

**What is
Curriculum
Differentiation?
How Do You
Do It?**



1 About the programme

1.1 Purpose of the programme

This programme is aimed at empowering educators in the current South African reality - faced with large class groups with very diverse learning needs – to plan, prepare for and implement curriculum differentiation so as to reach all learners.

This Unit Standard will be useful for practitioners implementing an inclusive learning programme using a variety of differentiated methodologies, strategies and techniques. Practitioners will gain the necessary competence to facilitate a well-structured and varied programme of learning to support all learners including those who experience barriers to learning and development. This process will enable all learners to participate actively and confidently in the learning process.

1.2 Unit standard alignment and articulation

The programme is based on US 252493 *Implement an inclusive learning programme using differentiated techniques*, which is included in your Portfolio Guide.

The programme is worth 15 credits towards the qualifications as indicated in the unit standard contained in the Portfolio guide.

1.3 Outcomes of the programme

The qualifying learner is capable of:

1. Applying knowledge of theory and principles of inclusion to plan and prepare a learning process.
2. Facilitating the learning process using differentiated activities, strategies and adapted materials.
3. Assessing the application of principles of assessment in the learning process.
4. Evaluating the implementation of the inclusive programme.

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Curriculum differentiation is a hot topic in our school systems today. Curriculum differentiation is defined as the structuring of lesson plans, rubrics, etc., for specific students based on their individual aptitude. Since many schools are downsizing and combining classrooms, it is often too difficult to allow students who might be slower or faster learners than their peers to have a separate classroom and teacher.

This requires the educator two options - either teach everyone the same, inevitably either leaving the lower achieving students behind or the higher achieving students unchallenged, or find a way to differentiate the instruction in order to allow students to achieve and grow at their natural level.

Anyone who has been an educator know that there will be a large degree of variation in learning among any group of students despite their similarities in age, background, etc. Therefore, differentiation seems at least on its surface to be an obvious choice when choosing a method of instruction. However, there are some challenges to this method.

The first challenge is perceived fairness. Many students and parents may resent the idea of curriculum differentiation when it means that other students in the class must do either more or less for the same grade. This is a difficult obstacle to overcome, as our culture focuses on comparison and competition when it comes to the educational system. The best solution to this is to provide families with detailed reasoning for curriculum differentiation while trying to shift the focus away from grades in the classroom.

A second challenge of curriculum differentiation is placement. How are the aptitudes of each student measured? While instructors often have a good "feel" for the students in their courses, they need more qualitative evidence in order to really understand where each student falls concerning their learning abilities. This can be accomplished with a simple pre-test at the beginning of each course that allows the teacher to see where each student stands.

The final challenge is resources. How does one teacher in one classroom teach several students on several different lessons? This can be resolved with some preparation before the semester begins. An instructor should design a set of the curriculum on at least three different levels (possibly more depending on the expected level of differentiation of the class) before the beginning of the semester. If instructors get stumped, there are plenty of teacher resources and teacher worksheets out there online to assist in developing more than one lesson. For each class session, the teacher can start the highest level students on their requirements, then use them as in-class helpers for the students who may be a bit farther behind. This is still difficult to manage, to students should have plenty of work to do on their own, such as worksheets on the topic at hand, while a teacher may be working with an individual student or group.

A special note on curriculum differentiation for instructors that have students with learning disabilities - depending on their disability, it is often very advantageous for these students to have their own tailored instruction and the help of a teaching assistant if possible. If this is not possible, sometimes one of the students who may be further ahead in aptitude can assist in teaching these students.

As you can see, curriculum differentiation, while it may be a more difficult challenge for the instructor, can be very beneficial for students at all levels, giving them the opportunity to grow and learn at their own pace.

Let's explore the possibilities together.....Remember "Every Child Needs a Champion"