

Between diagnostic intent and uniform tasks: Teachers' planning for differentiated learning in arts education

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Submitted:
21-04-2026

Accepted:
21-05-2026

Published:
22-05-2026

Abstract: This study examines how arts teachers in Indonesia plan differentiated learning under Kurikulum Merdeka and how such planning may be interpreted through the lens of creative pedagogy. This study employed a multi-source qualitative design using triangulative thematic analysis of two textual corpora: 35 open-ended online survey responses and 21 verified lesson plans/teaching modules from arts teachers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia. The findings show that teachers generally understand differentiation as a pedagogical ideal centred on learners' needs, interests, abilities, and learning profiles. In planning practice, however, differentiation was materialised mainly through variation in resources, media, and general classroom activities, such as projects, discussions, presentations, and reflections. While diagnostic assessment, enrichment, and remedial support were frequently mentioned, the linkage between assessment data and genuinely differentiated instructional design remained weak. Many lesson plans retained shared workflows, common core tasks, and relatively standardised outputs across diverse learners. The study concludes that arts teachers have moved towards procedural responsiveness, yet differentiation often remains thin rather than pedagogically plural. These findings emphasise the urgency of a stronger shift from surface variation towards meaningful pedagogical plurality in arts lesson planning.

Keywords: Differentiated learning, creative pedagogy, lesson planning

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana guru seni di Indonesia merencanakan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka dan bagaimana perencanaan tersebut dapat dibaca melalui lensa pedagogi kreatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif multisumber dengan analisis tematik triangulatif terhadap dua korpus teks, yaitu 35 respons survei daring terbuka dan 21 modul ajar terverifikasi dari guru seni di Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta dan Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru pada umumnya memahami diferensiasi sebagai ideal pedagogik yang berpusat pada kebutuhan, minat, kemampuan, dan profil belajar peserta didik. Namun, dalam praktik perencanaan, diferensiasi terutama dimaterialkan melalui variasi sumber, media, dan aktivitas umum kelas, seperti proyek, diskusi, presentasi, dan refleksi. Walaupun asesmen diagnostik, pengayaan, dan remedial cukup sering disebutkan, keterhubungan antara data asesmen dan desain instruksional yang benar-benar terdiferensiasi masih lemah. Banyak modul ajar tetap mempertahankan alur kerja kelompok, tugas inti yang sama, dan keluaran yang relatif terstandarkan bagi peserta didik yang beragam. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa guru seni telah bergerak ke arah responsivitas prosedural, tetapi diferensiasi masih cenderung tipis dan belum menjadi pluralitas pedagogis yang bermakna. Temuan ini menegaskan perlunya pergeseran dari variasi permukaan menuju pluralitas pedagogis yang lebih substantif dalam perencanaan pembelajaran seni.

Kata kunci: Pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, pedagogi kreatif, perencanaan pembelajaran

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INTRODUCTION

Global curriculum reform is increasingly moving toward flexibility, autonomy, and responsiveness to student diversity, rather than remaining centred on uniformity in content, time allocation, and learning methods. This shift is driven by the recognition that contemporary classrooms are marked by unequal learning readiness, diverse interests,

varied socio-cultural backgrounds, and different ways of engaging with knowledge (Abakirov et al., 2025; Anyichie et al., 2023; Feng et al., 2025). The OECD (2024) argues that curriculum flexibility involves not only goals and content, but also pedagogy, assessment, and learning time, and that its success depends on teacher capacity, clear objectives, and supportive institutional conditions. In this sense, flexibility is not simply a policy slogan; it is a pedagogical demand that requires teachers to transform curriculum autonomy into concrete planning decisions.

Within this reform landscape, differentiated learning has become one of the most prominent approaches for responding to learner diversity. Differentiated instruction is commonly understood as a proactive pedagogical orientation in which teachers adjust content, process, product, and learning environment in response to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Gheysens et al., 2023; Langelaan et al., 2024; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). Therefore, valid differentiation is not synonymous with extreme individualisation, improvised task variation, or random assignment choices. Rather, it refers to deliberate, evidence-informed planning that provides all students with meaningful, challenging, and appropriate learning opportunities (Eikeland & Ohna, 2022; Tomlinson, 2001; Tomlinson et al., 2003). In the Indonesian context, this urgency gained new momentum through Kurikulum Merdeka, which normatively positions meaningful, effective, and student-centred learning and enables educators to design learning in line with students' contexts and learning needs. The official Independent Curriculum document defines (BSKAP Kemendikdasmen RI, 2025b) differentiated learning as a strategy focused on developing each student's competencies through assessments conducted at the beginning, throughout, and at the end of the learning process. Kurikulum Merdeka positions learning and assessment as an integrated cycle and emphasises that assessment should provide information for designing subsequent learning. The 2025 national guidance explicitly frames planning as the formulation of learning objectives, learning steps, and assessment, while defining assessment as the process of collecting and processing information about students' learning needs and achievement. This policy logic makes diagnostic and formative assessment central to differentiated planning, not merely an administrative requirement. The Indonesian learning and assessment guide states that assessment provides information for the learning that needs to be designed, and that formative assessment is prioritised to support the development of student competence.

Recent empirical studies, however, show that the implementation of differentiated learning remains uneven. Studies conducted within the Merdeka Curriculum context report recurring challenges, including limited or surface-level teacher understanding, insufficient training and resources, limited time for preparation and implementation, difficulty diagnosing students' needs, and difficulty designing suitable assessment instruments or differentiated assessment strategies (AP et al., 2025; Asep Ahyar et al., 2025; Dewi et al., 2025; Khotimah et al., 2025; Muhtadi et al., 2024; Witraguna et al., 2024; Witraguna & Jaya, 2024). These studies suggest that the current problem is no longer simply whether teachers know the vocabulary of differentiation, but whether they can convert diagnostic information into genuinely differentiated instructional architecture. This issue is particularly important because Kurikulum Merdeka grants teachers greater autonomy, yet autonomy does not automatically lead to differentiated practice. A teacher may conduct a diagnostic assessment, identify readiness or learning profiles, and still design a single

common task, a shared workflow, and a uniform product for all students. They face difficulties with assessment, criteria design, training, and the practical implementation of differentiated learning under the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Arts education offers a strategic but under-examined context for analysing this tension. The basis for this claim lies in both international and Indonesian curriculum discourses. Arts education is expected to support creativity, reflection, expression, cultural engagement, collaboration, and meaningful relationships between school learning and wider social life (BSKAP Kemendikdasmen RI, 2025a; UNESCO, 2024). UNESCO's Framework for Culture and Arts Education emphasises culture and arts education as a means of broadening learning environments, integrating local knowledge systems, and connecting formal education with museums, galleries, creative spaces, cultural heritage, and community contexts. Thus, arts education is theoretically well suited to differentiated learning because it allows multiple media, rhythms, processes, expressive forms, and pathways of meaning-making. At the same time, this suitability creates a risk: because art lessons naturally involve varied media and creative products, teachers may assume that any variation in materials, media, or activities already constitutes deep differentiation (Cremin & Chappell, 2021).

In Indonesia, emerging studies on arts learning under Kurikulum Merdeka have begun to describe how teachers implement learning modules, learning outcomes, written and practical assessments, and culturally situated arts activities (Arisyanto et al., 2023; Nuur 'azmii & Wulandari, 2023; Siti Ni'matul Fitriyah et al., 2024; Ummah & Nadlir, 2024; Wati et al., 2025; Zuhro et al., 2025). However, these studies have not yet sufficiently examined how arts teachers translate diagnostic intent into lesson-planning artefacts, nor whether differentiated learning in arts education becomes substantive pedagogical plurality or remains limited to surface variation. This constitutes the specific research gap addressed in this study. Existing research tends to discuss differentiated learning in general subjects, teacher readiness, implementation barriers, or broad curriculum enactment. Far less attention has been paid to the micro-level textual evidence of teachers' planning, including how open-ended survey accounts and verified teaching modules reveal the relationships among diagnostic assessment, differentiation labels, task structure, and product expectations in arts education. Recent local arts education research has described the implementation of arts learning and assessment within the Kurikulum Merdeka, but the focus has not yet been on the tension between diagnostic intent and planning in artefacts.

This study is grounded in two theoretical perspectives. First, differentiated instruction provides the analytical basis for examining whether teachers' planning responds to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles through differentiated content, processes, products, and learning environments (Langelaan et al., 2024; Tomlinson, 2001, 2016; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023; Tomlinson et al., 2003). Second, creative pedagogy provides the interpretive lens for deeply analysing whether differentiation in arts education opens multiple entry points, varied expressive routes, student agency, reflection, and meaningful creative production, or whether it remains a procedural variation of the same task (Chappell et al., 2019; Cremin, 2015; Hendri & Wulandari, 2022; Hetherington et al., 2019; Lin, 2011; Selkrig & Keamy, 2017; Wulandari, 2020; Wulandari & Suryatna, 2017). Through this combined lens, differentiated arts learning is not treated merely as the use of diverse media, projects, or classroom activities,

but as the design of plural learning pathways that enable diverse students to think, make, reflect, and demonstrate understanding in different yet equally meaningful ways.

Based on this problem, research gap, and theoretical foundation, this study aims to analyse how arts teachers plan differentiated learning under Kurikulum Merdeka and how such planning can be interpreted through the lens of creative pedagogy. More specifically, the study examines three interrelated issues: first, how teachers interpret differentiation in arts education; second, how diagnostic assessment is positioned and connected to planning decisions; and third, whether the resulting lesson-planning artefacts demonstrate substantive differentiation or retain uniform task structures. Accordingly, the study asks: (1) How do arts teachers interpret differentiated learning in the context of Kurikulum Merdeka? (2) How is diagnostic assessment linked to instructional planning in teachers' survey responses and lesson-plan documents? (3) How can the tension between diagnostic intent and uniform task structures be interpreted through the lens of creative pedagogy? By addressing these questions, this study does not merely evaluate policy compliance. Rather, it investigates the pedagogical logic through which differentiation is understood, translated, narrowed, or expanded within arts teachers' planning practices.

METHOD

This research is a multi-source qualitative study using triangulative thematic analysis of two textual corpora, including online open-ended survey responses and lesson plan/teaching module documents. This design combines the strengths of an online qualitative survey to gather written accounts from diverse participants, document analysis to systematically examine pedagogical artefacts, and reflexive thematic analysis to develop themes flexibly, interpretively, and transparently. Online qualitative surveys are appropriate when researchers seek rich written responses rather than numerical prevalence estimates, and open-ended questions need to be clear, concise, and directly aligned with the research purpose (V. Braun et al., 2021). This research design aligns with the research objective, which is not to measure the prevalence of practices but rather to interpret how differentiation is understood, argued, and incorporated into arts learning designs.

The participants were selected through purposive-convenience sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (1) teachers teaching arts and culture-related subjects; (2) teachers affiliated with, or reachable through, the Arts and Culture Subject Teachers' Conference network; (3) teachers who had experience preparing or using Kurikulum Merdeka lesson plans or teaching modules; and (4) teachers willing to submit written survey responses and, where available, supporting planning documents. The survey corpus comprises 35 unique responses collected via Google Forms within the Arts and Culture Subject Teachers' Conference network in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and Nusa Tenggara Barat from June to August 2024, as shown in Table 1. Although two respondents came from elementary and early childhood education settings, they were retained only in the initial interpretive mapping because they belonged to the arts education cluster; the main analytical focus remained on junior high school, senior high school, and vocational high school teachers. The document corpus consists of 21 verified lesson plans/teaching modules from secondary-level arts teachers.

Table 1. Data

Corpus	n	School Type	Subject
Open-ended survey response	35	High school (15), junior high school (10), vocational high school (8), elementary school (1), early childhood education (1)	Visual art (18), kriya/crafts (7), music (7), dance (2), drama (1)
Verified document	21	High school (9), junior high school (7), vocational high school (5)	Visual art (13), kriya/crafts (2), music (5), dance (1)

The survey instrument consisted of 23 items: five respondent profile items, fourteen substantive open-ended questions, one assessment-focused item, one document upload item, one photo/evidence upload item, and one consent/confirmation item. The substantive questions were developed deductively from three sources: differentiated instruction theory, Kurikulum Merdeka learning and assessment guidance, and creative pedagogy in arts education. Differentiated instruction theory informed questions on content, process, product, and learning environment, as well as readiness, interest, and learning profile. Kurikulum Merdeka guidance (BSKAP Kemendikdasmen RI, 2025b) provides information on diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment, as the official guidance positions assessment as a source of information for designing and improving learning. Creative pedagogy informed questions on media variation, creative process, student choice, reflection, and artistic production. Thus, the items were not copied from an existing standardised instrument, but were adapted conceptually from established theoretical constructs and policy dimensions relevant to the study.

The survey questions were structured into four sections: teacher profile; teachers' understanding of differentiated learning; planning and implementation of differentiation across content, process, product, and learning environment; and assessment, documentation, and supporting evidence. Examples of items include: *What do you understand by differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum? What have you done in your classroom to implement process differentiation? How have you assessed/graded to measure each student's achievement of differentiation?* All questions were open-ended to allow participants to explain practices in their own words, while avoiding pre-coded responses that could restrict qualitative interpretation.

Instrument validation was conducted through content validation and readability checking. First, the initial item grid was mapped against the theoretical dimensions of differentiated instruction, official Kurikulum Merdeka planning and assessment components, and the research questions. Second, two arts education lecturers and one curriculum/assessment researcher reviewed the items for relevance, clarity, redundancy, and alignment with the study objectives. Third, minor revisions were made to simplify wording, remove overlapping prompts, and ensure that each item asked only one main issue. Finally, the Google Forms instrument was trialled with two arts teachers who were not included in the final corpus to check readability, completion time, and technical clarity. Their feedback was used to refine wording and upload instructions.

The accompanying documents were derived from the uploaded lesson plans/teaching modules. Twenty-one documents were collected and then treated as planning artefacts. According to the official Merdeka Curriculum guidelines, they should at least include

learning objectives, learning steps, assessments, and media or resources that support the learning process. Therefore, the documents were relevant for examining whether teachers' stated diagnostic intent was translated into differentiated planning structures. The authenticity of the documents was verified pragmatically by matching teacher names, educational units, subjects, phases/grades, and academic years; the presence of signatures or internal approvals; and the consistency of their structure with the Merdeka Curriculum teaching materials.

Data analysis used Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, operationalised through a hybrid inductive-deductive approach. Reflexive thematic analysis is suitable for flexible qualitative interpretation and does not require themes to be treated as mechanically discovered categories (V. Braun & Clarke, 2021). All survey responses and lesson plans were anonymised, reread, and memoed. Deductive codes were developed from differentiation theory and creative pedagogy, while inductive open coding captured categories emerging from teachers' language and document structures. Codes were then compared across the survey and document corpora to examine convergence, deviation, and contradiction. Final themes were identified not solely by frequency, but by their explanatory power in relation to the research questions, especially the tension between diagnostic intent and uniform task structures.

Trustworthiness was maintained through survey-document triangulation, expert review of the instrument, dialogic double-coding of a portion of the corpus, peer debriefing, limited member checking, audit trails, reflexive memos, storage of coded versions, and documentation of theme revisions. Ethically, this study was based on informed consent, anonymisation, and restricted-access data storage. The study is limited by its purposive-convenience sample, reliance on written responses without follow-up interviews, and uneven availability of lesson plans. However, these limitations were mitigated through cross-source triangulation and an emphasis on theoretical transferability rather than statistical generalisation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are organised according to the three analytical objectives of the study. To make the thematic structure explicit, Table 2 summarises the relationships among the research focus, themes, evidence patterns, and analytical meanings derived from the survey and document corpora. The table shows that the central finding of this study is not a simple absence of differentiation, but a more specific tension between diagnostic intent and uniform task structures.

Table 2. Summary of thematic findings from survey responses and lesson-plan documents

Research focus	Theme	Dominant survey codes	Coding evidence	Analytical meaning and core findings
Teachers' interpretation of differentiation	Responsiveness as a pedagogical ideal	needs; interests; abilities; learning styles/profiles; student-centred learning	In the recoding of 35 open-ended responses, explicit references to	Differentiation has been internalised primarily at the discursive level as a

			needs appeared in 23 responses, interests in 19, abilities in 17, and learning styles/profiles in 17. Teachers' discourse is echoed in planning labels as well as grouping.	pedagogical and policy ideal. Teachers largely speak the language of responsiveness, but this does not yet guarantee differentiated design.
	Differentiation perception materialised mainly through resources, media, and general activity variation	varied sources; multimodal media; discussion; project; presentation; reflection; group/individual work	Survey responses repeatedly describe differentiation through procedural variation. Lesson plans frequently list gadgets, laptops, internet access, videos, worksheets, digital platforms, and project-based or discussion-based routines.	Differentiation is present, but it is most often enacted as procedural variation in resources, media, and activities rather than as a transformation of learning pathways.
Link between assessment and planning	Diagnostic intent without strong instructional branching	diagnostic assessment; pretest–posttest; formative; summative; portfolio; peer tutor; enrichment/remedial	Teachers often place assessment at the centre of differentiation. Strong documentary traces	The issue is not the absence of assessment, but the weak conversion of diagnostic data into differentiated instructional architecture. Assessment often functions classificatorily rather than generatively.
	Uniform task structures	same indicators; same expected result; same	Survey responses show explicit	Differentiation tends to occur inside a shared

	across diverse learners	material/approach; grouped choice within common task	standardisation logic. Across modules, students often follow one common task sequence and one dominant product type. Even when choice is allowed, the task architecture remains largely shared.	task structure rather than through multiple equivalent pathways. Variation affects access and support more than the task architecture itself.
Creative pedagogy interpretation	Thin differentiation in arts education	surface variation; media-rich learning; product choice; contextual/creative appearance; limited plurality	Survey responses suggest creative-looking differentiation. Yet these often remain linked to the same overall learning structure. Several lesson plans contain promising traces of creative pedagogy. Yet still organise students around common objectives, workflows, and assessable outputs.	The novel conceptual contribution of the study is thin differentiation: teachers adopt the language, tools, and surface procedures of differentiation, but these do not yet consistently generate meaningful pedagogical plurality in arts learning.

Viewed through the lens of creative pedagogy, the thematic pattern in Table 2 suggests that differentiation in arts education should not be judged solely by the presence of varied media, projects, or classroom activities. Creative pedagogy requires attention to whether learning enables autonomy, agency, problem-solving, risk-taking, idea generation, collaboration, and meaningful creative inquiry (Cremin & Chappell, 2021). Therefore, the key analytical issue is not whether teachers mention differentiation, but whether their plans create conditions in which students can enter, negotiate, and demonstrate learning through plural creative pathways.

The novel finding of this study lies in identifying what may be called “thin differentiation” in arts lesson planning. Thin differentiation refers to a planning condition in which teachers adopt the language, tools, and surface procedures of differentiated learning, such as diagnostic assessment, media variation, flexible grouping, enrichment, remediation, projects, and student choice, but do not consistently transform these into substantively different learning trajectories. This finding strengthens the research gap stated in the Introduction. Previous studies have commonly reported teachers’ limited understanding, implementation barriers, or general challenges in differentiated learning under Kurikulum Merdeka. However, the present study shows a more specific mechanism: differentiation may appear administratively present in lesson plans while remaining pedagogically thin because diagnostic data are not converted into branching task design, differentiated complexity, varied product pathways, or flexible criteria of success. Further discussion is explained below.

Arts teachers' interpretation of differentiated learning in the context of Kurikulum Merdeka

Differentiation as a pedagogical ideal: Teachers’ dominant discourse of responsiveness

The most fundamental findings from the survey corpus indicate that art teachers generally do not interpret differentiated learning as a set of discrete classroom techniques, but rather as a pedagogical ideal that stems from a recognition of student diversity. In open-ended responses, the definitions that emerged repeatedly placed needs, interests, abilities, learning styles, and, in some cases, learning profiles at the centre of instructional orientation. One respondent wrote that differentiated learning is “a teaching and learning process that enables each student to understand subject matter according to their individual abilities, interests, and needs”. Another respondent emphasised that in the Independent Curriculum, teachers need to “facilitate student-centred learning, so that each student can learn optimally according to their needs, interests, and abilities”. Meanwhile, another respondent defined it as learning that “provides students with the freedom to develop their potential according to their learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles”. Some teachers formulated it more operationally as providing “several learning options, ranging from classroom delivery methods, content, assignments, and learning evaluation and reflection”, but still emphasised that the core of differentiation is meeting students’ basic needs before developing their interests and talents.

This pattern is not a marginal case, but rather a dominant trend. Of the 35 responses, explicit references to needs appeared in 23, interests in 19, abilities in 17, and learning styles/profiles in 17. Analytically, this distribution indicates that teachers understood differentiation primarily as a response to classroom heterogeneity, not simply as a variation in methods. In other words, what came first in teachers’ discourse was the assumption that students are indeed different, and therefore, uniform learning is deemed inadequate. At the discursive level, this finding closely aligns with Tomlinson’s idea (2001, 2016) that differentiated instruction is a way of thinking about teaching and learning, a pedagogical approach that starts from students’ readiness, interests, and learning profiles, then translates these into decisions about content, process, products, and the learning environment.

This closeness was also evident in the respondents' choice of language. Some answers not only mentioned individual differences but also linked them to teacher flexibility, continuous assessment, and the need for choice. One respondent, for example, wrote that differentiated learning "focuses on the needs, interests, and abilities of each student. Teachers need to understand their students' individual learning profiles in order to design appropriate learning". This formulation demonstrates that the language of the Kurikulum Merdeka policy, particularly regarding student-centred, flexible, and assessment-based learning, has been quite strongly internalised. In other words, at the conceptual level, teachers are not speaking from a vacuum; they are speaking with vocabulary aligned with official curriculum documents and more established differentiation literature.

Interestingly, this responsive orientation also leaves quite explicit traces in some lesson plans. In one music module, for example, it states that "Students are given the freedom to access learning resources according to their interests and learning profiles". In a two-dimensional art module, the teacher differentiates access to materials "for students with visual learning styles" through a drive module and "for students with auditory learning styles" through a video in a PowerPoint presentation, explicitly labelled "CONTENT DIFFERENTIATION". In another module, the teacher even states that the creation process is carried out "according to student interests", while in another music document, the learning is designed by dividing students "based on their musical ability level", where groups with low musicality are "given more intensive guidance", while groups with high musicality are "given more complex challenges". These traces are important because they demonstrate that the ideal of differentiation does not remain an abstract slogan; it has entered the language of planning, pedagogical labels, and some instructional decisions.

Pertanyaan Mendasar	1. Guru melakukan apersepsi, Guru mengajak peserta didik untuk membuka materi di link drive https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VpUHGNAYkPCMAYN4UgE_0JEmSQmZ?usp=share_link dengan materi pada modul UNIT 1 (bagi siswa dengan gaya belajar visual) atau dengan video dalam ppt dengan tema SENI DAN LINGKUNGAN DAN SENI RUPA 2D (bagi siswa dengan gaya belajar auditori). (TPACK) (DIFERENSIASI KONTEN) 2. Setelah memahami materi, peserta didik bertanya jawab dengan pendidik terkait materi yang dipelajari dengan pertanyaan sebagai berikut. 1) Apa yang kalian ketahui mengenai karya 2D?
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Fig. 1. Differentiation implementation code in the teacher's lesson plan

This finding is consistent with differentiated instruction theory, which positions learner readiness, interest, and learning profile as the basis for adjusting content, process, product, and learning environment. However, the present finding also suggests that teachers' conceptual familiarity with differentiation does not automatically guarantee differentiated pedagogical design. This distinction is important because recent studies on differentiated learning in the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum context (Fadil & Nurulpaik, 2026) report that teachers often understand differentiation as a response to learner diversity, yet still struggle to operationalise it in assessment, task design, and classroom management. It is reported that teachers face challenges in assessment criteria, readiness to design differentiated learning, and practical implementation under Kurikulum Merdeka.

This discursive responsiveness is an important but incomplete starting point. Creative pedagogy is not limited to recognising learner diversity; it also requires teachers to design learning situations in which students' differences become resources for generating ideas, experimenting with materials, taking interpretive risks, and constructing meaning (Lin, 2011). In this sense, the teachers' language of responsiveness indicates conceptual alignment with differentiation, but not yet sufficient evidence of creative pedagogical transformation.

Here, the influence of the Kurikulum Merdeka discourse is strongly evident, requiring teachers to start from students' characteristics rather than from uniform content. In this sense, our findings align with Braun et al.'s (A. Braun et al., 2011) view of policy enactment; policies are not implemented linearly, but are interpreted, translated, and negotiated by school actors. In this case, the interpretation stage appears to have progressed quite far; teachers have absorbed and repeated the policy language with a relatively high degree of coherence. A more fundamental issue, and one that will be addressed in subsequent themes, is how this established ideal is translated into concrete planning: whether it develops into a truly diverse learning design or remains at the level of normative discourse.

From responsiveness to procedure: Differentiation perception materialised mainly through resources, media, and general activity variation

From a cross-corpus reading, the most consistent pattern is not the design of truly branching learning paths, but rather the materialisation of differentiation at its most operational level, including the variety of learning resources, the use of multimodal media, the organisation of common activities, and the combination of individual and group work. In other words, differentiation is indeed present in practice, but primarily as the proceduralization of access and activities, rather than as a pedagogical design that profoundly changes the structure of the learning experience.

This is evident in the survey responses. In explaining the differentiation of resources, one teacher wrote: "I provide a variety of learning resources such as textbooks, online materials, learning videos, and learning apps. I present information using various methods and media, such as written text, visuals, audio, or interactive media, according to students' needs". Another respondent emphasised that she "gives students the choice to choose the learning resources that best suit their preferences". At the process level, another teacher explained that she "designs diverse lesson plans, using a variety of teaching strategies such as lectures, group discussions, project work, or problem-based learning". A similar pattern emerged with product differentiation: one respondent stated that she "provides a variety of options, such as art projects, essays, presentations, posters, mock-ups, videos, or other creative projects". while another wrote that after the lesson, students can choose to "make a poster, write an essay, create a PowerPoint presentation, or even make a short video". In terms of environmental differentiation, teacher responses frequently mentioned flexible space arrangements, study nooks, collaboration tables, freedom to choose seating, and classroom management that supports both individual and group work.

In general, these patterns indicate that differentiation in art teacher practice is most easily realised through four mechanisms. First, increasing the number of sources and the variety of information formats. Second, varying the modes of activity, especially discussions, projects, presentations, and reflection. Third, providing a choice of forms of expression or

products. Fourth, combining individual and collaborative work. However, the data also shows that the enactment is more focused on areas that are administratively and instructionally easiest to present in the document: media lists, learning models, activity steps, and assignment formats.

The survey findings are highly consistent with the lesson plan. Several teaching modules show that differentiation is indeed materialised primarily through resources, media, and orchestration of general activities. In one music module, the teacher lists learning media as "7-minute vocal warm-up learning application", "YouTube visual media", WhatsApp Group, Google Classroom, audio media, and assessment sheets. In the same module, learning resources include not only textbooks but also videos and digital devices, thus opening learning to various channels of representation. In another art module, the infrastructure explicitly lists gadgets, a laptop/PC computer, internet access, textbooks, worksheets, and other supporting references, with the learning model "Blended learning through a learning model using Project Based Learning (PBL) integrated with differentiated learning". In the poster module, students "watch a video of several poster examples provided by the teacher", then "are given a worksheet", engage in group discussions, and complete evaluations via Google Forms. In other modules, students are asked to practice, discuss, present their answers, and reflect individually or in groups on their achievements and challenges during the learning process.

The consistency between the survey and the documents indicates that, in teacher practice, differentiation is often understood as providing multiple media for accessing material and multiple activity formats for processing it. In the context of arts education, this kind of flexibility even seems highly compatible with the nature of the field itself. Art, as studio pedagogy, reminds us that it is inherently multimodal, experimental, and open to diverse ways of experiencing and expressing learning. Therefore, it is not surprising that art teachers move relatively easily toward a variety of media, projects, presentations, and reflections.

However, this is precisely where the critical finding lies. When viewed through Tomlinson's lens (2001), differentiation doesn't simply mean presenting multiple media or activities; it means proactively linking these adjustments to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles across the four core elements of learning: content, process, product, and environment. In this data, teachers frequently mention diverse sources, media choices, and varied activities; however, what is most apparent is superficial variation in learning methods, not always a transformation of the logic of learning design. This means that differences emerge more in the vehicles of instruction than in the architecture of learning. Students can read articles or watch videos; discuss, present, or work on projects; and work individually or in groups. However, in many cases, all of this remains within a single, central learning flow shared across the class.

Creative learning, as Sawyer (2011, 2017) emphasises, is not simply active and engaging; it needs to open up possibilities for students to approach learning from multiple points, move at different paces, and generate understanding through pathways that are truly meaningful to them. Within this framework, the use of video, the internet, student worksheets, projects, and presentations is certainly beneficial, but it is not synonymous with deep differentiation. In other words, this data demonstrates thin differentiation:

learning is becoming more media-rich, more varied in activities, and more collaborative, but not necessarily more pedagogically diverse.

This pattern illustrates a critical distinction between creative-looking learning and creative pedagogy. Learning may appear creative because it uses videos, digital platforms, worksheets, projects, presentations, or alternative materials; however, creative pedagogy asks whether these resources actually expand students' possibilities for inquiry, experimentation, authorship, and meaning-making (Sawyer, 2017). If varied media only support the same task sequence and the same expected product, then creativity remains attached to the surface of instruction rather than embedded in the structure of learning.

This reading is reinforced by the recurring planning structures in the document. For example, although certain modules mention project-based learning and differentiation, the core activities continue to follow a general sequence: providing a stimulus, watching videos, group discussions, working on student worksheets, giving presentations, and reflecting. In the music module, despite variations in resources and ability grouping, the activity structure remains remarkably similar across classes: teacher demonstration, practice, discussion, presentation, and reflective closing. This does not mean that differentiation is absent, but rather that differentiation is most often present in the form of enrichment of learning procedures, rather than substantive differentiation of pathways.

Thus, this theme suggests that the translation of responsiveness into practice does occur, but primarily through relatively easy-to-operate forms, such as a variety of resources, digital and non-digital media, student worksheets (LKPD), projects, discussions, presentations, reflections, and a combination of individual and group work. The key question is no longer whether differentiation is present, but rather the extent to which these procedures are truly informed by learning-needs data and lead to differentiated designs for different students. At this point, the tension among responsiveness, diagnostic assessment, and a tendency toward uniform assignments becomes increasingly apparent.

The linkage between diagnostic assessment and instructional planning in teachers' survey responses and lesson-plan documents

Diagnostic intent without strong branching design

This theme is the most central analytical point in this study. While in the previous two themes, teachers appear to have internalized differentiation as a responsive pedagogical ideal and have materialized it through a variety of resources, media, and activities, the third theme reveals a sharper tension: diagnostic assessment, initial ability mapping, and the terms enrichment and remedial are already quite present in discourse and documents, but these tools have not been consistently translated into truly branching learning designs. In other words, what emerges in many cases is a diagnostic intent without a strong branching design.

Theoretically, diagnostic assessment should function as a bridge between learner diversity and instructional decision-making. It should not end with identifying students' initial abilities, but should inform the selection of task complexity, learning support, grouping, pacing, resources, and product options. In this study, however, diagnostic assessment often functions as a classificatory device rather than a generative design tool. This means that assessment identifies who needs support or enrichment, but does not always reshape what students do, how they proceed, or how they demonstrate learning.

Recent studies on diagnostic assessment in differentiated learning (K & A, 2025) similarly emphasise that diagnostic information is valuable only when it is used to design adaptive follow-up actions, rather than merely to document learner differences. It emphasises its role in informing adaptive and differentiated learning plans, including follow-up actions to address students' learning needs.

At the survey level, quite a number of teachers position assessment as the foundation of differentiation. A music respondent (G06) wrote, "First, I start with an initial assessment to understand the individual student's needs, interests, and level of learning readiness. Then, throughout the learning process, I use continuous formative assessment to track student progress". This formulation closely aligns with the logic of assessment for learning: initial assessment is used to assess student condition, formative assessment is used to monitor progress, and summative assessment is used to assess final achievement. Another respondent from the visual arts (G26) formulated their practice more concisely: "1. Pretest and Posttest 2. Performance 3. Portfolio of work". Another respondent (G27) explicitly mentioned: "Conducting diagnostic assessments", while a craft respondent (G32) mentioned the sequence that has now become almost standard language in the Kurikulum Merdeka: "diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments".

Some responses even formally repeat the language of literature and policy. Respondent G02 wrote that "in differentiated learning, assessments conducted by teachers must of course take into account students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles" and then explained that before assessment, teachers must "plan or design learning," starting from examining learning outcomes, mapping achievements, formulating objectives, and determining the flow of learning objectives. Response G04 from the drama field followed a similar pattern. Teachers understand that valid differentiation should be based on information about students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles.

More concrete traces are evident in lesson plans. In the music arrangement module, for example, it is clearly stated that "Initial assessments are conducted to determine students' initial abilities related to music arrangement", followed by four indicators: "Musical notation, musical genre, song structure, [and] musical form" and "Summary of Students' Initial Abilities", with checkmarks and crosses to identify who has or has not yet acquired certain initial abilities. The document also emphasizes that "A cross (x) indicates that students do not yet possess the initial abilities and require guidance", followed by a "Follow-up" section, which states that students who have not yet mastered the skills will receive "guidance, either directly by the teacher or through peer tutors," while students who have mastered the skills will receive "additional assignments in the form of mentoring (peer tutors) or enrichment".

The dance module provides even more explicit evidence. In the appendix to the "DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT" section, there is a column for "Questions, Possible Answers, Category Scores, [and] Follow-up Plan". One item asks, "Have you ever created simple dance movements?" with possible categories of group 3/Advanced, group 2/Medium, and group 1/Low. The document then states, "If students have a high level of understanding, they are categorised as group 3 according to the learning target... If students have a medium level of understanding, they are categorised as group 2... If students have a low level of understanding, they are categorised as group 1". On the previous page, the same module

also mentions Remedial and Enrichment, where enrichment is provided “to students with high achievement... by providing different learning materials or activities”.

A critical reading of this article does not stop at the recognition that assessment exists. A more crucial question is: do the diagnostic results actually lead to substantive implications for instructional design? This is where the link between assessment and instructional differentiation remains relatively weak. In the music arrangement module, for example, after the initial and follow-up assessments are clearly outlined, the core learning activities continue to follow the same general sequence for the entire class: students observe and listen to songs, answer prompting questions, research answers, work in groups, conceptualise arrangements, practice, present results, and receive teacher evaluation. This means that diagnostic information is used to determine who needs guidance or enrichment, but it has not yet fully developed into substantially different task flows, truly tiered levels of complexity, or systematically differentiated product forms based on initial need profiles.

A similar situation is evident in the dance module. Although the document establishes categories for groups 1, 2, and 3 based on diagnostic assessments and includes a "follow-up plan," the learning sections within the document still emphasise the general logic of project learning, student worksheet assessments, observations, presentations, Quizizz games, written tests, and remedial and enrichment activities as supporting categories. In other words, while diagnostics are a fairly well-organised tool, the bridge between that tool and in-depth instructional differentiation is not always clearly visible in the activity structure.

Table 3. Respondent G09's answer regarding the assessment strategy

Bahasa	English
<i>Cara melakukan asesmen/penilaian terhadap siswa untuk mengukur ketercapaian diferensiasi masing-masing siswa biasanya saya lakukan dengan membuat indikator penilaian yang sama. Walaupun dalam pembelajaran diferensiasi membuat siswa belajar dengan sistem yang berbeda-beda, penilaian yang dilakukan haruslah sama. Perbedaan tersebut antara lain diferensiasi konten, diferensiasi proses, dan diferensiasi produk. Walaupun konten berbeda, namun indikator ketercapaian kompetensinya sama. Walaupun prosesnya berbeda, hasil yang diharapkan tetaplah sama. Walaupun produknya berbeda, itu sudah disesuaikan dengan minat dan kebutuhan mereka masing-masing.</i>	I typically assess students' achievement in differentiation using the same assessment indicators. Although differentiated learning requires students to learn using different systems, the assessments must be consistent. These differences include content, process, and product differentiation. While the content differs, the competency achievement indicators are the same. While the process differs, the expected results remain the same. While the products differ, they are tailored to each student's interests and needs.

This finding is further reinforced by some survey responses that, without realising it, demonstrate a tendency toward standardisation. Music respondent G09 wrote very clearly: "Although differentiated learning allows students to learn using different systems, the assessments must be the same. ... Even though the content differs, the indicators of competency achievement are the same. Even though the process is different, the expected

results remain the same". This statement is important because it demonstrates the core tension. On the one hand, teachers accept that students can take different paths. On the other hand, there is a strong push to maintain uniformity in indicators, outcomes, and endpoints. However, if taken too far, indicator uniformity can make differentiation less of a procedural adjustment and less of a truly responsive learning experience.

Black and Williams (1998) have long demonstrated that formative assessment is valuable when it provides feedback that genuinely influences subsequent learning, rather than simply adding information about students. In Tomlinson's framework (Tomlinson, 2001, 2016), diagnostic and formative assessments should serve as the basis for proactive decisions about content, processes, products, and learning environments. Therefore, a diagnosis that simply results in general grouping, guidance, or generic enrichment does not fully fulfil the logic of differentiation. It merely demonstrates a diagnostic orientation, not always resulting in instructional branching.

The primary problem identified by this research is not the absence of assessments, but rather the weak conversion of diagnostic data into substantively differentiated instructional decisions. Between discursively and administratively established diagnostic intentions, there remains a significant gap between truly differentiated learning designs. This explains why, in many cases, differentiation is evident as intentions, tools, and language, but has not yet fully manifested as a diverse pedagogical architecture. Diagnostic assessment, in a creative classroom, should not only identify who needs support or enrichment. It should also explain how students are invited to explore different materials, develop ideas at varying levels of complexity, collaborate in different roles, and produce different yet equally legitimate forms of artistic understanding (Chappell et al., 2019). When diagnostic data lead only to grouping, remediation, or enrichment without altering the creative pathway itself, assessment remains classificatory rather than generative.

Uniform tasks in the name of differentiation: Standardised outputs and shared workflow across diverse learners

A cross-section of the data reveals that many lesson plans remain built on relatively uniform patterns: one primary goal for the entire class, one shared core task, one common work sequence, one dominant product type, and success criteria that are often read collectively. Precisely because this research focuses on arts education, a field theoretically rich in possibilities for medium, rhythm, expression, and creative pathways, this finding is particularly significant.

This pattern indicates a structural tension in lesson planning. On the one hand, teachers are expected to respond to diverse learners; on the other hand, teaching modules require clear objectives, manageable sequences, assessable products, and administratively accountable evidence. As a result, teachers may preserve a uniform task structure while adding variation in media, grouping, resources, or support intensity. This explains why differentiation in the analysed documents is not absent, but bounded. It operates inside a shared instructional architecture rather than producing multiple equivalent pathways.

This finding contributes to the discussion on policy enactment. Curriculum policy is not implemented in a linear manner; it is translated through teachers' existing routines, institutional constraints, time limitations, and administrative formats (A. Braun et al., 2011). Therefore, the uniformity found in the lesson plans should not be read simply as teacher

failure, but as evidence of how progressive curriculum language is negotiated within the practical grammar of school planning.

The traces of this uniformity are quite evident in the documents. In the art module on collage, the entire class is guided through the same process: students are divided into groups, search for answers through videos, articles, or findings around the classroom. Then, in the next meeting, "Students are asked to create a collage using randomly cut origami paper for approximately 20 minutes", after which, "The teacher asks students to discuss and analyse the elements and principles of fine art found in the collage" and finally, "Groups are asked to present the results of their discussions to the class". Here, we can see that despite varying access to learning resources, the core task remains the same: creating a collage; the workflow is shared equally among all students.

A similar pattern is evident in the music arrangement module. Although the document mentions freedom to access learning resources "according to interests and learning profiles", and provides space for children's songs, national anthems, regional songs, and popular songs, all students are still directed toward one primary task: "creating a concept and applying an arrangement to a simple song", practising, and then "presenting and displaying the arrangement as agreed upon by the class". In other words, variations are provided in the choice of songs or reference sources, but the intended learning product remains the same: a song arrangement that is then performed. Even when the document mentions guidance for struggling students, the primary change is the level of teacher support, not the assignment's basic format.

Similar tendencies are also evident in other modules. In design thinking-based design lessons, teachers divide students into groups to observe issues around the school, then "ask students to work in groups to choose one issue for which they will devise a solution in the form of an art product". Although the issue's topic may vary across groups, the work structure remains the same: observation, problem identification, group discussion, solution development, and presentation. Similarly, in the module on enlarging images using grids, although the objects can be chosen individually, the prescribed task format is very clear and single: "Draw an enlargement of one image object using the grid you have studied. The object can be a photo or a map, as you wish". The variation here is based on the choice of object, not the broader choice of learning path, mode of representation, or product form.

In many classes, especially those with large student populations, teachers need a consistent task structure so that learning can be managed, assessed, and completed within a specific timeframe. Furthermore, teaching modules in school administrative practices also encourage clarity of objectives, sequence of activities, and easily accountable assessments. Rather, it appears to be the result of a conflict among curriculum demands, classroom implementation needs, lesson-planning traditions, and available time and resources.

What matters is not simply that the assignment is manageable, but rather whether the diversity of students actually influences the type of work they do. Several teacher responses explicitly indicate that, in their practice, differentiation is still often understood as different ways of doing things that essentially lead to the same goals and structure. One respondent wrote, "all students are given the same material with the same approach, after which they are evaluated or assessed by presenting the material individually". This statement is crucial because it demonstrates that even when differentiation is discussed, learning can still proceed with a very uniform logic: the same material, the same approach,

and the same presentation assessment. Another respondent wrote more concisely but still adhered to a similar logic, for example, "Giving assignments to make specific products based on the abilities and tools to make a product" or "Giving assignments to make specific products based on the students' ability levels".

V. ASESMEN

1. Bentuk Soal

Gambarlah pembesaran satu objek gambar dengan bantuan *grid* yang telah kalian pelajari. Objek gambar dapat berbentuk foto atau peta sesuai yang kalian suka.

2. Bentuk dan Kriteria Penilaian

a. Bentuk Penilaian :

- 1) Penilaian nontes yang dilaksanakan saat proses kegiatan pembelajaran berlangsung, berbentuk pertanyaan-pertanyaan lisan sebagai *assessment for learning* dan *assessment as learning*.
- 2) Penilaian formatif berupa penilaian demonstrasi, berbentuk penilaian praktik dan hasil karya. Penilaian praktik dan hasil karya merupakan satu kesatuan kegiatan yang akan mengukur aspek kuantitas teknis dan kualitas estetis.

b. Kriteria Penilaian:

Rubrik Penilaian Praktik

KUALITAS TEKNIS	Predikat			
	A	B	C	D
Kesiapan alat dan bahan				
Kebersihan				
Keseriusan/kesungguhan				
Kemandirian				

Predikat Nilai:

A : 90 - 100 : di atas standar
 B : 70 - 89 : memenuhi standar
 C : 50 - 69 : belum standar
 D : < - 49 : kurang

Fig. 2. The learning task and the assessment

Strong differentiation requires proactive adjustments to content, processes, products, and learning environments based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This means that differentiation does not stop at allowing students to work with different materials or providing different levels of support; It demands the possibility that students can approach learning objectives through radically different pathways. In this research data, this possibility does occasionally appear, for example, in the choice of songs, issues, or objects, but what remains dominant is the common workflow: shared stimulus, discussion, shared core tasks, presentations, and reflection.

The arts theoretically provide a very fertile ground for profound differentiation. In arts learning, students can think through different media, produce works with varied rhythms, build ideas from diverse experiences, and express their understanding through a wide variety of forms. This is why arts education is often seen as inherently close to differentiation. However, this research finding reveals a paradox: the field theoretically richest in possible learning pathways is still often realised through standardised tasks. What varies is the media and activities surrounding the task; what remains stable is the structure of the task itself. Under these conditions, differentiation is often more easily realised through variations in media, grouping, or levels of support than through the design of multiple, entirely distinct trajectories. Factors such as workload, time constraints, the

administrative needs of teaching modules, and the habit of collectively designing lessons for a class make a shared task structure more feasible and secure.

In many art teachers' lesson plans, differentiation is present, but often within, rather than outside, the shared task structure, which is quite far from open-ended intent (Wulandari, 2020). A class remains directed toward one dominant goal, one primary output, one sequence of activities, and one relatively similar horizon of success. Differences exist primarily in access to materials, choice of resources, intensity of guidance, or minor variations in the process. This finding should not be read as a personal failure of teachers, but rather as a symptom of the encounter between progressive policy language, the administrative format of teaching modules, the practical limitations of learning, and an understanding of differentiation that is still closer to "learning variations" than "multiple learning path designs." It shows that the problem of differentiation in arts education is not just about making learning more interesting or more flexible on the surface, but about shifting planning from uniform tasks to a plurality of truly meaningful learning architectures.

Interpreting the tension between diagnostic intent and uniform task structures through the lens of creative pedagogy

Cross-survey data and lesson plans indicate that this differentiation most often stops at superficial variations, namely variations in materials, delivery modes, or activity steps, while task structures, workflows, and horizons of success remain relatively uniform. This is where reading through creative pedagogy (Cremin, 2015; Lin, 2011; Selkrig & Keamy, 2017) becomes important, as it allows us to distinguish between differentiation as a creative possibility and differentiation as procedural variation.

In the survey corpus, there are quite a few responses that, at first glance, appear to align strongly with differentiation. One teacher wrote that in her class, she "increases the resources of teaching materials and creates learning media in the form of visuals, audio, and audiovisuals, both in a traditional and online format". Another teacher mentioned, "using different digital applications when working on projects or practical assignments", while another respondent stated that she gave students project options, such as "creating presentations, writing essays, making videos, or making posters". There were also responses that emphasised the environment and context, such as "Students learn directly in the schoolyard when learning to draw flora", or utilising materials around the school, such as rocks, natural objects, and waste for art activities.

The same lesson is evident in lesson plans. Several documents demonstrate efforts to connect art learning with current issues, other disciplines, and life contexts. One integrated art module, for example, lists "The relationship between current issues and various other disciplines through integrated artworks" as a meaningful understanding, and even includes the objective of "Analysing works of art using other relevant disciplines". Another document, which has been "integrated with CT," places the theme of Yogyakarta culture as the context for poster creation, so that students not only produce images but are also encouraged to connect artistic practices with local wisdom and their living spaces. The module states that students will be "required to work and think artistically" and "encouraged to create works of art with Yogyakarta cultural themes as a way to preserve local wisdom". Meanwhile, in another art module, the expected understanding is that

students will be "able to see things from various perspectives" and "more creative in generating original ideas".

There are numerous signs that they are striving to build more open, contextual, and creative learning. In several modules, students are asked to explore local issues, connect art to other subjects, present their work processes and portfolios, and receive peer feedback. In the coffee painting presentation module, for example, the presentation is positioned as "a space for appreciation for other students, and will provide feedback for the students presenting their work".

Reading through creative pedagogy, however, demands a deeper question: do all these variations truly open up pedagogical plurality, or simply enhance the surface of procedures? This is where the research findings become more critical. In many documents, even when teachers use videos, the internet, worksheets, gadgets, surrounding objects, or projects, learning continues along the same trajectory for the entire class. The variation that occurs more often lies in the delivery system than in the learning architecture. In other words, students may be allowed to use different media, but they still move toward one dominant output form; students may be allowed to choose resources, but the rhythm and framework are still shared equally across the class.

Thin differentiation is not the absence of differentiation, but rather differentiation that operates primarily as a superficial adjustment: more media, more resources, more activities, but not enough to change the structure of learning possibilities. In survey language, this tendency is evident when teachers talk about "using a variety of learning methods," "providing several options for assignment formats," or "grouping students according to their learning abilities," while simultaneously maintaining the same core tasks or outcome indicators. In lesson plan language, a similar tendency is evident when documents mention "differentiation," "content-based," "interest-based," or "ability-based," but the learning objectives, main product types, and sequence of learning experiences remain the same.

This finding reveals a paradox of arts-based differentiation. Arts education is often assumed to be naturally open because it involves images, sounds, gestures, materials, performances, and personal expression. Yet, the analysed lesson plans show that this openness can be administratively narrowed into a common workflow and standardised product expectation. From a creative pedagogy perspective, the problem is not the existence of shared objectives but the absence of multiple legitimate routes through which students can reach, reinterpret, or evidence those objectives (Selkrig & Keamy, 2017). Meaningful differentiation in arts education should open multiple entry points to learning, various forms of representation and production, choices of medium and work rhythms, spaces for reflection and agency, and even the possibility of cross-border work among art, everyday life, local culture, and other disciplines (Chappell et al., 2019; Craft et al., 2013; Glăveanua et al., 2015; Hetherington et al., 2019; Wulandari & Suryatna, 2017). If differentiation is truly creative, then students' differences not only influence how they receive material but also how they conceptualise problems, choose media, determine creative processes, construct meaning, and demonstrate achievements. By this standard, some traces in the data, for example, integrated arts learning, Yogyakarta cultural themes, the use of the school environment, or differentiation based on musicality, can be seen as important embryos. But these embryos have not always developed into full pedagogical plurality.

As emphasised in the introduction, arts education is closely aligned with differentiation because it provides space for a variety of media, processes, expressions, and meanings. However, this closeness makes reduction easier. When teachers simply add videos, worksheets, presentations, or projects, arts learning can appear creative and differentiated, even though the structure of learning possibilities remains limited. Truly creative differentiation is not simply "more varied" than conventional learning, but more epistemically, materially, and affectively diverse. As a compromise emerges: responsive enough to acknowledge diversity, but not radical enough to design multiple learning trajectories that are truly equal yet distinct. In other words, the problem is not a lack of intention but rather a lack of strong pedagogical imagination and the structural conditions to transform differentiation from procedure into plurality.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how arts teachers interpret differentiated learning, how diagnostic assessment is linked to instructional planning, and how the tension between diagnostic intent and uniform task structures can be understood through the lens of creative pedagogy. The findings show that teachers generally understand differentiation as a responsive pedagogy oriented towards students' needs, interests, abilities, readiness, and learning profiles. At the level of discourse, differentiation has been internalised as a pedagogical ideal aligned with the language of Kurikulum Merdeka. However, the analysis of lesson-plan documents reveals that this ideal is not always translated into substantively differentiated instructional design. Differentiation is most often materialised through varied resources, media, activities, grouping, projects, presentations, reflection, enrichment, and remediation. Although diagnostic assessment and ability mapping appear in several documents, their results are not consistently converted into branching learning pathways, differentiated task complexity, varied product options, or flexible success criteria. Many lesson plans still rely on a common objective, shared workflow, similar core tasks, and relatively standardised learning products.

It can be concluded that differentiated planning in arts education often takes the form of "thin differentiation", a form of procedural responsiveness that acknowledges learner diversity but does not yet fully open plural, equitable, and meaningful learning architectures. The notion of thin differentiation can therefore be theorised as a weak form of creative pedagogy. It is creative in appearance because it incorporates projects, media choices, group work, reflection, and student products, but it is thin because these features do not substantially redistribute agency, complexity, authorship, or interpretive possibility among learners. In fuller creative pedagogy, variation should not merely decorate a uniform task; it should alter the conditions under which students imagine, decide, make, revise, collaborate, and communicate meaning. This finding contributes theoretically by distinguishing differentiation as surface variation from differentiation as meaningful pedagogical plurality. Viewed through the lens of creative pedagogy, robust differentiation in arts education should enable multiple entry points, diverse creative processes, varied forms of representation, student agency, and different yet equally valuable ways of demonstrating artistic understanding.

Practically, this study suggests that teacher professional development should move beyond socialising the concept of differentiation or producing administratively complete

teaching modules. Training should focus on helping teachers translate diagnostic assessment data into concrete instructional decisions, including tiered task pathways, varied levels of complexity, equivalent product alternatives, and flexible assessment criteria. Future research should include classroom observations, interviews, and comparative studies to examine how differentiated planning is enacted, negotiated, or constrained in everyday arts learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge that this research was funded by the 2024 DIPA Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY). The authors also extend their sincere appreciation to the participating teachers and the MGMP Seni Budaya network in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and Nusa Tenggara Barat for their valuable contribution, openness, and support throughout the data collection process.

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