

Creating a Learner Profile for Differentiation: The 'I Can/I'm Trying/Likes' Method

Materials Needed:

- Large sheets of paper or poster board (one per learner profile created)
- Markers or colored pencils
- Index cards or sticky notes (for sorting activities)
- Optional: Pictures of various early childhood activities (e.g., blocks, painting, story time, puzzles)
- A simple case study or observation notes (provided by instructor/parent or jointly developed) about a hypothetical 4-year-old learner (e.g., "Liam loves trucks, avoids messy paint, and can count to ten but struggles with matching colors.")

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the learner will be able to:

1. Define and categorize the three main areas of differentiation: Content, Process, and Product.
2. Utilize the "I can do," "I'm trying to do," and "Likes/Dislikes" framework to construct a comprehensive Learner Profile.
3. Design at least one differentiated activity (modifying Content, Process, or Product) based on the created Learner Profile of a 4-year-old.

Success Criteria

The learner knows they are successful when they have:

- Accurately placed observed behaviors into the three profile categories.
- Clearly explained how their designed activity addresses the needs (strengths or challenges) listed in the profile.
- Created a visually clear and organized Learner Profile poster.

Introduction: The Puzzle of Learning

Hook: The Superpower Question (5 minutes)

Imagine you have a superpower that lets you see exactly how someone learns best. You know what makes them excited, what they find tricky, and what they've already mastered. How much better could you help them learn if you had that superpower?

In teaching, that superpower is called **creating a Learner Profile**. Today, we are going to learn how to create this profile for young children (specifically 4-year-olds) so we can adjust our teaching methods—a practice called **Differentiation**.

Review of Key Concepts

Differentiation means customizing instruction to meet individual learner needs. It typically involves adjusting three areas:

- **Content:** What the child is learning (e.g., different reading materials, different topics).
- **Process:** How the child makes sense of the learning (e.g., independent work, group discussion, hands-on modeling).
- **Product:** What the child creates to show mastery (e.g., drawing a picture, building with blocks, telling a story).

Lesson Body: Building the Profile

Phase 1: I Do - Modeling the Framework (15 minutes)

Instructional Method: Visual Demonstration & Direct Instruction

The core of our Learner Profile uses three simple, non-judgmental categories that are perfect for observing early learners:

1. Defining the Profile Categories

(Using a whiteboard or large paper, create three columns and label them.)

1. **I Can Do (Mastery/Strengths):** These are skills the child has already mastered. They do them independently and consistently. *Example for a 4-year-old: I can use scissors safely. I can identify three primary colors.*
2. **I'm Trying to Do (Goals/Challenges):** These are skills the child is working on. They need scaffolding, practice, or help to achieve them. This is the Zone of Proximal Development. *Example: I'm trying to zip my coat. I'm trying to share toys without prompting.*
3. **Likes & Dislikes (Motivation/Interests):** These determine engagement. Likes tell us what content or process to use to motivate them. Dislikes tell us what to modify or avoid. *Example: I like building tall towers. I dislike loud, sudden noises.*

2. Applying the Framework to Differentiation

The goal is to use the profile to make adjustments. We use **Likes** to choose motivating **Content**. We use **I'm Trying to Do** to adjust the **Process** (scaffolding). We use **I Can Do** to determine challenging **Product** options.

Example Scenario: A 4-year-old who "Likes" dinosaurs but "Is trying to" learn to sort.

Differentiation: Instead of sorting colored blocks (low motivation), they sort small plastic dinosaurs by size or type (high motivation Content). (This modifies the Content).

Phase 2: We Do - Collaborative Profile Creation (20 minutes)

Instructional Method: Think-Pair-Share & Guided Practice

We will now apply this to a case study. (Present the provided case study/scenario about a hypothetical 4-year-old, e.g., Liam, the truck-lover.)

Activity: Profile Sort

1. The learner reviews the case study notes (Liam's strengths, weaknesses, and interests).
2. The instructor writes down 6-8 specific behaviors/observations onto separate index cards (e.g., "Can sing the ABC song," "Gets frustrated during coloring," "Loves playing outside," "Counts objects up to 5," etc.).

3. **We Do (Sorting):** Together, the instructor and learner read each card and physically place it under the correct category on the poster board (I Can Do, I'm Trying to Do, Likes/Dislikes).

Formative Assessment Check: Ask the learner: "Why did we put 'Counts objects up to 5' in 'I Can Do' rather than 'I'm Trying to Do'?" (Checks for understanding of mastery level.)

Phase 3: You Do - Designing Differentiated Activities (25 minutes)

Instructional Method: Application & Creative Design

Now, the learner uses the completed profile for Liam to design specific differentiated activities.

Activity: Differentiation Design Challenge

Using Liam's profile, the learner chooses one area (Content, Process, or Product) and designs an activity to target one of Liam's "I'm Trying to Do" goals, using one of his "Likes" for motivation.

| Liam's Goal (from "I'm Trying to Do") | Differentiation Area Chosen | Design the Activity (Specific Steps) |
|--|--|--|
| <i>Example: Trying to identify and name three shapes (circle, square, triangle).</i> | Process Modification | <i>Activity: Instead of drawing the shapes on paper, Liam is given large plastic trucks (his "Like"). He must match cardboard cutouts of circles, squares, and triangles to specific parking spots drawn on the floor (the "Process" is now kinesthetic and highly motivated).</i> |
| <i>Learner's Choice: [Fill in one goal from the profile]</i> | <i>Learner's Choice: (Content/Process/Product)</i> | <i>Learner must detail the activity steps here.</i> |

Success Criteria Review: The learner presents their designed activity, explaining which part of the profile informed their choice of Content, Process, or Product modification.

Conclusion: The Practical Teacher

Recap and Reflection (5 minutes)

We started by asking how we could get the "superpower" of understanding how a child learns. We learned that the Learner Profile—using the "I Can Do," "I'm Trying to Do," and "Likes/Dislikes" categories—is the tool that gives us that power.

Key Takeaway Question: How does using a profile like this help a 4-year-old feel more successful?

(Expected Answer: It ensures the learning isn't too easy, isn't too hard, and is always interesting.)

Summative Assessment (Demonstration)

The learner submits their completed Learner Profile poster and the written Differentiation Design Challenge activity, showing the direct connection between the child's observed needs and the instructional adjustment made.

Adaptability and Extensions

Differentiation Options

- **For Struggling Learners/Beginners (Scaffolding):** Provide a list of pre-written 'I Can Do' and

'I'm Trying to Do' statements for the 4-year-old case study, allowing the learner to focus primarily on the matching/sorting task and the differentiation design, rather than analyzing observations.

- **For Advanced Learners/Training Contexts (Extension):** Challenge the learner to design a second activity that differentiates for the **opposite** extreme of the profile (e.g., if the first activity supported a challenge, the second activity should enrich a strength). For instance, designing a Product that challenges the 4-year-old who "I Can Do" count to ten, requiring them to use counting skills in a unique way (like building a ten-block symmetrical tower).

Context Adaptations

- **Homeschool Context:** The "We Do" phase can focus on observing a younger sibling, a neighbor's child, or a character in a children's book/show, making the profile creation highly personalized and immediate.
- **Classroom Context:** Students can work in pairs to analyze different profiles provided by the instructor, then "present" their differentiated plan to the class for peer feedback.
- **Training/Professional Development:** Trainees can use real, anonymized observation data from their current workplace or student roster to practice creating the profiles as a job-specific planning tool.