OVERVIEW

“Differentiation is an individual-focused approach to teaching… excellent teachers plan, teach, and reflect with human differences in mind”. (p.37)

This in-depth look into 21st century education by Tomlinson and Imbeau, stresses the key elements of leading and managing a differentiated classroom - which are at the core of today’s complex and diverse classrooms. In contrast to traditional views of teaching, a “one size fits all” version, the recurring theme of flexibility to suit the needs of the valued individual in the differentiated classroom is stressed.

“This book highlights four different audiences for which teacher leadership is essential to make student-focused instruction a reality” (p.9). The four audiences are: teachers, students, parents and school administrators.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

Professional classroom educators and leaders, including: superintendents, principals and vice principals, specialists, counsellors, department chairs, and curriculum coordinators.

CONTENT SUMMARY

Part 1 – Leading a Differentiated Classroom (pp. 1 – 68)

- Identifies the teacher as an "irreplaceable leader in moving differentiation from an abstract idea to a fundamental way of life in a classroom." (p. 9) Although student-focused instruction is the responsibility of multiple educators and leaders, Tomlinson and Imbeau emphasize that the teacher is the “key player”.
- Reviews the elements of differentiated teaching
- Emphasizes that teacher preparation and instruction must take human differences into account
• “Suggestions are provided for talking with students, parents, and other educators about differentiation so that teacher leaders can confidently invite them to participate in creating a place and processes that benefit the broadest possible array of learners.” (p. 11)

Part II – Managing Differentiated Classroom (p. 69 – 150)

• Deals with “nuts and bolts” of managing a student centred classroom, distinguishing between management and leadership which are interdependent (p. 72)
• Focuses on key elements, guidelines and strategies that create a “required orderly, flexible environment”. (p.77)
• Building community is key – a common vision to support one another’s learning meets a fundamental need for acceptance, belonging, affinity, respect, self-awareness, acceptance of responsibility which in turn prepares them for the outside world – a contribution of the common good, in addition to self-actualization.
• Designing a physical environment such as clear routines/procedures provides structure and predictability which addresses individual and group needs. In turn, student learning is supported, followed by student success.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

• Educators (both in the classroom and in a leadership role) will glean an in-depth understanding of both the philosophy and strategies integral to the differentiated classroom.
• Hands on activities and ideas (“teacher’s tool kit”) are presented to support differentiated classroom instruction.
• Teachers:
  o “Must...motivate themselves to plan and implement instruction…
  o Must motivate, lead and direct students to understand, contribute to, and participate in a classroom that is designed to take into account the needs of the individuals and group.
  o Need to lead parents to understand the goals of student-focussed or responsive classrooms.
  o Can be important leaders for other teachers and for school administrators” (p. 9)