

# Introduction

## ***Before you read on . . .***

- How do you define differentiation?
- What makes differentiation difficult?

Bring to mind the names of two or three students that you think would benefit from differentiated instruction.

**A**sk teachers to define differentiation and you'll get a wide variety of answers. For a moment, let's look at a definition:

Differentiation: tailoring instruction to meet individual learners' needs, styles, and interests.

That's the problem right there. In one sentence, teachers are being asked to differentiate for student needs, multiple intelligences, learning styles, interests, cultural background, abilities, and more. You can read books and attend workshops on how to differentiate for each one of these factors.

It's overwhelming, isn't it?

But what if you had one framework that helped you organize all of these facets of differentiation into one model for planning lessons? What if it gave all students access to rigorous thinking tasks? What if that same model helped you understand your own strengths as a teacher and those of your colleagues as well?

## **WHY READ THIS BOOK?**

That's what this book is about, helping you organize all the above ways to look at students through *one* framework so that you can

- Recognize genuine differences in what individual students need to both *love* school and *learn*
- Develop and use differentiation strategies that are manageable and effective
- Put into practice concrete ideas that have been tested in diverse schools.

That framework is personality type.

## **WHAT IS PERSONALITY TYPE?**

Type isn't a panacea, but a rich theory. Think of it as a toolkit that helps you organize, and therefore access, the tools you need to reach the wide variety of

## 2 DIFFERENTIATION THROUGH PERSONALITY TYPES

students who enter your classroom each day. Personality type explains *normal* differences in

- How people take in information. When students read, or listen to directions, or take a field trip, or think quietly, there are distinct patterns in the information they attend to. They do not notice the same things, nor do they process perceptions in the same way.
- How people make decisions. Every day, students need to decide what is important, what to do with the information they have, what it means for their lives, or how to organize it. They come to these judgments in intensely different ways.

Taking in information and making decisions. These are two profoundly important elements in education. Our personality type preferences affect how we teach and how we learn—to a significant extent. The theory is fully explained in Chapter 2, but consider this: **Woven throughout the practical strategies and lesson planning techniques in *Differentiation Through Personality Types* are the results of type research studies that demonstrate how our schools are actually biased toward some personalities, leading to higher grades, test scores, and scholarships for students whose natural personality fits best with our notions of academics.** Type is that important to conversations about teaching and learning.

If you've taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, then you've learned something about type. However, if a workshop leader handed you your results and said, "That's who you are. That's how you act," he or she not only used the instrument unethically but denied you the chance to experience and discover how the theory behind the instrument—the heart of type—makes sense of the interests, needs, and behaviors of people around you and the students you teach. Type is so much more than a four letter code; as one teaching team put it, "Can we sit in our type groups at this meeting so that we can remember the different 'foreign languages' we're speaking?"

### HOW TO USE THESE PAGES

The purpose of *Differentiation Through Personality Types* is to help you learn the "language" of type so you can better meet the needs of students. When I'm working directly with teachers, I find that it often takes several weeks for them to understand how personality type and differentiation apply to their own teaching and learning style. Usually, they prefer working with me to develop their first differentiated lesson plan. I tried to fill these pages with ideas and tools that would provide readers with that kind of support.

You can read cover to cover, but that might not be the most useful strategy. Differentiation is a huge topic, and to read quickly may make it seem even more overwhelming. One of the biggest barriers to success that teachers acknowledge is the trap of trying to do it all at once and becoming overwhelmed with trying to meet the needs of every student. Instead, try the following strategy.

*Work with someone else.* You can read this book on your own. However, if you can meet with at least one other educator to discuss its contents, chances are you'll gain more insights into students who will benefit most from these strategies. In professional learning communities in which teachers have developed trust, discussing your varying reactions to different ideas, tools, and strategies makes the theory of type come alive. Together, you will *see* the very real differences in how you take in information and make decisions. And, most teachers discover new benefits from collaborating.

Embedded in each chapter are reflection and study questions. Record your own responses and compare them with those of other teachers.

- Work together to analyze a lesson plan, using the concepts discussed in Chapter 5. You might start with one designed by a teacher not *in* your group, because teachers often hesitate to critique each other's ideas.
- Try an idea from *Differentiation Through Personality Types*, perhaps a classroom management strategy from Chapter 6. Discuss your experiences. Were they influenced by your own personality preferences? How did different students react?
- Finally, plan a lesson together. What new insights do you gain from other teachers, now that you have a common language for discussing differences in teaching and learning styles?

*Differentiate for your interests.* Read the opening chapters and then move on to the sections that will be of most benefit to you.

- Read Chapter 2, "Who You Are Is How You Teach," to understand your own personality type.
- Bring to mind one or two students you have struggled to reach. Read Chapter 3, "What Type Looks Like in Students," to explore whether type differences explain some of your difficulties.
- Read Chapter 4 to grasp the basic differentiation model.
- Revisit the table of contents. Which topic might most clearly address your biggest needs right now? Classroom management? Multiculturalism? Mathematics? Read that chapter next. Try a few concrete strategies—perhaps a suggestion for helping students develop better study habits from Chapter 6 or a reading activity from Chapter 7.
- Then, pull out a lesson that *almost* worked. Revisit Chapter 4 to discover ways you might improve it.
- Think about introducing type concepts to students, as described in Chapter 11. Skim the lesson ideas. Might teaching about one of the preference pairs improve your ability to talk with students about their potential as learners?

*Think process, not pages.* Too often, professional learning communities set goals such as finishing a book before the end of a semester, or reading a chapter a month. With *Differentiation Through Personality Types*, a better idea is weaving reading goals with application goals. *Try* the concepts before moving on. You can use many of the strategies and techniques described in this book long before you finish it.

- Use your prep periods to observe other teachers in your study group as they try new strategies. Were some of the ideas easier for them to implement? How might you adapt one to your own style? Focus later discussions on student learning. What happened?
- Take time to examine student work together and look for patterns. Is there evidence that students with certain personality types are more engaged than others? How might the assignment or instruction be tweaked or changed?
- Finally, get student feedback. Did your differentiation strategies meet their needs? Did they learn? Seek their thoughts, opinions, and suggestions.

May this book provide strategies that will simplify and enrich your life as a teacher, helping you move forward in the tremendous task of educating the incredibly diverse students who enter your classroom.