

## Critical Elements for Success in a Differentiated Classroom

Excerpt from *Making Differentiation a Habit: How to Ensure Success in Academically Diverse Classrooms*, by Diane Heacox, Ed.D.

Much has been written about differentiation as teachers take on the challenges of academically diverse classrooms. Critical to effective responses to student learning differences is an understanding of what differentiation *is* and *isn't*. It is assumed that teachers recognize that the academic diversity of their classrooms and standards/goals-based education, along with initiatives such as Response to Intervention (RTI), demand authentic differentiated approaches in order to increase the likelihood of student success in learning. Following are the 12 critical elements for success in a differentiated classroom.

Authentic differentiation requires you to:

1. Integrate strategies for differentiation and RTI into your classroom practices.
2. Identify learning goals, or KUDo's (what your students need to Know, Understand, and be able to Do).
3. Examine your professional practices in light of your students' needs.
4. Apply practical, doable, and valid assessment strategies.
5. Create differentiated learning plans.
6. Use choice opportunities to motivate student learning.
7. Prescribe tiered assignments and use flexible grouping as necessary and appropriate.
8. Maintain flexibility in your planning and teaching.
9. Develop student responsibility and independence.
10. Use ethical grading practices.
11. Differentiate instruction for gifted students with their particular and specific learning differences in mind.
12. Commit to a leadership framework for differentiated classrooms in your school.

All students can learn; but they don't all learn in the same way. As tempting as it might be, you can't buy prepackaged intervention activities and expect that they will work in addressing your students' individual and specific achievement issues. The authentic differentiated instruction described in *Making Differentiation a Habit* responds to specific learning differences and needs and is the critical element in classroom interventions that produce positive results for students.