ACEL
Inspiring Educational Leaders

Leadership
vs
Autonomy

A case study of evidence based instructional leadership

Creating the conditions for transformational change

Leading differentiated high performance learning

Leading differentiated high performance learning

Manoj Chandra Handa
on leader*shift* and unleashing creative potential

The School of Athens by Raphael
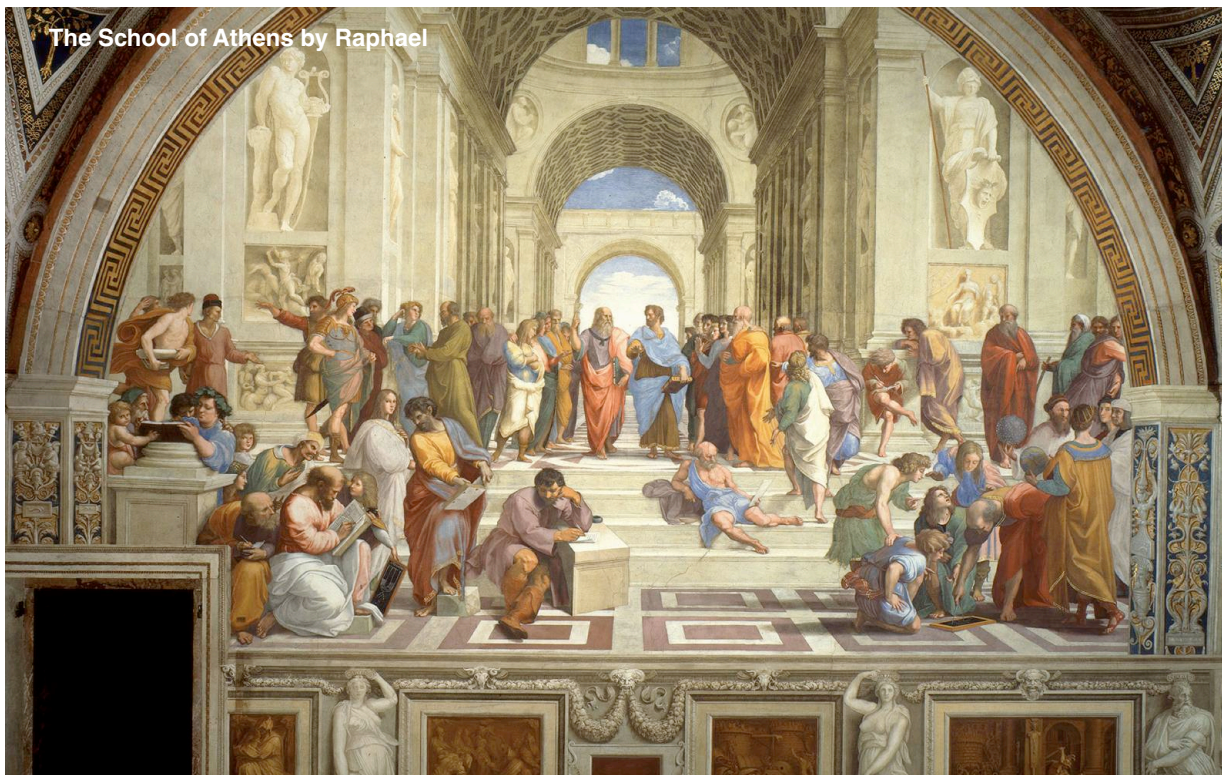
"Learning is not about filling buckets but lighting fires in the imagination of the people." **WB Yeats**

Effective school leaders innovate whole school change by creating conditions that lead to differentiated high performance learning among staff and students.

What is high performance learning?
The high performance approach to education seeks to nurture holistic performance of excellence (academic, creative, social, emotional) in as many students as possible.

Significantly, it is not a one-size-fits all approach at either school or a student level. It locates the general principles to suit the school's different contexts, and simultaneously develops a unique approach that meets the individual needs of each school.

What is differentiated learning?
Differentiated learning is a philosophy and an approach to learning in which teachers and school communities actively work *by honouring each student's learning needs, readiness and interests* through thoughtful planning, targeted flexible instruction, and strategic assessment in order to maximise each student's learning potential and achievement.

In a learner-centred differentiated curriculum, research suggests that teachers offer *differentiated* approaches to five key dimensions of learning (refer to Table 3): (a) *learner outcomes* – why students learn; (b) *learner content* – what students learn; (c) *learning strategies* – how students learn; (d) *evidence of learning* – how students demonstrate what they have learnt; and (e) *learning environment* – where students learn.

What does a school's high performance mindset do?
A high performance mindset in the school culture (a) raises the aspirations, expectations and achievements of all students; (b) challenges teachers' thinking about the possible level of each student's achievement; (c) changes classroom pedagogy through a systematic focus on advanced cognitive performance; (d) creates a rich diet of frequent, regular cognitive challenge in classrooms; (e) introduces ideas and approaches that will unleash the capacity of students to enable high performance; and (f) takes the school through a change process that creates the culture of high expectations and achievements.

Table 1: Leading differentiated high performance learning.

Ten actions of school leaders that innovate school change

Leadership Actions	Strategies
1 Identify a visible reason for change and establish a sense of urgency result = a shared need	• Identify a visible reason for change, the "why" of change, namely moral purpose, e.g., an educational reform and innovation • Define and dramatise an issue/concern/problem • Generate dissatisfaction with the status quo • Eliminate complacency • Clarify the moral purpose and make explicit connection with high student achievement outcomes
2 Set up a guiding coalition result = accountability	• Develop an instructional leadership team that contains both commitment leaders (the heart side of change) and strategic leaders (the head side) to promote and facilitate differentiated learning • Ensure that all stakeholder groups within the school and in the wider school community understand the change process • Identify clearly the role that each team member will play in the change process
3 Establish a collective vision and strategy result = anticipation	• Clarify the change vision of the future of the organisation • Inspire, motivate and develop vision with the leadership team • Write change vision and strategy succinctly • Develop high expectations for student learning in the entire school community • Connect the vision of leading differentiated learning to high student performance outcomes
4 Communicate the change vision and strategy result = commitment	• Communicate the vision widely through simple words, deeds & actions • Communicate: Why? What? and How? • Communicate regularly through formal and informal channels • Hold difficult and crucial conversations with colleagues in a constructive and focused manner • Ensure that people understand the effect and benefits of the proposed change
5 Share knowledge and Information result = a shared need	• Collect, use and manage data about the organisation • Select innovations matched to school's needs • Possess knowledge and information about best practice for differentiating curriculum, instruction and assessment • Hone deep content knowledge about innovation – e.g., embedding differentiated learning *across curriculum* in the school
6 Commit resources to foster collective capacity of staff result = systemic alignment	• Build collective capacity of the whole staff team in the school • Ensure that the staff professional learning plan includes strategies to identify the whole school staff professional learning needs and is linked to the school plan and faculty plans • Ensure that the professional learning is focused on student outcomes • Allocate time for all teachers to plan and share differentiated learning strategies • Ground professional learning within the school and classrooms • Make sure that the professional learning is evidence-based, data-driven, collaborative, and involves reflection and feedback • Provide for coaching and mentoring of staff
7 Empower staff and build engaged learning communities result = distributed leadership for learning	• Promote collegial discourse and develop a culture for learning that involves learning from peers, especially from those who are further along in implementing new ideas • Foster positive mindsets about continuous school improvement, and build dynamic, engaged learning communities • Encourage resilience, experimentation and risk-taking • Organise regular teacher visits/'walkthroughs' in classrooms as a basis for ongoing professional dialogue • Distribute leadership responsibilities to teachers and produce a critical mass of leaders who have change knowledge • Empower teacher leaders to lead and undertake staff professional learning in the school and beyond
8 Generate and consolidate short-term wins result = momentum and a culture of success	• Plan deliberately for short-term wins • Highlight success that is a direct result of the initiative • Ensure that short-term wins provide meaningful milestones to demonstrate the success of staff team • Recognise and measure school and individual success based on results • Use the credibility of small wins to continue the push for the big win – the *organisational change mindset* of differentiated learning
9 Embed the changes into school culture result = lasting change	• Connect the change with organisational success • Align school systems and processes with the change • Lead and anchor the way to broad-based mindset when people begin to say about the new change: *"This is way things are done around here"*
10 Develop a culture of ongoing reflection result = lifelong learning mindsets	• Engage the school in the process of self-assessment *for* learning • Engage with student focus groups and gather data on student learning • Seek feedback from the entire school community (parents, students, teachers and the wider community) • Develop action plans based on the above three points • Use the reflective, critical feedback to renew and revitalise the process of school improvement, change and innovation

(Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; Dinham, 2008; DuFour, 2004; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010; Fullan, 2003; Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Guskey, 2002; Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001; Holman, Devan, & Cady, 2007; Kotter, 1996; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008)

Table 2: Differentiated High Performance Learning.

Ten characteristics of differentiated learning in the school

Characteristics	Strategies
1 Differentiated learning is based on the needs of individual students	• Acknowledge learning differences according to interests, learning needs and readiness • Identify and pre-assess highly able and gifted students, mainstream learners, and students with special learning needs to ensure that appropriate learning provisions are in place • Ensure that students with special learning needs participate in the regular setting to the fullest extent possible • Establish early identification, ongoing pre-assessments and appropriate assistance and support to meet individual student needs
2 Differentiated learning focuses on high-quality, concept-driven curriculum	• Emphasise essential understandings of a discipline • Ground the curriculum in factual, procedural and conceptual knowledge • Teach for *transfer* of knowledge and understanding to new or similar contexts • Guide high-order thinking, questions, dialogue and discussion • Assist students to connect significant ideas to personal lives • Develop students' skills, expertise and mindsets for quality work
3 Differentiated learning focuses on learning outcomes of significance	• Advance higher level skills and conceptual understandings in learning outcomes • Identify expectations for learning at appropriate levels that reflect the priorities of the Australian Curriculum for being broad-based, conceptual and relevant to real-world application
4 Syllabus outcomes, instruction and assessment practices are *aligned* and *differentiated* to meet individual student achievement outcomes	• Align the syllabus outcomes, instructional strategies and assessment practices to ensure consistency • Differentiate the learner outcomes, learning and teaching strategies, and assessments to maximise individual student learning • Identify starting point for learning through pre-assessment
5 Flexible classroom routines	• Adjust learning time based on student needs • Organise flexible grouping based on different methods and configurations • Provide varied materials • Use varied support systems for learning
6 Formative assessment is used to improve learning and achievement	• Use the evidence that teachers and students gather to make adjustments for continuous improvement • Ensure that assessment *for* learning includes rubrics for student self-assessment and peer assessment to generate self-efficacy and self-regulation • Provide formative feedback at task, process and self-regulation levels, including "where to next" (feed*forward*)

7 Evidence-based *modifications* and *accommodations* are made to the learning outcomes, content, process, product and environment to meet the needs of individual students	• Develop primary and secondary *units of learning* that encompass differentiated approaches to:
	  - why students learn (outcomes)
	  - what students learn (content)
	  - how students learn (instructional and management strategies)
	  - how students demonstrate what they have learnt (evidence of learning)
	  - where students learn (learning environment)
	• Design tasks at different levels of difficulty
	• Vary tasks and instruction in creative, practical and analytical methods
	• Embed learning technologies into curriculum as a tool for promoting higher-order thinking
	• Promote inquiry-based learning and problem solving by having students take charge of their own learning
	• Foster creative, critical, reflective and conceptual thinking skills among all students

8 Data-informed *Individual/ Personalised Learning Plans* (ILPs/PLPs) provide the framework for developing programs to meet the needs of individual students	• Develop Individual/ Personalised Learning Plans (ILPs/PLPs) through a collaborative team effort involving the student, parent, regular education teacher and resource personnel • Ensure that the instruction for gifted and mainstream underachievers, and students with special learning needs is guided by ILPs/PLPs, and builds on individual strengths
9 Ongoing *evaluation* and *reflection* on pedagogy and learning outcomes by teachers and students leads to professional growth of teachers and improved student achievement outcomes	• Organise teacher evaluation and reflection on teaching and learning practices, using the *Quality Teaching Model*, in collaboration with peers that leads not only to teacher professional growth but also improves student achievement outcomes • Provide students regular opportunities for self and peer evaluation • Develop students' metacognition – planning, monitoring, assessing and reflecting on their own learning – to increase their self-regulation and improve academic achievement
10 Differentiated learning develops habits of mind that foster autonomy and wisdom.	• Use differentiated learning approaches to realise individual potential and develop the learners into autonomous, young men and women of wisdom • Encourage students to develop habits of mind that resemble those of professionals in various fields with respect to skills, dispositions and attitudes

(Brophy, 2004; Castellano & Frazier, 2011; Chandra Handa, 2009; Chapman & King, 2012; Claxton ,*et al*., 2011; Delisle & Galbraith, 2001; Dixon & Moon, 2006; Dodge, 2005; Erickson, 2007; Fogarty, 2001; Gargiulo, 2012; Gregory & Chapman, 2001; Hattie, 2009; Heacox, 1996; Kirk, *et al*., 2012; Ladwig & Gore, 2003; Maker, 1982; MacLeod, 2004; Renzulli, *et al*., 2009; Rowe, 2004; Runco & Nemiro, 1994; Sousa, 2007; Turnbull, *et al*., 2010; Van Tassel-Baska, 2003)

Table 3: Differentiated High Performance Learning

Five elements of differentiated learning in the classroom

Elements	Strategies
1 Outcomes differentiation	• Modify the learning outcomes to meet diverse needs of students • Extend learning outcomes to advance higher level skills and conceptual understandings • Ensure that the differentiated content, processes and products emerge from, and are aligned with, the differentiated learning outcomes to maximise individual student learning
2 Content differentiation	• Modify the content in terms of complexity, enrichment, extension, compression, acceleration, variety and authenticity to meet diverse needs of students • Ensure that the substantive content is rich in deep concepts and ideas that encourage students to investigate beyond the facts • Encourage students to focus on "big ideas"/enduring understandings • Provide students opportunities to engage in the study of people by researching the lives of creative and productive individuals • Encourage students to think like experts in a field by relating content to the methods used in a particular field • Emphasise depth over breadth and concepts over facts in the curriculum • Ensure the curriculum is grounded in real-world problems that students care about or need to know
3 Process differentiation	• Modify the teaching strategies to meet diverse needs of students • Emphasise higher-order thinking processes in the learning activities such as application, analysis, evaluation and synthesis • Promote and develop creative, critical, conceptual and metacognitive thinking skills in the learning tasks • Provide students opportunities for self-directed learning to pursue extended projects and in-depth investigations by using an inquiry approach • Provide feedback that is meaningful, constructive, timely and is focused on the task, the process, self-regulation, and "where to next" (feed*forward*) • Ensure that the teaching strategies and learning activities are fun-filled and foster deep curiosity for learning among students
4 Product differentiation	• Modify the products to meet diverse needs of students (e.g., more complex, more conceptual or abstract for advanced learners) • Promote work on rich tasks that reflect and address real-world problems • Encourage students to develop products that are open-ended and are directed towards a real audience with an identified purpose • Encourage students to extend solutions to generalisations and *transformations* (finding practical uses for what is learned) • Undertake teacher assessment and student evaluation by using pre-established criteria • Ensure that ongoing formative assessments guide instruction (such as re-teaching, extending) and student learning • Design summative assessment products to maximise student performance
5 Learning environment differentiation	• Encourage inquiry and independence in the learning environment • Develop a learning environment that values diversity, emotional well-being and positive social interactions • Provide opportunities for choice and negotiation • Ensure that student groupings are flexible • Encourage students to take risks in exploring ideas and directions • Promote a sense of community in the classroom where students can freely express ideas and value each other's opinions

(Chandra Handa, 2009; Erickson, 2007; Kolencik & Hillwig, 2011; Maker, 1982; Slavin, 1987; Stefanakis, 2011; Tomlinson, 1995, 1998, 1998, 2001; Tomlinson, *et al.*, 2003; Trail, 2011; Van Tassel-Baska & Little, 2011)

What do high performance learners look like?

Improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation's social and economic prosperity and will position young people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives. High performance learners are:

- *Knowledge workers* who become lifelong learners, have a sense of self-worth and optimism about their lives, and make a leading contribution to society
- *Future leaders* who act with moral and ethical integrity, work for the common good, and are responsible global and local citizens (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs, 2008)
- *Entrepreneurs* who are innovative, take initiative, embrace opportunities, demonstrate capacity for "design thinking", and are well placed to enjoy future success (Shavinina, 2013; Wagner, 2012; Zhao, 2012).

Whole school systems approach

It requires all stakeholders to engage in the process of change – principals, executive, teachers, parents and students. Effective leaders build a culture of high expectations and reward efforts as well as high achievement. They ensure that learning is differentiated a*t all levels* in the school. The learning community is focused on providing advanced learning opportunities; creating autonomous learners with flexible outlooks; encouraging students to have a voice in their learning; and fostering leadership and community values in students.

In order to lead and nurture high performance in schools, I have outlined research-informed leadership actions, as well as characteristics and strategies for fostering differentiated learning at whole school and classroom level (Tables 1 to 3):

1 Leading differentiated high performance learning: 10 actions of school leaders that innovate school change.
2 Differentiated high performance learning *in the school*: 10 characteristics of differentiated learning.
3 Differentiated high performance learning *in the classroom*: 5 elements of differentiated learning.

References

Black, P, Harrison, C, Lee, C, Marshall, B, Wiliam, D 2003, *Assessment for learning,* Open University Press, Philadelphia.

Brophy, J 2004 *Motivating students to learn* (2nd ed.), Lawrence Erlbaum, NJ.

Castellano, JA, Frazier, AD 2011 *Special Populations in Gifted Education,* Prufrock, Waco, TX.

Chandra Handa, M 2009, 'Learner-centred differentiation model: A new framework', *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 55–66.

Chapman, C, King, R 2012, *Differentiated Assessment Strategies*, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Claxton, G, Chambers, M, Powell, G, Lucas, B 2011, *The learning powered school*, TLO Limited, Bristol.

Delisle, J, Galbraith, J 2002, *When Gifted Kids Don't Have All the Answers*. Free Spirit Publishing, Minneapolis.

Dinham, S 2008, *How to get your school moving and improving* ACER, Melbourne.

Dixon, F, Moon, S 2006, *The Handbook of Secondary Education*, Prufrock Press, Waco.

Dodge, J 2005, *Differentiation in action* Scholastic. New York

DuFour, R 2004, 'What is a "Professional Learning Community"?' *Educational Leadership*. Available at http://staffdev.mpls.k12.mn.us/. Accessed August 2013.

DuFour, R, DuFour, R, Eaker, R, Many, T (2010). *Learning by doing*, Solution Tree Press, USA.

Erickson, HL 2007, *Concept-Based curriculum and instruction for the thinking classroom*, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Fogarty, R 2001 *Different learners: Different strokes for different folks*, Fogarty and Associates, Chicago, IL.

Fullan, M 2003, *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*, The Falmer Press, London.

Fullan, M, Cuttress, C, Kilcher, A 2005, '8 forces for leaders of change', *JSD*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp. 54–64.

Fullan, M 2007, *The new meaning of educational change*, Teachers College Press, New York.

Gargiulo, RM 2012, *Special education in contemporary society: An introduction to exceptionality*, Sage, Los Angeles.

Gregory, GH, Chapman, C (2001). *Differentiated instructional strategies: One size doesn't fit all*, Corwin. Thousand Oaks, CA

Guskey, T 2002, 'Professional development and teacher change', *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, vol. 8, no. 3/4, pp. 381–91.

Hargreaves, A, Earl, L, Moore, S, Manning, S (2001). *Learning to change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hattie, J 2009, *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, Routledge, New York.

Heacox, D 1996, *Up from Underachievement*, Free Spirit Publishing, Minneapolis.

Holman, P, Devan, T, Cady, S 2007, *The Change Handbook*, Berret-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.

Kirk, S, Gallagher, JJ, Coleman, MR, Anastasiow, N 2012, *Educating exceptional children*, CENGAGE Learning, Wadsworth.

Kolencik, PL, Hillwig, SA 2011, *Encouraging metacognition*, Peter Lang, Oxford.

Kotter, J 1996, *Leading change*, Harvard Business Press, Boston.

Ladwig, J, Gore, J 2003, *Quality teaching in NSW public schools*, Department of Education and Training, Sydney.

Leithwood, K, Louis, KS 2012, *Linking leadership to student learning*, Jossey-Bass, CA

MacLeod, B 2004, *GERRIC Module 5: Professional Development Package for Teachers*, University of NSW.

Maker, CJ 1982, *Curriculum development for the gifted*, Aspen Systems, Rockville, MD.

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2008, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Available at http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/publications,11582.html. Accessed July 2013

Renzulli, JS, Gubbins, EJ, McMillen, KS, Eckert, RD, Little, CA 2009, *Systems and models for developing programs for the gifted and talented (2nd Ed.)*, Creative Learning Press, CT.

Robinson, VMJ, Lloyd, CA, Rowe, KJ 2008, 'The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types', *Educational Administration Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 5, pp. 635–74.

Rowe, K, 2004, *The importance of teaching: ensuring better schooling by building teacher capacities that maximise the quality of teaching and learning provision*, ACER, Melbourne.

Runco, MA, Nemiro, J 1994, 'Problem finding, creativity, and giftedness', *Roeper Review*, vol. 16, pp. 235–41.

Shavinina, L, ed 2013, *The Routledge International Handbook of Innovation Education*, Routledge, London.

Sousa, DA 2007, *How the special needs brain learns*, Corwin, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Slavin, RE 1987, 'Ability grouping: A best-evidence synthesis', *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 57, pp. 3–8.

Stefanakis, EH 2011, *Differentiated assessment*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Tomlinson, CA 1995, 'Deciding to differentiate instruction in middle school: One school's journey', *Gifted Child Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 77–87.

Tomlinson, CA 1998, 'For integration and differentiation choose concepts over topics', *Middle School Journal*, (Nov): pp. 3–8.

Tomlinson, CA 1999, *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*, ASCD, Alexandria, VA.

Tomlinson, CA 2001, *How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classrooms* (2nd ed.), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.

Tomlinson, CA, Brighton, C, Hertberg, H, Callaghan, C, Moon, T, Brimjoin, K, *et al.* 2003, 'Differentiating instruction in response to student readiness, interest and learning profile in academically diverse classrooms: A review of literature', *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, vol. 27, no. 2/3, pp. 119–45.

Trail, BA 2011, *Twice-exceptional gifted children*, Prufrock Press Inc, Texas.

Turnbull, A, Turnbull, R, Wehmeyer, ML, Shogren, KA 2010, *Exceptional lives*, Pearson, Boston.

VanTassel-Baska, J 2003, *Curriculum planning and instructional design for gifted learners*, Love Publishing, Denver, CO.

VanTassel-Baska, J, Little, CA (2011). *Content-based curriculum for high-ability learners*. Waco,TX: Prufrock.

Wagner, T 2012, *Creative Innovators*, New York: Scribner.

Zhao, Y 2012, *World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students*, Sage, London.

About the author

Manoj Chandra Handa currently serves as an Acting CEO Leadership in High Performance Directorate at the NSW Department of Education and Communities. A passionate advocate of the education of the gifted, he has published and presented internationally on gifted learning, leading educational change, and creativity. He is currently pursuing his doctoral thesis on 'Leading Differentiated Learning for the Gifted' at Macquarie University, Sydney.