Differentiating Instruction (Online!) for Equity in Learning

Teachers know that no two students are the same.

In this webinar, we will:

• explore the concept of differentiated instruction, which aims to ensure all learners are given opportunities to succeed, taking into account their backgrounds, academic experiences, learning styles, and interests

• examine a variety of practical differentiation strategies that can help us meet the diverse needs of students

• discuss ways to adapt these classroom practices for online learning settings
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In 2019, she served as a U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow in João Pessoa, Brazil, where she led professional development for public school English teachers and collaborated on program development for a public bilingual middle school.

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1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: Why is it important?
3. Differentiation: What is it?
4. Online: Challenges and opportunities
5. Differentiation: How do we do it?
6. Helpful resources
7. Final thoughts
The Blob Tree of Learning

Silent Reflection:
How comfortable do you feel with differentiated instruction?

Where are you on the tree?

Source: www.blobtree.com
Today’s Session: Differentiating Instruction

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How are our learners unique?

Think about the learners in your class. How are they unique and different from one another?
How are our learners unique?

- Prior school experience
- Interests
- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Skills
- Family life
- Gender
- Religion
- Hardships
- Languages at home
- "Multiple Intelligences (Writing III, 2008, males)" by pabeaufait is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
1. Thinking about our learners

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So, no two learners are the same...

...and no two learners learn in the same ways.
“Fair doesn’t always mean equal.”

What does this mean to you?
For a non-discriminative selection, everybody has to take the same exam: climb that tree.
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Differentiated Instruction: Definitions

“At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.”

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2000, p. 1)
Differentiated Instruction: Definitions

“Every teacher who has entered a classroom has differentiated instruction in one way or another. Teachers differentiate when they give a student more time to finish an assignment, allow children choice in what they read, give different types of assessments, and myriad other ways...[It] is a set of strategies that will help teachers meet each child where they are when they enter class and move them forward as far as possible on their educational path.”

Today’s Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: **Why** is it important?
3. Differentiation: **What** is it?
4. **Online: Challenges and opportunities**
5. Differentiation: **How** do we do it?
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7. Final thoughts
What challenges have you faced teaching online?
What has been positive about it?
Online! What teachers are saying

Challenges and opportunities

Engaging children and supporting them in the learning process online can be **challenging**, especially those who do not connect.

I don’t create my content, so I can’t control that or differentiate it too much.

Online makes differentiating more difficult, because you aren't with the students for long and it's hard to get to know them. **On the other hand**, online teaching is **very flexible**, which helps with differentiation. Allowing students to **express their learning in different ways** and learn more about **things they are curious about** is a benefit of online teaching.
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I try to keep classes dynamic with fun activities like movie days or Zoom tea parties. Also, empathy is so important, asking students how I can support them.

To get to know each student, despite the distance, we held individual student-teacher meetings and also always let students stay after on Zoom classes if they want.

Students can be "tech tutors." This boosts their confidence and motivates them. I use online classrooms a lot more now. It’s helps keep track of student work and is nice to able to access it whenever from wherever. I’ll hold onto that practice.

Thanks to: Jenna Ellsworth, Lucy Stefano, Kyle Bellows, Chris Mason and Katrina Schmidt, the teachers quoted here.
Today’s Session: Differentiating Instruction

1. Thinking about our learners
2. Differentiation: *Why* is it important?
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The Process of Differentiation

**Figure 1: Differentiated Instruction Graphic Organizer (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010)**

- Teachers can differentiate
  - Content
  - Process
  - Product

- According to student
  - Readiness
  - Interest
  - Learning profile
First, learn about our learners

What are some ways you learn about your learners?
First, learn about our learners

- Interviews
- Surveys / forms
- Family histories
- School histories
- Observations
- Assessments
Back to School form

Surveys or Forms
- Student or family
- Answers automatically go into a spreadsheet
- Look back through year
- Helps student self-reflect mid-year, end of year
Something I want my teacher to know about me is:

Long answer text

Sometimes I need help to ....

Long answer text

I learn best when I work *

- in groups
- in pairs
- alone

I like to learn using *

- technology
- art
- music
- writing
More questions to ask learners...

- What is your favorite thing to do on the weekend?
- What language do you speak at home with your family?
- Do you like working in groups, with a partner, or alone?
- Do you feel comfortable asking for help?
- Where do you do your homework?
- Who do you ask for help with your homework?
- Do you like to do homework in silence or with music?
- What’s something you’re really good at?
- Does anything about school make you nervous?
- What time do you usually go to bed?
How can we differentiate?
Ways to differentiate

**CONTENT**

WHAT is to be learned

*Example:* Let students choose the topic

**PROCESS**

HOW, WHERE, WITH WHOM students learn

*Example:* Vary grouping, or seating arrangements

**PRODUCT**

HOW students DEMONSTRATE learning

*Example:* Let students choose the type of final project
How do you currently differentiate in your class—by **Content**, **Process**, and/or **Product**?
Content: What is to be learned

- Give choice of topic based on interest (within curriculum also)
- Respond to student feedback and make changes
- Use multiple forms of input (realia, demonstrations, videos, books, photos, podcasts)
- Vary content based on student level
- Vary tasks and supports based on student preparedness (word banks, sentence starters)
### Content: What is to be learned

**Tic-Tac-Toe: Give students choices**

**Learning about recycling**: choose which to research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What can schools do to help recycle?</th>
<th>Which countries have the highest rates of recycling?</th>
<th>What are some materials you can recycle?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How can people recycle more at home?</td>
<td>What is the local government’s role in recycling?</td>
<td>What happens to the materials we recycle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can your city or town improve its recycling?</td>
<td>What percent of our plastics get recycled?</td>
<td>What are some products being made out of recycled materials?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Content: What is to be learned

Writing a persuasive letter

Students choose an issue they feel strongly about in their town or city and write a letter to someone in government explaining the issue and what should be changed.

Book report

Students choose the book they want to read (or teacher can give them three choices). The assignment is still the same, but the content they’re using is interesting and personally motivating.
Content: What is to be learned

Supports: Given by teacher
- Leveled content for different groups (length, difficulty)
- All receive same text/image, different questions (can already be in a shared doc)

Supports: Optional for students
- Provide a word bank (in a separate doc) that students can use if they want.
- Give sentence starters or frames that are optional.

![Adventure Story Word Bank]

- wizard
- dragon
- treasure
- gold
- castle
- volcano
- boat
- sword
New York Times: What’s Going On in This Picture?

- Building
- Fire
- Smoke
- Watching
- Kids
- Playing

https://www.nytimes.com/column/learning-whats-going-on-in-this-picture
**Group 1:** What is happening in this picture? Name 5 things.

**Group 2:** What happened before this picture was taken? Explain why you think so.

**Group 3:** Explain what’s happening in this picture and what could have been done differently.
Process: How, where, with whom students learn

What are some ways you differentiate **process** in your classes (online or in-person)?
Process: How, where, with whom students learn

- **(HOW)** Give material in advance to pre-read or divide into small parts
- **(HOW)** Allow for more time / breaks
- **(WHERE)** Flexible seating / flexible sync & async
- **(WITH WHOM)** Grouping: same or mixed ability (teacher-selected or student-selected), with different levels of teacher support for different group
- **(WITH WHOM)** ZOOM breakout rooms - great for grouping!
  - Different assignments per room
Flexible seating and movement

Flexible seating is about more than simply having a variety of different, fun seats in the classroom. It's about utilizing student voice, creating buy-in, heightening collaborative learning, and prioritizing students' needs concerning the environment in which they learn. (Markle, 2018)
**Process:** How, where, with whom students learn

**Student Profile:** Valentina, 16 yo

**Teacher Observation and Survey:** Shy, likes working with one partner, needs more time reading, but has strong comprehension. With support, she is developing oral fluency.

**Class Plan:** Reading and discussion of a chapter “My Name” (2 pages) in *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros

**Process and Differentiation:**
- Before class: Give Valentina and five other students the text to pre-read
- Whole class discussion: Before reading, ask Valentina “Do you like your name?”
- Zoom breakout room: Group Valentina with Marcos, work in shared doc with discussion questions and sentence starters
  - “Why does Esmeralda want a different name?” *She wants a different name because...*
Let students choose how to show their learning

- Choice between questions in assessment
- Essay
- Poem
- Oral report/presentation
- Drawing with caption
- Song lyrics

Next time, they have to choose a different type of product.
Product: How students demonstrate learning

- Different roles and responsibilities in group work and presentations
- Challenge students with more responsibility (Leading discussions, researching at home, being the teacher for the day)
- Vary questioning for oral responses (Ask one student the color of his shirt, ask another student why she chose to wear that color.)

Success means different things for different students!
Product: How students demonstrate learning

Free response

Imagine, we’re going to watch a short video about climate change in our Zoom class together.

After, you’ll have 5 minutes to respond however you choose - drawing, an audio recording, writing, notes, a poem, mind map...

How would you respond?
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Resources to help with differentiation

Leveled texts online:

- Voice of America: https://learningenglish.voanews.com/
- Breaking News English: https://breakingnewsenglish.com/
- News ELA: www.newsla.com

Google Classroom: Assignments or questions for certain students only.

Youtube: use closed captioning and subtitles. Download videos beforehand.
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Differentiation: Summary and Key Concepts

Independence

Motivation

Choice

Flexibility

Interest

Support

Adapt
The Blob Tree of Learning

**Silent Reflection:**
How comfortable do you feel with differentiated instruction?

**Where are you now?**

Source: www.blobtree.com
Reflection: Exit Cards! (Zoom version!)

1. I used to think…
   Now I think…

2. OR
   Write one differentiation strategy you want to try in your class.
Thank you!!
References


Differentiation and the Brain: A Discussion with Carol Ann Tomlinson. (2013, June 30). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLzCqoPFxRw


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"High School ELA flexible seating. Full classroom. Canton Galva Schools! 2018-19" by LauraGilchristEdu is licensed under CC BY 2.0 “\Retrieved from https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/b8e15d6f-bee7-4062-a270-b033a494df92

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Reflection Questions

1. What are some of the ways that your students differ from one another? Do you already differentiate your instruction to address these differences? If so, how?

2. What choices might you offer your students about how they learn and what they produce to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in virtual learning settings?

3. What are the key takeaways from this session that you might apply in your classroom?