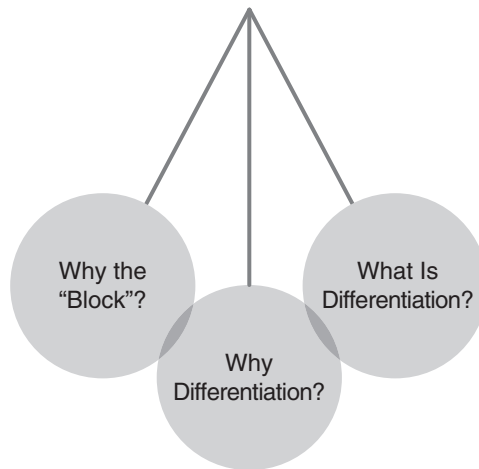


1

Introduction



Block scheduling, simply defined, creates large segments of instructional time for staff and students. These longer-than-usual periods provide several opportunities. Many teachers have used this extended time as a resource to integrate the curriculum, providing enriched student learning experiences. Others have used the additional minutes of instructional time to afford students the chance to delve deeper into subject areas, enhancing student understandings. Schools have used block scheduling to increase the number of credits that students may take in a given year. Many schools report several benefits derived from longer periods of instructional time: fewer discipline referrals, better student attendance, enhanced staff-student relationships, and more students on the honor roll. Students report that block scheduling has prepared them for college and is “less stressful” than a traditional schedule. Block scheduling success relies heavily on how instructional time is used. It is also well known that every learner is unique. This book is devoted to these two factors.

WHY THE “BLOCK”?

In short periods of time, there is little hope of providing a full range of instructional strategies to meet the various preferences and learning styles of diverse learners. Often time is sufficient only to present content or skill through teacher direction and insufficient for anything other than delivery. In a block of time, students get a chance to rehearse new learnings through a variety of instructional tasks and assessment. Teachers get a chance to know the students at a deeper level and begin to identify their learning styles and multiple intelligences as well as their strengths. In addition, flexible groups can be established for interaction and clarification, enrichment, and reteaching.

WHY DIFFERENTIATION?

Teachers have always been driven by student success. Today, teachers face a challenging landscape that is in constant flux. Many factors influence the constantly changing classroom:

- *Standards-Based Classrooms.* Targeted outcomes are set by districts, states, and counties.
- *High Expectations for All Students.* No longer can we leave students behind and just “spray and pray” for success.
- *Multicultural Diversity.* Continuous immigration means some students have little or no communication skills or competencies in English.
- *Diversity of Student Population.* Students have individual learning styles, different levels of multiple intelligences, and unique learning profiles.
- *Continuous Growth of Cognitive Research on Human Learning.* Our knowledge of the brain, including how it develops memory, makes meaning, and engages in the learning process, is constantly improving.
- *Constant Societal and Technological Change.* Political and economic revolutions influence what and how learning takes place.

WHAT IS DIFFERENTIATION?

Differentiation in a nutshell is providing the opportunity for every student to succeed and reach his or her potential. Back when the earth was

cooling, we used a “bell curve” to spread out the learners; only some could achieve at high levels, and some wouldn’t make it. We went through a cycle of “teach, test, and hope for the best.” If they did not “get it,” it was just too bad. In education today, we have a quest to “leave no child behind,” but to achieve that end, we must plan strategically, using all the knowledge and skill at our disposal. We must create an inviting, supportive classroom environment and have a tool kit of instructional and assessment instruments to provide variety and be responsive to the learner.

This is not a simple task for one teacher and many different types of learners. Teachers are doing an amazing job, but there is always room to grow. Differentiation is like the story of the elephant and the six blind men: there are many facets to differentiated instruction, and if you touch just one part, you may be missing others.

Differentiation may be accomplished through varying the following (see Figure 1.1):

- Content
- Process
- Product

Figure 1.1 Content, Process, and Product

<i>Content</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Product</i>
The <i>what</i> we are teaching: Students can develop competencies and big ideas through varied content that sparks their interest and meets their needs.	The <i>how</i> we teach: Students can get to the same goal in a variety of ways. Thus elaborate rehearsal of content may vary from student to student or group to group.	The <i>result</i> of learning: Students process information and demonstrate understanding or competence in a variety of ways.

Differentiation can also be accomplished through attention to the following (see Figure 1.2):

- Readiness
- Interest
- Learning profile (learning styles, preferences, multiple intelligences)

Differentiation is a process or journey for the teacher and students. You cannot differentiate “everything, every day, in every way.” However, you can

4 ● Differentiated Instructional Strategies for the Block Schedule

become more responsive over time. Celebrate successes on the way. Just get started, and you will find you are doing more each week, month, and year (see Figure 1.3).

Start small and think big!

Figure 1.2 Readiness, Interest, and Learning Profile

<i>Readiness</i>	<i>Interest</i>	<i>Learning Profile</i>
<p>What is the prior knowledge or experience of the learner? Pre-assessments are key to determining readiness. Respond to differentiated readiness with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • varied texts, • supplementary materials, • tiered tasks and products, • compacting, • coaching, and • scaffolding. 	<p>How can the learner be “hooked” or engaged?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring of materials to find an interest • Various entry points • Student choice • Group investigation • Negotiated tasks • Contracts 	<p>Consider the learner’s</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic); • opportunity for self-expression through multiple intelligences; • ability to benefit from a flexible learning environment; • preferred organizational choice; and • agenda.

Figure 1.3 Easy Beginnings and Advanced Differentiation

<i>Easy Beginnings</i>	<i>More Advanced Differentiation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start building up a variety of reading materials that will grow each year. • Give choices for homework. • Assign partner work. • Use simple cooperative structures. • Provide more opportunity for student interaction and dialogue. • Vary questioning. • Give quick pre-assessments to get a starting point for planning. • Use more graphic organizers. • Give students learning choices related to the standard. • Vary the pace of instruction. • Adjust the complexity of material. • Reteach content in small groups. • Scaffold to support learners. • Begin to assemble more concrete materials and manipulatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use multiple texts and layered books. • Tier assignments. • Use tiered centers. • Increase the variety of assessments. • Use contracts. • Use individual agendas. • Compact content. • Allow opportunities for group investigation. • Use choice and tic-tac-toe boards. • Use simulations. • Employ problem-based learning. • Use rubrics for assessment. • Allow students to form interest groups and study self-selected topics. • Introduce students to a variety of methods of note taking and summarizing. • Make thorough use of evidence-based instructional strategies. • Provide a full range of visual, auditory, and bodily/kinesthetic learning opportunities.

What Can Be Varied?

When teachers plan any lesson, certain variables can be adjusted to meet the needs of the diversity of learners in the classroom. Some of the factors listed below are done on a daily basis, often randomly and unconsciously, yet need to be considered in the overall planning process.

Differentiating Content and Materials (DCM)

Sometimes students will exhibit a particular interest in some aspects of the unit of study and will want to go deeper into this area. For example, in a unit on the American Revolution, the students may be interested in different individuals who had an impact or major role in the Revolution. Whether learning more about Thomas Jefferson or Paul Revere, students may investigate an outstanding individual of choice and still arrive at the understandings or beliefs of a “freedom fighter.” Likewise, they can take this approach to concepts such as fascism or democracy.

Reading materials may be differentiated based on the needs of the readers. Content may be accessed from a variety of materials and resources, from books to the Internet.

Differentiating Communication/Technology (DCT)

Students may select from a variety of communication methods, from role-play to essay to presentation, depending on their needs or their interests. Technology may be integrated based on students’ needs or expertise.

Differentiating for Multiple Intelligences (DMI)

Projects, problem-solving tasks, and learning centers may be created to engage different multiple intelligences. This differentiation allows students to find a comfort area or area of strength or perhaps an area that needs attention and bolstering.

Differentiating by Readiness (DR)

Students may be grouped by readiness or sometimes by their ability to deal with a learning situation that is just beyond their level of expertise.

Differentiating by Interest/Choice (DI)

Students are allowed to choose an assignment based on their interests or choice. Contracts, projects, and tic-tac-toe boards are useful in facilitating this.

Differentiating by Process (DP)

Students may use different methods to process information. Activities that are varied and engaging allow all students to rehearse information and skills and apply them in a variety of ways to increase retention and understanding.

In the chapters that follow, specific attention is given to enhancing the use of instructional time with respect to a variety of dimensions: what is known about how the brain learns, teaching strategies, ways to promote attention, working with inclusion students, active participation, review strategies, grouping techniques, approaches to curriculum, assessment practices, classroom management, dealing with student absences, promoting student responsibility, time management, and using technology. In addition, this book will discuss how to select a schedule conducive to the needs and goals of the particular school and its community.

Teachers and administrators today are experiencing continuous pressure to help students meet or exceed national- and state-level academic standards. At the same time, they are facing an educational population that is increasingly diverse—culturally, academically, socially, and emotionally. This complex environment puts schools in the difficult position of being compelled to focus on academics with a population of youths who often lack prerequisite skills or who are emotionally or socially needy. That is, the students may come from households where stress is high because of failed relationships and/or where financial, ethical, and moral support is lacking. Students in such situations are often more concerned with immediate basic needs than with academic concerns. Remarkably, the one place where these same students may find a source of solace is in school.

Teachers who are asked to fill multiple roles, from social worker, counselor, and educator, may well feel overwhelmed by the challenge. However, in these times school truly must be a place for the heart and the mind. A caring, supportive environment goes a long way to welcome each learner and provide nurturing of the heart as well as stimulation for the mind.