

**A**s a teacher, the most significant moments in my life have been those when I have seen students arrive at that amazing “Aha!” moment as their eyes light up with understanding. You can almost see the cartoon lightbulb appear above their heads while the look of excitement spreads across their faces. They have finally made the connection and are as proud of themselves as you, their teacher, are of them. Whether the student is age three or ninety-three, it is just as rewarding to have helped someone reach that place of understanding. For some students it happens immediately or easily, but for others it takes great amounts of effort, sometimes even tears, to arrive at that gratifying moment of comprehension.

In my continual search to increase these moments of perception, I started to read about ways to develop powerful learning in my classroom. I found descriptions of learning that were interactive, real, exciting, connected to students in personal ways, and spiral in nature. This concept of learning laid a foundation of knowledge and then built upon it with new knowledge that spiraled students to higher levels of understanding. Part of this concept included a belief that you must understand your students and where they are coming from in order to design lessons that could help them—all of them—reach greater success in their education.

This is the search that led me to an approach called *Differentiated Instruction*, which helped me discover a whole new level of teaching that almost immediately benefited my students, my school, and me. It changed good teaching into great teaching by helping me learn ways to get to know my students and use that information to build strong lessons that connected with them and got them excited about learning and about art.

Differentiated Instruction, often called DI, also helped me create an artroom where all individuals are part of a community of learners; where each is valued as a unique and important part of the whole. It transformed the classroom into a safe place where students know that they have individual and unique strengths and ways of learning, and where they respect each other's differences as artists and as learners. My students not only learn about art, but also about themselves and each other.

One of the greatest struggles I encountered in trying to implement Differentiated Instruction practices into my teaching was due to the lack of art-related examples of DI and the disconnect between how the information applies to the art classroom when compared to general education classrooms. The books and articles I found were all directed toward teachers in the general education classroom who often see the same students every day. Like many art teachers, I did not have the luxury of a consistent schedule with twenty to thirty students I saw on a daily basis. I taught hundreds of children.

My schedule consisted of six to seven classes each day of students of various grades whom I saw for forty-five minutes once in every six-day schedule cycle. This schedule averaged a meeting with each class approximately thirty times throughout the course of the school year, and this average does not take into account the occasional missed class due to Monday holidays, snow days, fire drills, field trips, or assemblies. I was constantly asking myself, "How am I going to modify or translate this information to make it work for me?"

At this point, like most art teachers, I had become fairly adept at doing just that—translating what I was reading about

general education and making the information applicable to the art classroom.

This book is meant specifically for art teachers to guide them in the use of Differentiated Instruction in their classrooms. It is based on the experience I have gained by implementing its methods into practice within my own classrooms, as well as by consulting in schools, teaching Differentiated Instruction to other art educators, and conducting research in classrooms where teachers were already using DI.

Since 1999, I have been teaching others how to use Differentiated Instruction to enhance their classroom practices. For every moment that I have helped others strengthen their pedagogy, my own has been empowered as well. Their ideas and lessons are as much a part of this book as are my own and I thank them for their ideas and contributions. It is my hope that this information will guide you, the reader, in connecting with Differentiated Instruction and will inspire you to find ways to light up the eyes of your students with a love of learning in and through the arts. My wish is that Differentiated Instruction will be as much of an “Aha!” moment for you as it was for me.

The chapters in this book will take you on a journey through Differentiated Instruction; each chapter is broken down into content that addresses the most common questions that I receive about DI. Chapter 1 answers the question, *What is Differentiated Instruction?* In successive chapters, you will gain deeper insights into the information provided in this introductory chapter.

Chapter 2, “History and Foundations,” will explore the theoretical foundations of Differentiated Instruction by answering the question, *Where did Differentiated Instruction come from?* This chapter will help break down many of the theories, ideas, and best practices in education that comprise and shape Differentiated Instruction. With this basic knowledge in hand, chapter 3, “Why Teach This Way?” will help you consider why you might choose to implement DI in your classroom and what the benefits for you and your students could be. This chapter also includes the personal perspectives of teachers and students who have experienced Differentiated Instruction in their classrooms to help you make connections and answer this question for yourself.

In chapter 4, “One Teacher, Many Roles,” you will begin to think about the personal question, *How will DI shape my role as a teacher?* You will explore the concepts that describe what it means to be a Warm Demander, a Partner in Learning, a Proactive Designer, a Flexible Manager, and a Reflective Practitioner.

Differentiated Instruction can function differently in various settings or classrooms and you can implement it in multiple ways; for this reason chapter 5, “Getting Started,” will help you consider the question, *How would I start to implement DI in my classroom?* You will learn small, proactive steps that you can take to design curriculum and instruction that help to maximize students’ ability to connect to learning. You will also consider what role pre-assessment plays in assisting you and your students to accomplish their learning goals.

Chapter 6, “Curriculum,” and chapter 7, “Differentiated Lesson Examples,” help you explore in greater detail numerous practical ways to implement Differentiated Instruction in

your curriculum, while providing examples that help to contextualize each strategy. The examples provided span all grade levels and, for each lesson, break down what you will differentiate and how.

Chapter 8, “Tips for Success,” the closing chapter, will share experiences of how to find and build support for yourself as you begin your journey into Differentiated Instruction. It will also provide tips on how to deal with those who don’t understand what you are doing, as well as how to advocate for your choice to teach in this way. Following this chapter, you will find an appendix of additional resources.