Look-Fors in an Effectively Differentiated Classroom

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Background

(No teacher should be expected to display all these attributes at a given time. Rather these are elements toward which strong teachers persistently work and many of which strong teachers regularly demonstrate in their teaching. Guiding questions in this document are useful in conversations with teachers as catalysts for further thinking.)

Differentiated Instruction is a <u>proactively planned</u>, **interdependent system** marked by a positive community of learners; focused, high-quality curriculum; frequent formative assessment; flexible instructional arrangements; and respectful tasks.

- Student needs are the motivation for differentiated instruction.
- Building a sense community among students and the teacher in a positive learning environment is the foundation for differentiated instruction.
- Focused, high-quality provides the compass for differentiated instruction. (High-quality differentiation is necessary for high-quality differentiation.)
- Frequent formative assessment is the primary tool for gathering information about how and why to differentiate instruction.
- Well-managed, flexible grouping provides a mechanism for differentiated instruction.
- A variety of low-prep and high-prep strategies can be used to design and deliver respectful tasks that adjust content, process, and products for students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

CATEGORIES, LOOK-FORS, RUBRICS & GUIDING QUESTIONS

Look for 1: Classroom Environment
Category: The teacher builds a foundation for differentiated instructed on a solid classroom community and a positive learning environment.

Indicators:
- The physical and affective characteristics of the classroom set a positive tone for learning.

- The teacher fosters respect for individual differences and preferences.
- The teacher and students share ownership of and responsibility for the classroom.

Evidence:
- The teacher communicates explicitly and implicitly to students that they are multi-faceted individuals whose needs, preferences, and strengths are dynamic.
- The teacher communicates implicitly and explicitly to students that they and their contributions are valuable and necessary in order for the classroom to function well.
- The teacher helps students get to know one another well.
- The teacher encourages creativity of thought and expression.
- The teacher structures activities so that students see one another in varied contexts and in varied roles.
- The teacher assists students in setting their own personal and class goals for learning and behavior.
- The teacher solicits student input in making decisions that will affect the whole class.
- The teacher frequently asks students for feedback on how the class is working for them, and for suggestions about how they and the teacher could work together toward improvement.
- The teacher designs and assigns roles for students to assume in making the routines and systems flow smoothly.

Rubric:

Classroom Environment	
Advanced 4	a. The affective and physical attributes of the classroom environment inspire students to achieve their personal best and to take initiative in learning. b. The teacher empowers students to view their and each other's differences as assets to the classroom community such that students view one another as equals. c. The teacher and students are equal partners in sharing responsibility for the classroom.
Proficient 3	a. The affective and physical attributes of the classroom environment equip students to succeed in achieving the teacher's high expectations. b. The teacher honors student differences, nurtures student strengths and preferences, and provides opportunities for students to compensate for their weaknesses. c. The teacher shares his/her roles and responsibilities with students, allowing them to control many aspects of classroom routines
Basic 2	a. The affective and physical attributes of the classroom environment convey ambiguous messages about how the teacher views the student's role in the learning process. b. The teacher recognizes student differences, but does not build on them to foster a positive classroom environment.

	c. The teacher allows students to share some of his/her roles and responsibilities.
Below Basic 1	a. The affective and physical attributes of the classroom environment alienate students and quench their desire to learn. b. The teacher ignores or is hostile toward student differences. c. The teacher does not share any of his/her roles and responsibilities with students.

Classroom Community	
Advanced 4	Compare the way your current classroom looks and feels with how it looked and felt in your first year of teaching. How do you encourage students to apply and transfer what they learn in your classroom about student differences to the real world? What would it look like to allow students to have even more control over the classroom?
Proficient 3	How do student differences impact your decisions about the physical aspects of your classroom (e.g., how the room is set-up, the messages students see on the walls)? How do you capitalize on the strengths and maturity level of this age group to help daily routines run more smoothly?
Basic 2	How do you help students see one another as equally valuable to the classroom community? In what ways do you communicate to students that this is their classroom? How do you decide which classroom roles responsibilities to give to students, and which to keep in your control?
Below Basic 1	What are some ways that students in your class differ from one another, and from you? What are some concrete ways you communicate to them that those differences are assets to the classroom community? What are the most flexible aspects of your physical classroom space?

Look for 2: Curriculum
Category: The teacher uses high-quality, coherent curriculum as a compass for differentiated instruction.

Indicators:
• The teacher plans curriculum so that important conceptual ideas are at the forefront of a unit of study. Essential facts and skills are used to help students make sense of these ideas.
• The teacher uses the curriculum as a point of engagement, of motivation, and of access to powerful ideas.
• The teacher ensures that the curriculum is an authentic reflection of the discipline being studied.

Evidence:
• The teacher frames learning goals in terms of what students should know, understand, and be able to do as a result of the lesson/unit.

- The teacher clearly communicates the learning goals to students.
- The teacher connects the knowledge and skills students are learning to an essential question, big idea, important principle, and/or overarching concept.
- The teacher connects the curriculum to students' collective and individual experiences and interests.
- The teacher engages students in activities that help them see how what they are learning is used in the real world (e.g., by real historians, scientists)

Rubric:

Curriculum	
Advanced 4	a. The curriculum is a conduit for developing expertise. b. The teacher plans a curriculum focused on what students should know, understand, and be able to do and which facilitates in-depth perspective. c. The teacher uses the curriculum in ways that inspire students to ask high-level questions, pursue further information on their own, and make their own suggestions for class activities. d. The teacher fosters relevance helping students transfer and connect important ideas/concepts to familiar and unfamiliar contexts.
Proficient 3	a. The curriculum is a bridge between students and important ideas/concepts. b. The teacher plans a curriculum focused on what students should know, understand, and be able to do. c. The teacher uses the curriculum in ways that illuminate why the identified skills, principles, and facts are important and that excite students about learning. d. The teacher fosters relevance by building on student experience.
Basic 2	a. The curriculum is a tenuous link between students and important ideas/concepts. b. The teacher plans a curriculum based primarily on facts and skills. A big idea or principle may be implicitly present, but the teacher does not make it visible to students. c. The teacher uses the curriculum in ways that encourage students to believe that the purposes of learning are restricted to getting grades and performing well on tests. d. The teacher attempts to foster curricular relevance, but either has difficulty identifying student experiences to build on or makes analogies that don't "ring true".
Below Basic 1	a. The curriculum is a wedge between students and important ideas/concepts. b. The teacher plans a curriculum comprised of disconnected activities, disparate facts, and isolated skills. c. The teacher uses the curriculum in ways that intimidate, bore, or discourage students. d. The teacher ignores the importance of making curriculum relevant to student experience.

Curriculum	
Advanced 4	Would you describe your approach to curriculum design as primarily inductive, primarily deductive, or a combination of approaches? How do you incorporate what experts in your discipline do (e.g., how they work, how they think, the tools they use) into your curriculum?
Proficient 3	How is curriculum related to differentiated instruction? How does knowing that not all students will not access the curricular goals at exactly the same time or in the same ways influence how you plan curriculum? In addition to making connections to students' experiences, what are some other ways you can foster curricular relevance?
Basic 2	What does "good" curriculum look like in your grade level/subject area? Characterize your students' attitudes toward the curriculum. What do you think accounts for the differences/similarities in how individual students experience the curriculum?
Below Basic 1	Describe the process you go through in planning a unit/lesson. How do you decide what is important to teach? What resources do you use?

Look for 3: Formative Assessment
Category: The teacher employs formative assessment as the primary tool for informing differentiated instruction.

Indicators:
• The teacher formatively assesses students' readiness, interest, and learning profile needs and uses the results to inform adjustments to content, processes, and products.
• The teacher integrates formative assessment as an important aspect of classroom life.

Evidence:
• The teacher employs a variety of formative assessment techniques that glean information most critical to making adjustments for student need.
• The teacher pre-assesses students' readiness, interest, and learning profile needs relative to the learning goals prior to a unit of study.
• The teacher uses ongoing assessment to gauge students' progress during a unit.
• The teacher uses data gathered through informal or formal formative assessment to make decisions about how and when to use various instructional arrangements.
• The teacher uses data gathered through informal or formal formative assessment to adjust content, processes, and products.
• The teacher explicitly communicates the purpose of formative assessment to students.

Rubric:

Formative Assessment	
Advanced 4	a. The teacher plans and administers pre-assessment well in advance of a unit of study and ongoing assessment diligently throughout a unit. b. The teacher uses formative assessment results to make low-prep and high-prep adjustments to curriculum and instruction. c. The teacher designs formative assessments that require students to demonstrate their understanding, knowledge, and/or skill in multiple modes. d. Students look forward to formative assessment opportunities due to their numerous positive experiences with how their teacher uses the results to make adjustments for their individual needs.
Proficient 3	a. The teacher administers formative assessments before and during a unit of study. b. The teacher uses formative assessment results to make low-prep adjustments to curriculum and instruction. c. The teacher uses formative assessments that allow students to demonstrate their understanding, knowledge, and/or skill in modes other than writing. d. Students understand how and why the teacher uses formative assessment.
Basic 2	a. The teacher periodically administers formative assessments during a unit (e.g., quiz, exit card). b. The teacher uses assessment results to determine student progress, but does not use the results to inform instructional adjustments. c. The teacher uses formative assessments that limit student response to one mode of expression (e.g., written). d. Students view formative assessment as ways to earn grades.
Below Basic 1	a. The teacher rarely, if ever, uses formative assessment. b. The teacher uses formative assessment primarily to fill a gradebook rather than to inform instruction. c. The teacher chooses assessments that severely inhibit students' capacity to fairly demonstrate what they have learned (i.e., due to poor design, due to misalignment with curricular goals). d. The teacher fails to give a rationale for formative assessment or to help students distinguish between the purposes formative and summative assessments.

Formative Assessment	
Advanced 4	How do you use formative assessment to foster a positive learning environment? How does the way you use formative assessment data to drive instruction (e.g., differentiated tasks, varied groupings, varied materials) affect the way students view themselves and one another? How do you use formative assessment to track student progress over time, both formally and informally?

Proficient 3	How do you know when to formatively assess students' readiness? Their interests? Their learning profiles? What kinds of formative assessment give you the most/and or the best information? How would you characterize your students' attitudes toward formative assessment?
Basic 2	How do student differences in readiness, interest, and learning profile affect student performance in the unit you are currently teaching? In what ways do you anticipate and plan for those differences? How do students distinguish between formative and summative assessment?
Below Basic 1	At what point(s) in a unit do you typically assess students? Describe what kinds of assessments you use. What kind of information do these assessments give you? How do students view assessment in your class?

Look for 4: Instructional Arrangements
Category: The teacher integrates well-managed, flexible instructional arrangements as a primary mechanism for differentiated instruction.

Indicators:
• The teacher uses a variety of flexible, well-managed instructional arrangements to meet students' varied readiness, interest, and learning profile needs.
• The teacher makes decisions about how and when to use various instructional arrangements based on curricular goals and on data gathered through informal or formal formative assessment.
• The teacher establishes routines and structures to ensure that movement in the classroom is purposeful and students are self-directed.

Evidence:
• The teacher employs many kinds of instructional arrangements (e.g., small groups, student-teacher conferences, partners, individual work, whole-class) to meet students' needs.
• The teacher's purposes for grouping are aligned with curricular goals.
• The teacher's group compositions are intentional.
• The teacher groups and re-groups students on the basis of the most recent information (e.g., assessment data) about the students' readiness, interests, and/or learning profiles.
• The teacher ensures that, over the course of a unit or semester, students experience varied roles and responsibilities within groups.
• The teacher has established routines for how students should transition between different instructional arrangements.
• The teacher plans for and clearly communicates what students should do when there is "down time" (e.g., when a group finishes a task early).
• There are multiple ways for individual students and groups of students to receive help during instructional segments.

Rubric:

Instructional Arrangements	
Advanced 4	a. The teacher's flow of instruction is characterized by a seamless, dynamic pattern of purposeful grouping and re-grouping. b. The teacher makes grouping decisions based on the most current, relevant assessments of students' readiness, interests, and/or learning profiles. c. Classroom routines and structures allow for fluid movement between instructional arrangements, teach students how to be autonomous and reflective, and emphasize interdependence.
Proficient 3	a. The teacher incorporates multiple instructional arrangements throughout a unit. **b.** The teacher makes grouping decisions based on assessment data about readiness, interest, and/or learning profile for different lessons, appropriate to the curricular goals. **c.** Classroom routines and structures support order, independent decision-making, and peer-to-peer assistance.
Basic 2	a. The teacher uses several instructional arrangements during a unit, with whole-group instruction at the forefront. b. Purposes for grouping may be tangential to curricular goals and group composition based on factors that cannot be substantiated by formal or informal assessment of readiness, interest, and/or learning profile. c. Classroom routines and structures impede orderly movement between instructional arrangements, encourage student dependence on the teacher, and isolate students from one another.
Below Basic 1	a. The teacher relies on static, teacher-centered instructional arrangements. b. The teacher either ignores student differences altogether in making grouping decisions or pigeonholes students into groups on the basis of past performance and the teacher's personal preconceptions. c. Few, if any, management structures or routines exist to support a movement toward more flexible arrangements.

Instructional Arrangements	
Advanced 4	With which pattern(s) or sequence of instructional arrangements do your students experience the most success? How do you give students primary ownership over how the classroom "runs"? What is the instructional arrangement or group composition you use the most? Why? How about the least?
Proficient 3	How do you think students view the various ways they are grouped for instruction in your class? How does the way you use assessment make flexible grouping possible? What additional supports could you incorporate in your classroom that would give you more time to work with individual or groups of students?

Basic 2	How does using different instructional arrangements in your class allow you to address various student needs? How do you make decisions about how to group students? What management tools do you have in place that make facilitating a flexible classroom easier?
Below Basic 1	What kinds of instructional arrangements do you use in your class? When do you use small groups in your class? What are some management challenges that using small groups poses? What strategies can a teacher use to overcome these challenges?

Look for 5: Respectful Tasks
Category: The teacher provides optimal challenge for individual students and groups of students through respectful tasks.

Indicators:
- The teacher uses respectful tasks to meet students' varied readiness, interest, and learning profile needs.
- The teacher plans and delivers respectful tasks using a range of appropriate low-prep and high-prep strategies to adjust content, processes, and products.
- The teacher plans tasks that, whether completed alone or collaboratively, reinforce that all students are high-status students.

Evidence:
• Tasks give all students access to the same clear, high-quality lesson/unit goals.
• Tasks require students to mimic or approximate the skills, thinking, habits, dispositions, or work of real-world professionals (e.g., mathematicians, biologists, writers).
• Tasks require all students to use higher-level thinking skills (e.g., analyzing, judging, defending).
• Tasks are equally appealing and engaging from the students' perspective.
• The teacher scaffolds tasks using a variety of techniques.

Rubric:

Respectful Tasks	
Advanced 4	a. The teacher plans tasks that are focused on the same learning goals and mimic the work of an expert/professional in the discipline. b. The teacher articulates a continuum of criteria based on student readiness and provides multiple scaffolds to ensure successful, high-quality completion of the tasks. c. Side-by-side, the tasks are equally challenging and intriguing.
Proficient 3	a. The teacher plans tasks that are focused on similar learning goals and suggest the work of an expert/professional in the discipline. b. The teacher articulates clear criteria and provides scaffolding to ensure successful, high-quality completion of the tasks. c. Side-by-side, the tasks are comparatively challenging and intriguing.

Basic 2	a. The teacher plans tasks that are not aligned to the same learning goals and are loosely tied to the work of an expert/professional in the discipline. b. The teacher's criteria for successful completion are confusing or incomplete. The teacher provides some scaffolding, if students compel a need for it. c. Side-by-side, one task may be more/less challenging and intriguing than another.
Below Basic 1	a. The teacher plans tasks without considering what all students should know, understand, and be able to do, or how an expert/professional in the discipline works. Tasks may be tangential to unit content. b. The teacher does not articulate criteria for quality or provide scaffolding for success. c. Tasks bore or frustrate students.

Respectful Tasks
Advanced 4	What steps do you take in planning differentiated tasks to make sure each student is optimally challenged? How do you involve students in the process of determining task criteria? How do you decide what supports students might need?
Proficient 3	What are the similarities between what the students are doing and what practicing professionals in the discipline (e.g., writers) do? If you have two or more versions of a task, which version do you design first? Why? How do you adjust the tasks for readiness, interest, or learning profile?
Basic 2	Describe your process for planning a task or lesson that is differentiated for student readiness. How do ensure all students produce work that is high-quality and meets your expectations? When you give a choice between differentiated tasks, how do you prevent your students from choosing an "easy" option?
Below Basic 1	What do you want all students to know, understand, and be able to do upon completing these tasks? How do you decide what makes a worthwhile task? How might students' differences in readiness, interest, and learning profile affect their capacity to complete a task successfully?