* Zoe
* What is differentiation?
* Broadly, the development and assignment of distinct instruction or curricula for students who are perceived to have different learning abilities or styles.
* Differentiated instruction is not a single strategy but rather a framework with which to implement a variety of instructional strategies to account for differences between students.
* This topic was inspired by  Mike Rose article we read, “The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University,” which discussed the contention surrounding remediation and differentiation in college writing classrooms
* The issue that arose for me here is the difficulty and complexity of finding a good solution. Remedial classrooms carry stigma for students. But classrooms with students of mixed ability can be equally stigmatizing if students on the lower end of the bell curve of ability feel singled out or inferior to classmates around them.
* So what do we do? That’s what we plan to unpack in this presentation.
* Real-World Application - overview of advanced learning debate in Seattle Public Schools
* Seattle Public Schools has a long history of contention with differentiated learning
* The first “gifted” programs emerged in the 1960s with self-contained programs that relied heavily on IQ testing for identification.
* Programs have fluctuated over the years since.
* Currently, Seattle Public Schools has a self-contained model of differentiated learning for advanced learners called the Highly Capable Cohort which serves students in 1st-8th grades, with optional pathway schools offered in 9th-12th to maintain a cohort for advanced coursework to be offered. This program serves students who test in the top 2% nationally on IQ and other standardized tests. The program serves about 9% of SPS’s population, or about 5,000 students.
* SPS has tried other tiers of advanced learning in the past, including a program called Spectrum, which essentially amounted to the self-contained classroom model, and Advanced Learning Opportunities (ALO), which was differentiation within the classroom. Both programs were implemented inconsistently, without proper training or resources provided to teachers. Additionally, many teachers were against the fundamental philosophy behind the programs and differentiation for advanced learners. They ended up being very site-specific and dissolved quickly.
* Seattle Public Schools’ current Supt, Denise Juneau, wants to dissolve the HCC program altogether, citing racial inequity. This argument is entirely valid. The HCC program is vastly disproportionate racially - for example, about 14.2% of students in the district are black, but only about 1.7% of students in HCC.
* The issue becomes: if you dissolve the self-contained model, what do you do with the students it once served?
* The current plan is for all students to attend schools in their neighborhoods, but even these are vastly disproportionate in terms of resources and population of advanced learners who attend - and thus pressure to offer services.
* Juneau has not proposed any models of professional development for teachers to serve a mixed-ability classroom or plans to implement site-based differentiation.
* As shown through the failures of Spectrum and ALO, differentiation doesn’t just happen. A large amount of devotion and effort are necessary to offer such services.
* There’s also the social stigma created, both for advanced learners who lack the cohort where they are not an anomaly, prone to being outcast, labeled ‘nerdy’ and ‘weird,’ and for general education students who suffer from shaky attempts at differentiation and already limited resources within schools directed away from them and towards serving the couple of students per grade who represent extreme outliers.
* This is a complex problem that lacks a simple solution. Time, money, and resources must be devoted for differentiation to be implemented successfully in any form, and for all students to be served.
  + Possible solutions include:
    - universal testing for giftedness,
    - making HCC an opt-out program, automatically enrolling all qualified students to ensure they do not miss out on services due to lack of information or difficulty navigating the district’s complex logistics.
    - a sliding scale for HCC admission based on race or socioeconomic status, a system The Seattle Times reported was successful in Miami at vastly expanding access to advanced learning for students of color, low-income students and English Language Learners.
    - removing the threshold that causes problems of access: making HCC a self-contained option program available to all students.