make each student succeed, the idea of differentiation comes to mind. A differentiated curriculum will be an appropriate approach to help individual student access the curriculum. What then is a differentiated curriculum?

Differentiated curriculum is one that is individualized to meet the diverse needs of all of the students in one class. According to Winebrenner (1996), equality means giving everyone equal opportunities to learn, not teaching everyone in exactly the same way. If implemented appropriately, differentiation does not have to mean more work for the teacher. In fact, it will allow a teacher to spend his or her time more efficiently with a greater number of students. In the words of Tomlinson (1999), curriculum differentiation for all students as “ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student’s readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning.” This implies a commitment to accommodating individual learner characteristics. That commitment is also evident in the sets of principles of high quality curriculum for general and gifted education derived from general and gifted education literature. Flexibility “to account for student differences,” a theme common to high quality curriculum in both general and gifted education, is operationalized in practice as curriculum differentiation.

Students with special needs are provided for in many educational settings. They range from students who are formally undiagnosed but are identified as having a particular learning difficulty to those who are immobile, lack functional communication skills, and need specialist, multi-disciplinary interventions to realise their potential. These are the students who were previously labelled as “mentally handicapped”. However, students who have a general learning disability display a wide range of abilities, learn in different ways, and are motivated differently. Like students in any typical primary or Junior High school class, their learning potential should be recognized and be developed as fully as possible. Such students are entitled to access to a full educational experience, but the pathways they need to take and the time they need to achieve this may be different from many of their mainstream peers. However, the aim will be the same: the realisation of their full potential as unique human beings, both now and in the future.

Although some students will require detailed, individualized programmes of work, these programmes should not isolate students from the class group, from the benefits of co-operative learning, or from the educational opportunities available to their mainstream peers. They need a flexible and diverse range of provision in location, curriculum, teaching approaches, and assessment and certification options. Developing educational approaches that are appropriate for each student will require the involvement not only of teachers and other professionals but of students and their parents in the development of any adaptations, enhancements or elaborations of content and methodology that will make their educational experience relevant and meaningful.

Although the notion of differentiation has appeared the education literature since the 1950s, it has gained greater significance and attention as the diversity of students in today’s classrooms has increased (Tomlinson, 1999).

Teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile: (1) content—what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information; (2) process—activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content; (3) products culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit; and (4) learning environment—the way the classroom works and feels (Tomlinson, 1999). Every learning activity in a curriculum is composed of four elements: content, process, product and learning environment.

In developing the curriculum, societal needs one of the elements in curriculum development. The societal needs are then incorporated into the content (what to teach). The content of curriculum is the new knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes to be learned in the activity. According to Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD, 2007), the content column of the syllabus presents a selected body of information that you (teacher) will need to use in teaching each particular unit. Again, it states that, the content presented is quite exhaustive. Content can be drawn from one discipline (subject) or it may be interdisciplinary. Content includes curriculum topics, concepts, or themes, reflects state or national standards, and presents essential facts and skills (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000).

The content in any discipline may be in the form of facts, concepts, procedures, principles, generalizations, theories, strategies, heuristics, actions, meanings, emotions, etc. The concept inclusion, where students are in the same classroom participating in the teaching and learning process and getting access to the same content in the curriculum will be of help to them since they will in the same society. However, with regards to ability or aptitudes of special needs students especially those with severe impairment, sensory impairment and others with physical disabilities accessing the content column in the syllabus will be a challenge to them. In the words of Bursztyn (2007), differentiated instruction supports the inclusion of all students, as teachers consider differences

in student ability and learning styles to be attributes of diversity rather than identified characteristics used to sort and segregate students. When student both those with disabilities and the non-disabled are differentiated in the mode of adapting to the curriculum will be of help to them. To differentiate, use hands on' activities for some learners to help them understand a new idea, use texts or novels at more than one reading level, present information through both whole to-part and part-to-whole, use a variety of reading-buddy arrangements to support and challenge students when working with different texts, re-teach students who need further demonstration or exempt students who already demonstrate, mastery from reading a chapter or sitting through a re-teaching lesson, use texts, computer programs, tape recordings and videos as a way of conveying key concepts to varied, learners use Bloom's Taxonomy to encourage thinking about content at several levels use.

Differentiating based on methodology serves as a Process (how to teach) through which all students can access the curriculum without difficulty. The process in curriculum is in the actions (thinking, feeling, physical, etc.) students use to develop their understanding of the content. Learning processes include the way students find and work with information and resources, as well as the ways they interact with others (peers, experts, teacher, etc.), teaching special needs students requires teachers to adapt different teaching approaches to meet their diverse needs in order for them to learning. According to Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008), you will need to consider several factors in adapting the curriculum. They further asserted that, adaptive instructional programs are characterized by combined teaching strategies, flexible scheduling, individualized instruction, mastery learning, large- and small-group instruction, individualized tutorials, and cooperative learning. Further, while we need to adapt the form of instruction to meet children's individual needs, we also need to adapt the delivery and response factors that face the child in school.

To differentiate process, Tomlinson and Allan (2000), have suggested the use tiered activities through which all learners work on building the same important understandings and skills but proceed with different levels of support, challenge or complexity, provide interest centres that encourage students to explore subsets of class topics that are of particular interest to them, develop personal agendas (task lists written by the teacher and containing both 'common' work for the whole class and work that addresses the individual needs of learners) to be completed either during specified 'agenda time' or if students complete core work ahead of time, offer 'hands-on' supports for students who need them, vary the length of time a student may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a struggling learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth and use flexible grouping to group and regroup students, for example according to content, ability, interests.

How to assess students learning and performance (Product): Products of learning experiences communicate the substance of what has been learned. Bright and gifted students should be expected produce evidence in which they demonstrate their potential and their growth in understanding, not their age. Assessment criteria and procedures should clearly communicate this expectation. According to CDRR (2007), in developing assessment procedures, select specific objectives in such a way that you will be able to assess a representative sample of the syllabus objectives. Each specific objective in the syllabus is considered a criterion to be achieved by the pupil. Criterion referenced test is the type of assessment that identifies the extent to which a child has mastered an area of content in the curriculum (Deku & Gyimah, 2002).

In assessing special needs students, different approaches can be employed to assess the students on how they have mastered the curriculum. The following assessment approaches were cited by Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008), assignments are: allow extra time, alter activity, highlight text, link learning to real situations, modify difficulty, modify question format, and provide a choice (when appropriate).

How to design the classroom environment (Learning Environment): The environment in which students learn has physical and psychological features can be enhanced to increase the benefits of differentiating the contents, processes and products learning. Pierangelo and Giuliani (2008) assert a very important option when working with children with special needs is to offer options that take into account learning style, modality strengths (e.g. Visual learner), age, developmental motor skills, and attention span. The learning environment: is the 'climate' of a classroom it includes the operation and tone of the classroom - class rules, furniture arrangement, lighting, procedures and processes. According to Tomlinson and Allan (2000), in differentiating the learning environment involves: considering the look and feel of the classroom, providing a safe and positive environment for learning, allowing for individual work preferences, managing the learning space.

To differentiate the learning environment: the teacher has to make sure there are places in the room to work quietly and without distraction as well as places that invite student collaboration, provide materials that reflect a variety of cultures and home settings, set out clear guidelines for independent work that matches individual needs, develop routines that allow students to get help when teachers are busy with other students and cannot, help them immediately, help students understand that some learners need to move around to learn while others do better sitting quietly, vary the places where learning occurs for example the lab or outside, use alternative seating, identify classroom management procedures that would make the learning environment safe or more supportive.

## 7.0 The Meaning of Special Needs Child

This section of the article discusses the meaning of special needs child. A special needs child is child who has been determined to require special attention and specific necessities that other children do not. The state decides upon this status and offers benefits that follow a special needs child because it is believed the child will not be adopted if assistance is not provided.

Special needs is an umbrella underneath which a staggering array of diagnoses can be placed (Mauro, 2017). He asserted that special needs are any of various difficulties (such as a physical, emotional, behavioral, or learning disability or impairment) that causes an individual to require additional or specialized services or accommodations (such as in education or recreation). Children with special needs may have mild learning disabilities or profound cognitive impairment; sensory impairment; food allergies or terminal illness; developmental delays that catch up quickly or remain entrenched; occasional panic attacks or serious psychiatric problems. Brief explanations have been done on the various special needs face by these children.

### 7.1 Medical Issues

Medical issues for children include serious conditions like cancer and heart defects, muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis. It also includes chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes; congenital conditions like cerebral palsy and dwarfism; and health threats like food allergies and obesity. Children with medical issues may require numerous tests, long hospital stays, expensive equipment, and accommodations for disabilities. Your family may have to deal with frequent crises, uncertainty, and worry and establishing a good support system is very important.

### 7.2 Behaviour Issues

Children with behavior issues may not respond to traditional discipline. Diagnoses like ADHD, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Dysfunction of Sensory Integration, and Tourette syndrome require specialized strategies that are tailored to their specific needs. If these strategies are not developed and used, kids with behavior issues can throw their families into chaos. It also increases the risk for problems at school. As a parent, you will need to be flexible, creative, and patient.

### 7.3 Developmental Issues

Developmental disabilities are some of the most devastating for a family to deal with. This can change your visions of the future and provide immediate difficulties in caring for and educating your child. Diagnoses like autism, down syndrome, and intellectual disabilities often cause children to be removed from the mainstream. Quite often, parents become fierce advocates to make sure their children receive the services, therapy, schooling, and inclusion they need and deserve.

### 7.3 Learning Issues

Children with learning disabilities like dyslexia and Central Auditory Processing Disorder struggle with schoolwork regardless of their intellectual abilities. They require specialized learning strategies to meet their potential and avoid self-esteem problems and behavioral difficulties. Parents of learning-challenged kids need to be persistent. This includes working with your child at home as well as teachers and schools to ensure they get all the help they need.

### 7.4 Mental Health Issues

Realizing that your child suffers from anxiety or depression, or has attachment difficulties can be unexpected. Again, every child will be different, yet these can leave your family dealing with a roller coaster of mood swings, crises and defiance. It is important that parents find the right professionals to help. You will also need to make decisions about therapy, medications, and, possibly hospitalization. The consequences of missed clues and wrong guesses can be significant.

## 8.0 The Regular Classroom and the Special Needs Children

Students with identified exceptionalities who are placed in a regular classroom have a number of options available. They may receive what is known as indirect support. That means that their regular teacher may receive consultative services from experts outside of the classroom. These can include special education consultants, educational psychologists, and speech-language therapists. Another possibility is for the student to receive in-class assistance in the form of specialized instruction or another form of assistance. This may be for part of the day or for the full day, and it may be delivered by a special education teacher or by a special education assistant. Finally, a child may be in a regular classroom, but may be withdrawn from that class for up to 50% of the day to receive special instruction in a resource room or special education classroom (Chaban, 2010).

## 9.0 What is sensory impairment?

Sensory impairment is when one of your senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste and spatial awareness, is no longer normal. Examples - If you wear glasses you have sight impairment, if you find it hard to hear or have a hearing aid then you have a hearing impairment. A person does not have to have full loss of a sense to be sensory impaired.

### 9.1 Common Concerns

Although every special needs child is different and every family is unique, there are some common concerns that link parents. These include getting appropriate care and accommodations; promoting acceptance in the extended family, school, and community; planning for an uncertain future, and adjusting routines and expectations. Out of necessity, parents of children with special needs are often more flexible, compassionate, stubborn, and resilient than other parents. While it may not be something you had hoped for or expected, it is important for your child that you try to do your best.

In educating special needs children to be able to fit into the society, looking at the various special needs faced by these children, I think it will be prudent to see them as unique individual who needs special services in educating them hence the need for differentiated curriculum. In using differentiated curriculum, there exist the views in favour for differentiated curriculum and others authorities speak against it.

## 10.0 Views In-Support of Differentiated Curriculum

The principle behind differentiated instruction is pretty basic: to teach each child in a classroom in a personalized way. By eliminating the group instruction format in most circumstances, children are able to learn in unique ways that best suit their needs. This focus on individualization has certain advantages that appear in the classroom setting, but not without disadvantages appearing as well. Here are the key points to consider when evaluating the pros of differentiated instruction.

### 10.1 It Provides Teachers with a Higher Level of Flexibility.

Under group instruction guidelines, teachers are forced into standardized grading practices based on the specific demands of a governing entity. Under differentiated instruction, students are graded based on their own performance and work toward a passing grade based on their own needs and goals. Instead of being compared to other students, each student is compared to their learning baseline they had on the first day of school for that grade ([Lombardo, 2015](#)).

### 10.2 Meeting Students Where They Are

Designed differentiation is the deliberate act of modifying instruction or an assignment in order to customize the effect to match the particular developmental level and skills of a student or group of students. The idea is to provide equivalent learning activities that cater to the students' strengths but bring all of the students to the same learning objective. On one end of the spectrum is the one-size-fits-all learning activity, while on the other end is the completely individualized learning plan for each student. Although I believe it is time for the latter, realism demands that teachers deal with something that hovers around the middle of the continuum.

The best teachers throughout time have always found ways to reach individual students. Teachers today are no different. We have all sorts of designed differentiation strategies that help teachers offer variety and choice to students of different skills and needs. Johnson (2009) asserts that, we can

1. vary the length or quantity of the assignment.
2. extend or curtail the duration of the assignment.
3. change the language of the assignment.
4. scaffold the learning activity from hard to medium to easy.
5. compact the activity and teach only what they don't know.
6. give them learning activities that let them perform the same learning objective with multiple mediums like summarizing a story they have read through narrative, drama, song, poetry, art, or design.

### 10.3 Allow for Do-Overs

There is also a strong movement of simply allowing students to work at their own pace through computer-aided instruction. There is one more type of designed differentiation method I believe is underutilized the rough draft. When a student is given a learning assignment to turn in, is it really a learning assignment if they have only one chance at meeting the mastery-level standard. Clearly identified standards of performance are necessary to make this work, but when a student submits a substandard piece of work, rather than assign a grade immediately, we can provide personalized, individual feedback to that student, which includes providing suggestions for improvement and giving it back to the student for revision. Is there a limit to the number of times this can be

done to help a student overcome a particular learning obstacle? Some students might be able to do it right the first time, while others need several revisions. This strategy is the ultimate in designed differentiation. Typically, we see this kind of opportunity in almost all the subjects such as English and Social Studies classes. After all, if the student eventually gets the concept, isn't that what counts? The thing I like about this approach is that no student is left out -- not even the quiet, no-problem kids (Johnson, 2009).

### **11.0 Views against Differentiated Curriculum**

Turning education around to meet the diverse needs of special children requires much more work, a willingness to try new things, and a degree of discomfort among all stakeholders in the educational establishment. In particular, turning the educational philosophy around for teachers means differentiating instruction, according to the diagnostic needs of their students. Some of the views against differentiated curriculum have been elaborated below;

#### *11.1 Some Children Could Prevent the Class from Moving On*

Students have different strengths and weaknesses. According to Lombardo (2015), the problem is that some weaknesses can be profound enough that it forces the teacher to stop progressing through a curriculum until the student can understand the information sufficiently. It can slow down the educational process so well, in fact, that some students may not receive any help on some days because the teacher is so focused on the student who is struggling.

#### *11.2 It Is Difficult to Evaluate the Effectiveness of a Teacher*

Because different students learn at different levels, evaluating the effectiveness of a teacher is very difficult to do. If one student proceeds at the same grade level while another grows three grade levels in a specific subject, was that because of the creativity [or lack thereof] of the teacher or the limitations of each student (Lombardo, 2015).

#### *11.3 Although Teachers Prize Their Independence and Academic Freedom to Teach How We Want; We Are Generally Conformists.*

According to Pennington (2014), being part of the "team" means accepting instructional compromises. We all agree to teach this novel, we all agree to do test preparation, we all agree to use these assessments, we all agree... not to disagree too much. There is no "I" in team. Teachers who differentiate instruction necessarily minimize their time commitment to the agreed-to scope and sequence of instruction or the unit-ending common assessment. There is tremendous peer pressure to teach like everyone else and avoid differentiation.

#### *11.4 It Essentially Creates a Second Full-Time Job for The Teacher.*

Each student needs an individualized education plan, which means every student must be evaluated to determine what their best learning style will be. In the words of Lombardo (2015), teachers are forced into a position where they have to individually teach each student every lesson every day, doubling their overall work requirements. A large classroom in such a system would make teaching impossible.

#### *11.5 Lack of Time for Teacher Preparation*

Lack of preparation time directly impacts teacher inability to treat students as individuals. Differentiated instruction requires more planning time, more analysis time, and more re-teaching time. Teaching colleagues rarely have sufficient time to plan together and learn from each other-not to mention time to break down the counter-productive peer pressure toward conformity to the status quo (Pennington, 2014).

#### *11.6 Pressure On Teachers to Cover the Content Rather Than Helping the Students to Master the Content.*

Teachers of all age levels are pressured to cover the content, cover the standards, and cover the material that will appear on the standardized test. Teachers are evaluated on what and how they teach and cover the content, not on what the students learn. Differentiated instruction adjusts the focus from teaching to learning. Teachers' mapping guides and instructional scopes and sequences are all about direct instruction of new content or group review of old content (Pennington, 2014). Differentiated instruction requires re-learning content not-yet-mastered by students.

Teachers view the process of teaching as a matter of one's own taste and relegated to secondary status compared to the teaching content (Pennington, 2014). He further stated that, differentiated instruction puts process and content on the same level playing field. How a student is taught becomes just as important as what is taught because the degree of success is measured by what is learned.

Again, the emphasis on rigor with high standards has led many teachers to abandon differentiated instruction. Teachers need to help students "catch up" through scaffolded instruction, while the students concurrently "keep up" with rigorous grade-level instruction (Johnson, 2009). However, teachers often feel the

pressure to do the latter at the expense of the former.

### *11.7 Standards-Based Instruction Has Made Many Teachers Abandon Differentiated Instruction.*

Comprehensive standards and emphasis on teaching to standards-based tests has re-focused many teachers on the *what* of teaching at the expense of the *how* and *why* of teaching. For many teachers, teaching the “power standards,” that is the standards most often tested on the yearly test, are more important than teaching to the needs of individual students (Pennington, 2014). As one colleague once told me, “My job is to teach the grade-level standards, if students have not yet mastered the previous years’ standard that is the fault of their teachers. I have to do my job, not theirs. In my opinion looking at the pros and cons of differentiated instruction can certainly be helpful in small classroom environments. It may not be possible for this type of learning to happen in large scale classrooms. By evaluating these key points, each school can decide if this is a structure they would wish to pursue.

## **12.0 Conclusion**

In helping the individual student to fully access the curriculum, each element in the curriculum can be modified to accommodate the characteristics of an individual or group of high ability learners as well as individuals with special needs. The content, process, and product take place in the learning environment should be carefully programmed to help the individual student succeed. Adaptation and modification are important factors. In adapting the curriculum, is to consider the use of a variety of response modes for the students with special needs. Providing many different options will increase the likelihood of success. Mainstreaming and inclusion has encouraged efforts to help special education students who spend at least part of the day in regular classrooms to master the curriculum. The curricula must be designed to meet the particular needs and characteristics of the individuals who are to learn various contents. Based on the unique characteristics of the individual, differentiating the curriculum will be of enormous benefits to the special needs individual.

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