



## 3 STEPS LEAD TO DIFFERENTIATION

By Linda Bowgren and Kathryn Sever

Just as all students do not benefit from a one-size-fits-all model of learning, neither do teachers. Much has been written about the value, need, and complexity of differentiating learning within every classroom based on student readiness, motivation and interest, apparent skills, learning preferences or styles, and identified cognitive needs. Teachers are encouraged to look at differentiation for students not as a formula for teaching, but rather as a way of thinking about and shaping the learning experiences of all (Tomlinson, 1999). If, as Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock note in their book, *Classroom Instruction That Works* (2001), it is the classroom teacher that is the most important factor in student success, then how can we ignore the value of differentiation for teachers?

What is differentiated learning? Rick Wormeli

(2006) tells us in his book, *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, that teachers must do whatever it takes to provide students with a chance for success. This means teachers give every learner whatever he or she needs before teaching, while teaching, and after teaching. Teachers change the nature of the learning to fit the needs of the learner. While the intent is for all students to learn the same content and standards, teachers will have to find the best path to that content for each particular learner. Differentiation does not dilute content, add to content, or change content. Rather, it presents content in differing ways with necessary adjustments to pave each learner's way to successful learning.

A district's staff is as diversified as any classroom of students. There are reluctant learners, gifted learners, those who struggle with literacy, numeracy, or technology, those who are artistic, as well as others who find it difficult to sit still for more than an hour at a time. Without different pathways that are specific to each learner's



needs, only a portion of these learners will succeed. Professional growth is vital for every educator, but it is not always shaped in ways that work for each individual. Differentiation guarantees all learners the opportunity to succeed. If districts intend to add value to professional development, they must consider the power of differentiation for teacher learning.

### JOB-EMBEDDED DIFFERENTIATION

In the foreword for NSDC's *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad*, James B. Hunt Jr. writes, "It is time for our education workforce to engage in learning the way other professionals do — continually, collaboratively, and on the job — to address common problems and crucial challenges where they work" (2009). Ongoing, differentiated professional development allows teachers to optimize their learning through the context of their daily classroom practice.

As we wrote in *Differentiated Professional Development in a Professional Learning Community* (Bowgren & Sever, 2010), teachers receive the differentiated support they need to transfer theory into practice using a three-step process: "I do," "we do," and "you do." The "I do" step of demonstration and expectation provides the modeling that offers teachers a common springboard from which to launch a learning process. The "we do" step of approximation and response personalizes the learning through joint practice and coaching support that ultimately results in the "you do" step of responsi-

bility and independent practice. When districts use an in-house coaching model during the second step of this model, research-based strategies are infused throughout all teachers' classrooms, resulting in a systemic approach that increases student achievement. Coaching promises follow-up action. Effective coaching relationships are true examples of a differentiated learning model. The types of coaching offered, however, must be dependent upon each learner's needs. Individual learners do not experience the same type of coaching, but all coaching focuses on the learning that has been demonstrated in the first step of "I do." Following the demonstrations in this first step, learners enter the collaborative coaching of "we do," where they are given ample time and opportunity for approximations. Together, coaches and learners decide what is missing, what learning and strategies to target, and what data to collect in order to plan next steps. Individual coaching over time allows learning to become transparent for each learner, resulting in the embedding of the new learning in each classroom setting during the "you do" step.

Teacher learning is demonstrated through changes in behavior, such as routinely implementing a teaching strategy deemed effective through the collection of student data. Brian Cambourne (2000) believes that learning, or behavior change, happens when the learner has models, feedback, peer support, and a lot of practice. Learners move from novice to more expert through social interactions with others who are more knowledgeable. As learners share expertise with peers, the learning continues. This model of learning is the "gradual release of responsibility" (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) where participants feel a purposeful shift in their level of accountability for the learning.

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### DOING IN-DEPTH

Let's take a more detailed look at the steps in the model to show how all teachers can move from initial learning to successfully embedding practice in a way that is responsive to the needs of both teachers and students.

#### **I DO**

In the "I do" stage, the teacher leader demonstrates the new learning through a traditional workshop setting or through modeling during team meetings or in

classrooms. New learning topics are determined after districts, teams, disciplines, or grade levels gather and interpret student data. The “I do” step makes the connection between new learning and district initiatives and cements the purpose for any new professional development. Teachers become aware of expectations and the process for reaching them. As part of this process, teacher

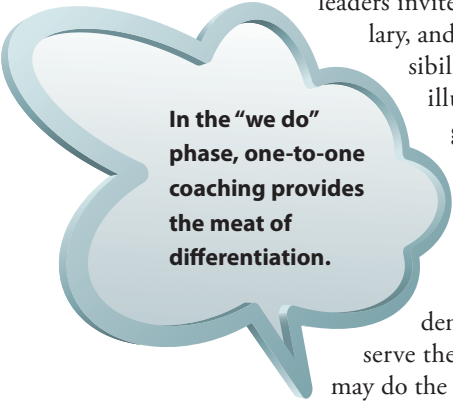
leaders invite questions, develop vocabulary, and propose action research possibilities for each participant. To

illustrate, we can envision a guided reading workshop.

Once participants learn about the necessary research base for the strategies, teacher leaders model the process with a group of students while their colleagues observe the demonstration. One leader

may do the modeling while another cues the participants about what to observe and

why: “Listen to how Kyle is reinforcing prediction skills...” When learners observe, they see how to do something and build an understanding for its purpose and value.



**In the “we do” phase, one-to-one coaching provides the meat of differentiation.**

### WE DO

After presenting the necessary background and initial modeling, teacher leaders segue to the “we do” phase of the model. In this phase, one-to-one coaching provides the meat of differentiation.

After observing, asking questions, and reflecting, participants begin to “learn by doing” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). Each learner is allowed many tries and time to achieve self-sufficiency with the learning. Some participants now work with their coaches in a push-in model, others co-plan and co-teach, while others engage in continued observations. Each of these methods provides time for developing individual action research plans for all classrooms. Coaching requires a variety of skills and levels of trust between leaders and learners. Differentiated coaching builds emotional connections where colleagues become equal partners in search of effective learning paths. Perhaps Teacher A would like to have the “I do” teacher leader model the guided reading format with additional student groups while Teacher B feels ready to jump in and lead a group, asking the leader to provide feedback and coaching. We begin to see the need and opportunity for differentiation. While Teacher A is not quite ready to enter the collaborative effort of “we do,” Teacher B is anxious to begin a coaching relationship. The “we do” phase is the opportunity for absolute differentiation during practice, through feedback, reflection, and purposeful planning. The demonstrations of “I do” have left these two teachers in different stages of understanding and at different levels of confidence. Each will receive support that is unique to his or her readiness. This

### THE MODEL IN ACTION

**D**ifferentiated, job-embedded professional learning is key to unlocking the potential of all adult learners. By experiencing the power of differentiation in their own learning, teachers will be better equipped to transfer differentiated support to their students, regardless of the focus of their own professional growth.

In the Maine-Endwell Central School District in upstate New York, the “I do, we do, you do” model has been successfully implemented to support numeracy instruction at the elementary level and literacy across the content areas K-12. Let’s consider one example.

- **Through data analysis**, middle school teachers discovered that their students struggled with editing tasks on state assessments.
- **As the colleagues** discussed the data, they realized the curriculum was not thoroughly addressing the state guidelines for this particular skill.
- **As a result**, grades 6, 7, and 8 language arts and literacy teachers adjusted their existing curriculum maps. They identified targets for each grade level that would build student ability in editing tasks.

### I DO

- **These teams** of teachers expressed a need for professional development to help them develop new lessons and strategies to address current instructional gaps. During a team meeting, language arts teachers asked the middle school literacy team (three literacy teachers and one academic intervention teacher) to model some editing strategies for them to begin teaching. They had established a target and focus for the initial “I do” step of differentiated professional development.
- **Since literacy team** teachers were already involved with push-in activities with language arts teachers, they agreed to provide several demonstrations over the next few weeks. They also offered to present a two-hour workshop session to teach language arts teachers a method for teaching a strategy as well as providing a list of best practice strategies that they would be demonstrating in the classrooms.

differentiation ensures growth and eventual success for each of these teachers, and is most often missing from traditional professional development.

### YOU DO

The “you do” step is a time of full control. The teacher-learners make the final shift and accept ownership of their learning through independent action, allowing them to use their own

**WE DO**

- **Literacy team** members provided follow-up through individualized coaching as they continued their push-in work in classrooms. In this case, language arts teachers practiced the initial demonstrations during the “we do” step with their teacher leaders now becoming their coaches.
- **A few took** advantage of colleague-to-colleague visits during this practice time in order to watch the action in other classrooms. A number of others engaged in co-teaching with their coach to solidify the methods and language of the new strategies. Still others desired more demonstrations before they were ready to try what the coach was doing. More traditional professional development might have found these teachers attending a workshop to learn new strategies, but would never have offered the coaching each would need over time to successfully transfer workshop information to classroom practice.

**YOU DO**

- **One by one**, these language arts teacher learners consistently embedded the new strategies into their daily work. Each entered the “you do” step of independence, able to lead their students to higher achievement levels with editing skills. They no longer needed the demonstrations and specific feedback provided in “I do” and “we do.”
- **However, they did not** all enter “you do” at the same time or with the same amount of expertise. Nevertheless, their in-house coaches continued to be available. Their professional learning was job-embedded with a coach who worked along with them in the classroom.
- **Once teachers** reached the “you do” step, coaches sustained them with encouragement and continued support through face-to-face meetings, e-mail journaling, and team sharing time to help learners maintain their level of success. And then it was on to the next topic and continued differentiated professional development.
- **When the teachers** studied initial data from the current state assessment, the growth in student achievement was astounding. Students attaining mastery on the editing section jumped 20%, while the number of students at proficiency increased by 30%. What a testimony to the power of targeted, differentiated professional development.

learning to create student learning. Colleague-to-colleague support results in deeper learning for both the participants and the teacher leaders and coaches. Haven’t we all learned new things through our teaching? Through this collaboration of teacher-learner and colleague-coach, the learning is ongoing as well as job-embedded.

Even after the teacher-learner is comfortable with embedding the new learning independently, the coach is still available for a

peer observation or simply to answer questions as they arise. At this point, the teacher and coach may establish new goals for their collaborative learning journey. When professional development is differentiated, school communities become stronger, providing the foundation for student learning.

To be successful with this differentiated model of professional development, teacher leaders/coaches must experience the learning necessary to develop the coaching skills that they will need to support their colleagues. They need pedagogical expertise, yet they must also learn about adult learning and coaching. Administrators must not only “talk the talk” but must also model their understanding and prioritization of job-embedded professional development. This is reflected in how they allocate time and money.

What must educators do to redesign their professional development? Differentiation is crucial in revamping a traditional approach. Regardless of the professional development targets of your district, employing a differentiated, job-embedded model of professional development will add value to your learning community by providing an arena for teachers to improve instructional practice that will be evidenced in increased student achievement.

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