

Differentiated Instruction

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Special points of interest:

- Cross school divisional teams support teachers in small schools.
- Understanding how we learn best and how this effects our teaching.
- Developing culminating tasks using DI improves student achievement.
- Working in grade teams builds Teacher capacity and improves Teacher attitudes towards Differentiated Instruction.

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Cross School Grade Teams Support Teachers

Small schools have their own unique strengths and weaknesses. Being able to plan and meet with other staff that are teaching the same grade is not possible in a small school.

During the 2006-2007 school year, 4 schools joined together to work in grade teams. Teachers were assigned into grade teams, also included were teams for Special Education Resource, Core French and Integrated Literacy

Teachers. The Teachers experimented, dialogued and reflected on differentiated instruction within the classroom setting. The Teachers developed grade specific culminating tasks using differentiated instruction techniques. These culminating

tasks were shared with the team. At the end of the project, each team member had several culminating tasks that they could use in their own classrooms. A major goal

for this project was to build Teacher capacity, and improve Teacher attitude towards differentiated instruction as a teaching and learning strategy.

Pre and post questionnaires completed by staff indicated that both goals were met during the pro-

ject. Teachers enjoyed learning about differentiated instruction, and realized the benefits of DI for students at all ability levels. Most importantly, Teachers improved their skills which improved teacher's attitude regarding this instructional strategy.



A grade team meeting encourages dialogue and reflection.

Teachers Reflect:

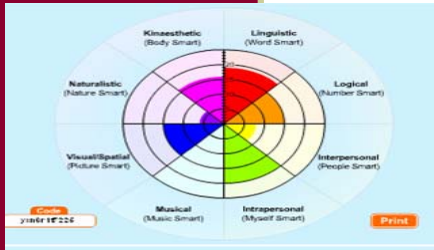
How does a Teacher's learning style affect the classroom? One of the first tasks during the MISA project was to have Teachers determine their strengths as a learner. It makes sense that Teachers teach in a way that makes them

comfortable. If a Teacher has no skill or interest in music, will they look forward to teaching the music curriculum? Will that Teacher be likely to introduce a song to his/her students to learn their multiplication tables? As

Teachers we need to be cognizant of our strengths and weaknesses as learners. We also need to be aware of our students, and how they learn best.

Teaching to students' strengths and at the same time building weaker learning styles will help students to be successful life long learners.

How Do You Learn Best?



Determining our learning strategies

“Understanding how I learn will help me create a better classroom environment.. Understanding how my students learn will make me a better teacher.”.

Once we realized as Teachers that everyone has specific strengths and weaknesses, we began to think about the students. Are students aware of how they learn best?

Completing multiple intelligence questionnaires with all students Kindergarten

ten to grade 8 was the next step in the process.

The students were introduced to the concept of learning styles by each classroom teacher. Each student then completed a learning styles assessment that indicated unique strengths and weaknesses for

each student.

The students represented their learning styles pictorially and displayed them in the school.

Realizing our uniqueness's, encouraged understanding and acceptance of others in the learning environment.

Students Understanding Learning Styles

Talking about student learning styles looked and sounded differently at each grade.

The grade teams met in divisions and looked at how to talk to students about their learning styles.

Teachers also brainstormed in their grade teams on how to improve and/or strengthen each

learning style for their students.

Primary students focused on building skills in all areas. Centres were developed in Kindergarten and grade 1 to build skills in each area.

Junior students completed a questionnaire to determine their learning style. They were then helped to become self reflective about their personal likes/dislikes in

terms of learning tasks and styles. A student that understands themselves are better equipped to be successful in the classroom.

Intermediate students completed the online assessment, and shared their strengths and areas to build on with others. Self awareness and advocacy were the focus for this grade level.

Professional Learning Teams

Dialoguing as professional learning teams occurred in two ways during this project.

The schools met as teams to look at the Catholic School Improvement Plan. The teams developed core beliefs and vision statements. The

PLT then set measurable goals and strategize how to attain those goals over a three year period.

The Teachers also met with their grade teams to discuss, reflect and plan how individual teachers could support school and project

goals.

The grade teams also acted as PLTs while learning and implementing DI strategies within their own classrooms.

Positive and Professional dialogue was evident in all PLTs.

Teacher Attitudes:



Using an on line assessment to determine learning style.

During the first survey Teachers indicated:

- they were not comfortable with DI as a teaching and learning strategy.
- they required in-service in order to feel confident using DI.
- they believed DI would be more work for the teacher
- they wanted to be able to

talk with other Teachers about their professional practice.

- They believed that DI would be successful for some students, but not all students.
- They were interested in learning more about DI as an instructional tool

Overall the survey indicated that Teachers were interested in learning and talking about DI and how it could be used to support student achievement.

The online survey revealed teachers' initial attitudes toward DI

Teachers completed two surveys during this project. One survey was completed in January 2007, the second survey was completed in June 2007.

Project Timelines

Professional Development Day 1

In grade teams, the teachers rotated through 3 PD sessions. Differentiated Instruction, Professional Learning Teams and Grade Team Planning Time. Teachers completed project survey.

Professional Development Day 2

In grade teams, the teachers rotated through 3 PD sessions. Assessment: The Child and Differentiated Instruction, Catholic School Improvement Planning and Grade team project time.

Professional Development Day 3

As a whole group, Teachers were in-serviced on Differentiated Instruction in the Content Areas and Catholic School Improvement Planning. The teachers also worked in their grade teams on their projects.

Sharing the Projects with Grade Teams

Through the MISA project funding, each Teacher in the four schools were released for a half day to share their Differentiated Instruction culminating tasks with their grade team members. The Teachers also completed the second teacher survey during this time.

The Teachers met at the boards resource centre so that they would be a focused learning community and not be distracted by other

Teachers or students.

The Teachers found this time to share and reflect on their projects extremely beneficial.

Teachers in small schools need to be able to talk and connect with staff that have the same responsibilities.

Teachers of small schools need to be encouraged to share ideas, resources, lesson plans and units

with Teachers in similar situations.

If building Teacher capacity and improving student achievement is a core belief for schools, Principals need to make connections with PLT in other schools to facilitate this positive learning experience.





**Peterborough, Victoria,
Northumberland and Clarington
Catholic District School Board**

**Schools Involved in MISA
Project**

Pope John Paul II Catholic School
St. John's Catholic School Kirkfield
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What The Data Revealed

50 Teachers participated in this 4 school project to determine,

“What impact will working in cross school divisional teams to create culminating / summative tasks using Differentiated Instruction have on building teacher capacity and teacher attitudes toward this instructional strategy?”

The project was a huge success. At the completion of the project all staff were comfortable with using Differentiated instruction techniques within the classroom and that DI was a positive experience for all students.

Although teachers no longer felt they required in-service to use DI, they all were interested in learning more about the use of DI and it's impact on student achievement.

DI continues to be seen by half of the Teachers as an increase in Teacher workload. One would hope that with increased use within the classroom that this perception would decrease over time.

Staff also agreed that regardless of future funding it was extremely beneficial to have time to meet and work with teachers from other schools that teach the same grade.

	Are you comfortable with DI?	Do you require in-service in DI?	Do you believe DI will be more work for the teacher?	Do you believe DI will be a success for some or all students	Do you want to know more about DI ?	Would it be helpful to meet with same gr. Teachers from other schools?
Pre-project survey	30% yes 70% no	80% yes 20% no	80% yes 20% no	65% some 35% all	100% yes 0% no	50% yes 50% yes
Post project survey	100% yes 0% no	0% yes 100% no	50% yes 50% no	0% some 100% all	100% yes 0% no	100% yes 0% no