1.   What is Curriculum Differentiation?

Curriculum differentiation refers to the mediation of the NCS at an instructional, content and material level to accommodate learner diversity

Curriculum differentiation is any adjustment or modification to:
- The teaching and learning environment,
- Teaching and learning techniques,
- Teaching and learning support material that enhances a learner's performance or allows at least partial participation in a learning activity
- Learning programmes and
- Assessment.

2.   Flexibility Features of the NCS Policy

The NCS has several components that are flexible enough to allow for differentiation. Examples of these flexible features include:

- Learning outcomes do not prescribe content or method. Therefore, content and methodology could be appropriate for a learner's needs. (DOE, 2002: Overview of Revised National Curriculum Statement, p14.)
- Activities can be flexible. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.10)
- The context can be made relevant to the learners' needs. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of learning Programmes, p.10)
- More time can be provided for assessment and execution of a task. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.11)
- Methods of assessment are flexible. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.1)
- The learning programme can be structured to meet the needs of the specific learners. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.2)
- Learners can communicate using SA sign language, Braille, assistive devices or any other communication method. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.1)
- Expectations can be adapted to the abilities of the learner within the framework of high expectations. (DOE, 2002: Overview of Revised National Curriculum Statement, p12.)
- The curriculum emphasizes the principles of social justice, healthy environment, human rights and inclusivity. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.5)
- Teachers are encouraged to consider any particular barriers to learning and/or assessment that exist in different Learning Areas and make provision for these when developing learning programmes. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.7)
- Assessment standards can be broken into finer components. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.1)
- A Lesson Plan time allocation can range from a single activity up to a term's teaching or more time if necessary, depending on the needs of the learner. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.1)

- Time allocation and weightings regarding learning outcomes and learning programmes should vary according to the learner's needs. (DOE, 2003: Teacher's Guide for the development of Learning Programmes, p.6)
- The number and nature of learning programmes at a school can vary depending on the availability of staff, resources and the needs of learners.
- Flexibility in the selection of appropriate assessment standards according to the individual needs of a learner is possible on the recommendation of the assessment team in the case of a learner not capable of achieving a GEC.
- Work schedules and learning programmes are not limited to a grade/year. Differently gifted learners may require acceleration or slowing down of the process.
- Integration of Learning Areas in a phase and across phases is possible.

The scale, scope and approach of any curriculum differentiation will only be determined after a thorough assessment of an individual learner. An individualised learning programme and Work Schedule with its related Lesson Plans should be devised on the basis of the needs of learners. Differentiation at Lesson Plan level will be required for all learners in a class who need specific additional support because of individualised barriers to learning. Those involved in this process must include the teachers, parents, school based and district based support teams (where they exist). Other relevant professionals from the community can also be consulted.

3. Effective Curriculum Differentiation

- Assists individual learners to compensate for intrinsic and / or extrinsic barriers to learning.
- Allows the learner to use current skills while promoting the development of new ones.
- Prevents dissonance between the learner's skills and the learning activities designed for the class.
- Reduces the level of abstract information to make content relevant to the learner's current context and future life.
- Creates harmony between the learner's learning style and the educator's teaching style.
- Forms the basis for customising Learning Programmes.

4. The three components of the curriculum differentiation process

The following THREE questions must be asked by the teacher when planning to differentiate an activity to accommodate all learners:

1. How can I differentiate the **content/context** so that it will be relevant to the life experience and level of competence of individual learners?
(Reflect on the skills, knowledge and values that need to be assessed Remember that some learners coming from different backgrounds may react differently to a specific text. While some of them may not have mastered English as a first additional language fully, they may still understand the key concepts. Also, the text may not be of interest to them and this may affect their behaviour during the activity. Finally, certain learners have the skill of communicating without necessarily having mastered the language)

2. What differentiations need to be made to the **LTSM** and how can the **method of presentation be differentiated**?

3. What will I take into consideration when I **assess** the learner's performance?

(Consider the purpose, the context, and strategies for collecting, evaluating, recording, reporting and using the evidence to design a support programme. Allow for a range of ways in which the learner can perform, respond, explain or demonstrate achievement of the outcome)

5. Some ideas for applying any of the components above

Differentiating the content

- Remember that some learners coming from different backgrounds may react differently to a specific text.
- Even if some of them have not fully mastered English as a first additional language, they may still understand the key concepts.
- The text may not be of interest to them and this may affect their behaviour during the activity.
- Certain learners can have the skill of communicating without necessarily having mastered the language.
- The level of abstract content can be reduced
- Setting a substitute task of similar scope and demand
- Replacing one task with a task of a different kind
- A more challenging or complex text can be selected for learners who need expanded opportunities
- Shorten the tasks
- Select texts and books that are culture sensitive
- Provide reading material that will interest learners and that is not too linguistically difficult to read.
- Using another planned task to assess more outcomes or aspects of outcomes than originally intended

Adapting the materials or differentiating method of presentation

- Allowing the learner to undertake the task at a later date
- Use study guides
- Graphic organizers and guided writing
- Demonstrate, model and prompt the expected response
- When doing reading, choose texts that have illustrations and that are easier to reinforce a concept, but let them attempt to demonstrate the same outcomes
- Use a variety of types of tasks and texts that link and expand concepts
- Re-teach the content if necessary
- Use supplementary materials
- Provide for wordlists
- Create a more positive learning environment in which learners feel valued and encouraged to take risks
- Create a classroom atmosphere in which the learners' backgrounds and cultures are valued and recognized
- Adapt the teaching methodology to the needs of specific learners.
- Read material orally
- Highlight essentials in a listening or speaking text
- Provide individual assistance
- Considering the format in which the task is presented, e.g. the complexity of graphs, diagrams, tables, illustrations, cartoons, etc. A range of strategies can be followed to

make these accessible to learners who experience barriers to learning of whatever nature, such as:

- o Picture or diagram simplified or shown differently without compromising complexity of question
- o Picture or diagram replaced by written description
- o Picture or diagram supplemented by written explanation
- o Picture or diagram replaced with a real item or model
- o Unnecessary picture or diagram removed
- o Amount of information reduced
- o Measurements altered
- o Inherently visual material replaced with equivalent non-visual material.

Allowing for a variety of assessment strategies to evaluate performance

- Design activities which would allow space for different learning styles or intelligences
- Encourage learners to read for meaning as well as for personal satisfaction.
- Provide opportunities for shared learning to encourage speaking and listening. Allow for knowledge to be constructed through group discussions.
- Pace or scaffold the activities
- Allowing the learner extra time to complete the task
- Use technology, aids or other special arrangements to undertake assessment tasks
- Use an estimate based on other assessments or work completed by the learner (in circumstances where the above provisions are not feasible or reasonable)
- Keep observation portfolios for certain learners who need additional support
- Record the material
- Read tests or assignments orally
- Give multiple-choice options
- Provide tasks which require short answers
- Test key concepts only
- Oral reports versus written reports
- Focus on the positive aspects or talents of the learners. Get to know which Intelligence is their strongest, and work on them. (Multiple Intelligences)

(See also Inclusion Guidelines for Assessment, 2002)

6. **Questions that can help us focus on assessing learners' performance and characteristics are as follows.**

Initial as well as ongoing baseline and diagnostic assessment must be done by the teacher to determine how each lesson can be adapted to accommodate all learners in the class, specifically those who experience barriers to learning. This will also inform all support planning and developmental assessment.

Progress with the curriculum
- Are learners learning what they were taught?
- Are they at the right entry point to 'grasp' the content worked on in the classroom?
- Are they practicing and performing as expected?
- Are they applying the facts, concepts and/or skills being learned?

Interests
- Are learners engaged in the lessons and activities?
- Are they showing interest in a new topic or area of study?
- Are they sharing their interests with others?

Characteristics
- What are their preferred learning styles (e.g., whole class teaching or pair work)?
- What are their responses to the materials?
- What are their responses to the difficulty level of instruction?
- What are their responses to the pacing of instruction?
- What are their responses to the environment?

(*Changing Teaching Practices: using curriculum differentiation to respond to students' diversity, UNESCO, 2004*)

7. **How can assessment be seen as an integral part of inclusive teaching and learning?**

- Assessment of learners and their learning is integral to the teaching and learning process.
- Assessment is an integral part of curriculum differentiation. It helps us identify what learners need so that we can appropriately adapt the content, and our teaching methods and activities.
- Information from various assessments helps teachers get to know their learners. Through assessment teachers find out what their learners know and can do and what their learners do not know and cannot do.
- Assessments of learners' characteristics such as interests, prior knowledge, and learning styles help teachers to provide learning activities that engage and encourage learner learning.
- We need to assess the academic performance of learners, their characteristics, their performance of skills and their performance on tasks using a variety of techniques.
- Teachers can assess learners by: observing them, reviewing their work, using pre-assessment strategies to find out what the learners already know and can do, and having learners' self-reflect and respond to questions and inventories.
- Assessment techniques most useful for differentiating the curriculum include: observation, entry-level indicators, error analysis, record keeping (e.g., anecdotal records, work portfolios/folders and journaling), performance assessments and learner-led conferences.
- Both the teachers and the learners can use all of these assessment techniques. Teachers should invite learners to be involved with them in the assessment process.
    (*Changing Teaching Practices: using curriculum differentiation to respond to students' diversity, UNESCO, 2004*)

References:
Department of Education (2002) Inclusion Guidelines for Assessment
UNESCO (2004) *Changing Teaching Practices: using curriculum differentiation to respond to students' diversity.* Paris

Teaching all students together through curriculum differentiation
We can make a difference!!