

Integrating Differentiated Instruction & Understanding by Design

by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe

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An ASCD Study Guide for Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design: Connecting Content and Kids

This ASCD Study Guide is designed to enhance your understanding of *Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design*, published by ASCD in January 2006. In this book, Carol Ann Tomlinson and Jay McTighe guide readers in thinking about what it means to establish classrooms based on curriculum and instruction designed to ensure that each student is fully supported in developing the enduring understandings of a discipline and in mastering its critical knowledge and skills. The book also provides practical suggestions for implementing and monitoring such classrooms. We hope this study guide will help you make connections between two key educational models: Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design.

There are several options for using this study guide. You can use the questions as pre-reading organizers, followed by discussion groups. You can read first and then pose the questions to guide discussion. You can read and discuss the book on a chapter-by-chapter basis, or read the entire book and then meet for discussion.

This study guide is organized around chapter questions that are meant to “uncover” key ideas in the book and stimulate participants’ active construction of meaning from the text. The questions provided are not meant to address all aspects of the book, but rather to guide your thinking about some of its important ideas. The questions that follow are ideally suited for discussion in small groups (4–10 people). Asking participants to write briefly before they discuss will help the discussion achieve focus and depth. When an individual does not wish to share a response with the group, the preference should be honored.

Bibliographic and ordering information can be found at the end of the study guide.

Chapter 1: UbD and DI: An Essential Partnership

1. After reading the preface and Chapter 1, what logic do you find for joining Understanding by Design and Differentiation? In what ways do these arguments make sense for your school?
2. The axioms in this chapter reveal beliefs that guided development of Understanding by Design. The corollaries following each axiom reveal beliefs that guided development of Differentiated Instruction.
 - a. Look at each set of axioms and corollaries and discuss what would happen if educators focused their practice on the axioms without the associated corollaries or on the corollaries without the preceding axiom? Do you see either omission happening in classroom practice in your school or district? Do you see practice which sometimes disregards elements of both axioms and corollaries in a set? What are likely outcomes of the omissions? How would the scenarios differ if the teachers in them disregarded the axioms, corollaries, or both?
 - b. What other axioms or corollaries would you propose for the list offered in Chapter 1?

Chapter 2: What Really Matters in Teaching? (The Students)

1. How do the lives of Elisa, Jason, Yana, and Noah shape their school experiences? Use

Figure 2.1 and the vignettes about these real students to develop your explanation.

2. Think about several students in your school or class whose biology, degree of privilege, positioning for learning, and or preferences shape experiences with school. Describe some of the specific factors in their lives that you feel cause them to embrace school as it now exists or cause them to have difficulty with it.
3. Based on your experience and ideas in this chapter, what arguments would you propose to support the idea that effective teaching responds to factors in students' lives. Explain and illustrate your thinking.
4. This chapter suggests ten approaches to teaching or patterns of instruction that should be helping in developing a classroom that is more responsive to a broad range of learners.
 - a. Which of the patterns seems useful in your setting? To what sorts of students would they be useful in promoting success?
 - b. Which of the patterns seem less likely to be effective in your setting? Why would they not benefit students?
5. The chapter concludes with 7 questions. What might change in our teaching if we persistently planned and taught with these questions in the forefront of our thinking?

Chapter 3: What Really Matters in Learning? (Content)

1. To what degree do you feel most teachers in your school or district regularly reflect on what knowledge is truly essential and enduring in their content? What would most effectively guide teachers in finding answers to this question? What likely impedes teachers' movement in this direction?
2. The authors make a case that backward design helps teachers avoid the twin sins of activity-based planning and planning for coverage. In what ways does backward design help educators avoid those pitfalls? What benefits should students derive from backward design?
3. Where is backward design naturally in use in your school? What changes in planning practices (by individual teachers and teams) are suggested by backward design?
4. What is the role of content standards in UbD? In what ways does that role differ from the role of standards in classrooms that don't use a UbD-type approach to planning curriculum?
5. Can we teach to standards and still be responsive to learners (standards without standardization)? Why might teachers perceive a conflict between standards-based teaching and differentiation? Based on information in this chapter (capsuled in Figure 3.3), why are standards and differentiation compatible and not in conflict?

Chapter 4: What Really Matters in Planning for Student Success?

1. This chapter proposes nine attitudes and skills that are likely reflected in the practice of teachers who help a broad range of learners succeed academically. Examine the nine one by one and discuss what role each of them plays in supporting student growth and success. (Look at how each indicator would affect specific "categories" of learners—for example: students for whom English is not a first language, students who have difficulty attending in class, students who need to move when they learn, students who are academically advanced, students who struggle cognitively, etc.)
2. Quickly re-read the classroom scenarios in Chapter 4. Jot down general characteristics the scenario classrooms have in common. Discuss how they are like and different from classrooms in which differentiated or responsive teaching is *not* a priority for the

teacher.

3. Chapter 4 poses three final questions. Do we have the will and skill to accept responsibility for the diverse individuals we teach? Do we have a vision of the power of high-quality learning to help young people build lives? Are we willing to do the work of building bridges of possibility between what we teach and the diverse individuals we teach? How would you answer those questions? Use the bullet points accompanying each question to help you elaborate on your answers.

Chapter 5: Considering Evidence of Learning in Diverse Classrooms

1. Assessment is a critical feature of both UbD and DI. Explain why that is the case for each model separately as you understand them. Also explain how assessment links the two models.
2. Chapter 5 offers three key principles of assessment (photo albums vs. snapshots, measures that match goals, form follows function).
 - a. What are the big ideas implicit in each principle? Identify specific actions that teachers can take to act on each principle.
 - b. Explain how each principle matters for successful curricular planning and for successful differentiation.
3. This chapter suggests four classroom assessment practices that honor student differences while promoting critical learning for each student (assessing before teaching, offering appropriate choices in assessments, providing feedback early and often, and encouraging student self-assessment and reflection).
 - a. What common teacher beliefs and practices do these guidelines challenge?
 - b. Identify specific examples of each principle in practice.
 - c. What would change for students in our classrooms if we appropriately followed these guidelines? For teachers? For learners?
4. How would assessment following these guidelines promote learning for a wide range of students rather than simply measuring it?

Chapter 6: Responsive Teaching with UbD in Academically Diverse Classrooms

1. This chapter proposes several “givens” or principles of planning that support effective differentiation:
 - All students (except those with IEPs indicating otherwise, which is the case for other the givens that follow) should work with the big ideas and essential skills of a topic.
 - All students should work at high levels of thought and on authentic tasks.
 - All students should have consistent support for growing in understanding and skill.
 - All students should have opportunity to make personal meaning of important ideas.
 - Teacher-guided instruction should ensure clarity of student understanding.
 - Students should have full knowledge of learning goals and indicators of success.
 - Pre-assessment and formative assessment should guide teacher thinking and instructional planning.

Examining the principles one by one, what are likely outcomes in classrooms where teachers attempt to “differentiate instruction” when the principle is not evident in the teacher’s practice?

2. It is likely the case that, at various times, teachers play the role of direct instructor, facilitator, and coach (See Figure 6.1). Give specific examples of when each role is needed. How do you think differentiation looks different across those roles? What would remain consistent about differentiation across the roles?
3. Review Figure 6.2: Options for Flexible Use of Classroom Elements to Address Learning Needs.
 - a. Which classroom elements do you already use in flexible ways to address learner variance?
 - b. In which of the elements would you like to continue developing flexibility of use?
 - c. Revise the figure by suggesting other examples of flexible use and other learner needs the adaptations could address.
4. Based on your own experience and ideas from the chapter, what are ways teachers can make instructional planning more manageable and efficient when they work to meet the varying needs of diverse learners?
5. Look again at Figure 6.3. What other common student patterns could you add to the chart based on your students’ needs? What are some approaches you’d offer for meeting those needs? Which students in your classes would benefit from your addressing those patterns?
6. Share with colleagues ways in which you deal or might deal with areas of concern about managing a differentiated classroom (Figure 6.5) so that you can teach more responsively to varied learner needs.

Chapter 7: Teaching for Understanding in Academically Diverse Classrooms

1. List and explain various ways in which the teacher’s role differs in an understanding-oriented classroom vs. a coverage-oriented one.
2. Illustrate with examples from your content area how a coverage-oriented lesson might proceed and how an understanding-based lesson might proceed. Be sure to state the essential questions around which your understanding-oriented example is based and to show how the six facets of understanding might shape the lesson as well.
3. The authors reject the idea of having students “climb Bloom’s ladder” as a means of differentiation. How do you feel about their reasoning? Why?
4. In what ways might a teacher use the WHERETO framework to support understanding for students with varied learning needs? In other words, how can WHERETO support differentiation?

Chapter 8: Grading and Reporting Achievement

1. When teachers believe that grading in a differentiated classroom is difficult, if not impossible, what are the issues and concerns fueling that belief?
2. The authors assert that the primary goal of grading and reporting is to communicate to important audiences, such as students and parents, high-quality feedback to support the learning process and to encourage learner success.
 - a. To what extent do present grading and reporting practices effectively communicate? To what extent are they accurate and fair?

- b. In what ways do current grading practices achieve that goal for academically diverse student populations?
 - c. In what ways do current grading practices fall short of achieving that goal for academically diverse student populations? In other words, for whom do current grading practices “work” and for whom do they “not work”?
3. The chapter offers six principles of effective grading and reporting. Examine them individually and discuss which students might learn more effectively if the principle were reflected in grading and reporting procedures—and which students suffer when they are not. Be sure to take into account the impact of grading practices on student motivation.
 4. In what ways might reporting three factors — student *achievement* of goals, *progress* toward those goals, and *work habits* in pursuit of those goals — improve student motivation? Student performance? Parent understanding of student work? Teacher satisfaction with reporting?
 5. Review Figure 8.1. What big ideas unify Understanding by Design, Differentiation, and effective grading practice?

Chapter 9: Bringing it All Together: Curriculum and Instruction through the Lens of UbD and DI

1. Analyze the original “You Are What You Eat” unit to determine which of the nine essential goals of UbD and DI it exemplifies and which it does not.
2. Now look at suggested modifications for the original unit. Which of the nine essential goals of UbD and DI do the modifications address? What value is added to the unit in an academically diverse class when both the goals of UbD and DI are a part of teacher planning and instruction?
3. Chapter 9 presents some observable indicators of classrooms in which teachers proficiently use the principles of both models
 - a. As you think about the indicators, which of them seem important to supporting the success of each student in academically diverse school populations?
 - b. Which seem of minimal importance in such settings? Note any of the indicators that would be difficult to achieve without a strong and enduring emphasis on understanding-based curriculum and/or attention to learner needs.
 - c. Note also any of the indicators that seem to you to be just a part of rather than *something separate from* desirable teaching practice.
 - d. Based on these indicators: In which areas is your teaching strongest? In which areas would you like to improve?

Chapter 10: Moving Forward to Integrate UbD and DI

1. What are results you'd like to achieve with and for your students that should be enhanced by integrating UbD and DI?
2. What are results you'd like to see in your professional practice that should be enhanced by integrating UbD and DI?
3. What will you accept as indicators that you are achieving the goals and that they are working?
4. What are important first steps in achieving the goals? How will you begin? How will you get help and support as you progress toward your goals of ensuring high quality curriculum and instruction for each learner?

Appendix

1. What do you see in the Support for Understanding by Design in Research and Theory section that affirms your beliefs about teaching and learning? What do you see that challenges your beliefs? What do you need to think or find out more about?
2. What do you see in the Support for Differentiation in Research and Theory section that affirms your beliefs about teaching and learning? What do you see that challenges your beliefs? What do you need to think or find out more about?

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