

# NO MORE READING INSTRUCTION WITHOUT DIFFERENTIATION

## DEAR READERS,

Much like the diet phenomenon *Eat This, Not That*, this series aims to replace some existing practices with approaches that are more effective—healthier, if you will—for our students. We hope to draw attention to practices that have little support in research or professional wisdom and offer alternatives that have greater support. Each text is collaboratively written by authors representing research and practice. Section 1 offers a practitioner's perspective on a practice in need of replacing and helps us understand the challenges, temptations, and misunderstandings that have led us to this ineffective approach. Section 2 provides a researcher's perspective on the lack of research to support the ineffective practice(s) and reviews research supporting better approaches. In Section 3, the author representing a practitioner's perspective gives detailed descriptions of how to implement these better practices. By the end of each book, you will understand both what not to do, and what to do, to improve student learning.

It takes courage to question one's own practice—to shift away from what you may have seen throughout your years in education and toward something new that you may have seen few if any colleagues use. We applaud you for demonstrating that courage and wish you the very best in your journey from this to that.

Best wishes,

— *Ellin Oliver Keene and Nell K. Duke, series editors*

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Figure 3-3: Engagement Inventory from *Teaching Reading in Small Groups* by Jennifer Serravallo. Copyright © 2010 by Jennifer Serravallo. Published by Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH. All rights reserved.

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# INTRODUCTION

ELLIN OLIVER KEENE

I took a walk with a friend, Betsy, recently, and we talked about her experiences as a young reader. Her teachers realized that she was reading well ahead of the rest of her class and promised her mother, also a teacher, that they were going to “individualize” her reading instruction. What followed for Betsy was a program in which she was asked to read a series of comprehension passages on cards, answer the questions, and, if she got the answers right, she “got” to work on longer passages on different colored cards. Initially, she recalled that she was excited to be out of the endless round-robin reading that characterized her peers’ reading “instruction,” but it wasn’t long before a paralyzing boredom set in, and she began to hide the books she loved in her desk, sneaking a moment to read whenever she could. It’s a sad day in schools when a child has to sneak a moment to read a real book!

Educators have long chased the ideal of differentiated instruction, but our efforts, as Betsy recalled, haven’t always been successful. The very idea of tailoring instruction for twenty-five children in one classroom seems overwhelming at best. As Lynn describes in Section 1 of *No More Reading Instruction Without Differentiation*, most of our attempts come from a deep sense of responsibility to meet students’ very different needs, but they may come up short when we do things like ask everyone to read that favorite novel every year.

Without choice in what they read and the opportunity to work on authentic learning tasks—work that one might reasonably expect to do outside of an academic setting—we cannot truly differentiate for students. As Lynn reminds us, “we do have to ditch the decision making that leads us to teach in a sequence rather than according to student

needs. When we don't plan according to the specific needs of the students in front of us, our instruction is all but guaranteed not to meet every student's needs."

In Section 2, Debra Peterson introduces us to the research on differentiating instruction and shows that, for at least the last forty years, we've understood that particular approaches to differentiation have made a significant difference in student achievement. As I read this section, I couldn't help but think of my friend Betsy's experiences as a young reader, and it becomes clear why she and many others didn't actually learn to become better readers through the "individualized" stair-step programs we've created over the years. Debra emphasizes that it is critical to engage students in higher-level thinking and to guide them to learning experiences that relate to their interests and have authentic audiences with whom they can share new knowledge and insights. The research is compelling and will provide readers with ample evidence to support more differentiated instruction in their schools and districts.

I wish that Betsy had attended a school like Lynn Bigelman's in the Detroit area. In Section 3, Lynn introduces us to teachers who would have supported Betsy as well as those who struggle to learn—and everyone else in between—in classrooms where project-based learning is the norm, where students have a great deal of choice in what they read and in how they share their thinking with others. In wonderfully practical detail, we get to see how teachers assess students' present performance and design subsequent learning experiences that are authentic and engage students in the higher-level thinking Debra calls for in Section 2. Readers will be able to see past the overwhelming idea of differentiation for each child to a new horizon in which children participate in their own assessment and designs for learning. She says, "In effective differentiated classrooms, students gather evidence of their own progress nearly as often as the teacher does. Even very young children can use a variety of means, in addition to talking and writing, to demonstrate their level of understanding in a way that reveals specifically what instructions they need next."



My friend Betsy ended up at Stanford Law School, is a successful environmental attorney, and is still a voracious reader. She was lucky to have parents who valued learning, read to her, and put books in her hands. I'm worried, however, about the children in classrooms right now who aren't privileged in the same way. Those kids need the approaches Lynn and Debra advocate in this incredibly useful book. You're about to be inspired to differentiate for the children in your life, and, as Lynn tells us, it's doable!

*Credits continued from p. iv:*

Figure 3–12: Gradual Release of Responsibility Model from “Essential Elements of Fostering and Teaching Reading Comprehension” by Nell K. Duke, P. David Pearson, Stephanie L. Strachan, and Alison K. Billman in *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, Fourth Edition, edited by S. Jay Samuels and Alan E. Farstrup. Copyright © 2011 by the International Reading Association, Inc. Reprinted with permission from the International Reading Association, Inc., conveyed through the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

Appendix A: Formative Assessment Options adapted from *Mosaic of Thought: The Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction* by Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann. Copyright © 2007 by Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann. Published by Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH. All rights reserved.

Appendix B: Project-Based Unit Planning Template from *Inside Information: Developing Powerful Readers and Writers of Informational Text Through Project-Based Instruction* by Nell K. Duke. Copyright © 2014 by Nell K. Duke. Published by Scholastic Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.