



# DIFFERENTIATION

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# Differentiation

To differentiate instruction is to recognize students' varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interests, and to react **responsively**. The intent of differentiated instruction is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is, and assisting in the learning process.

Tracey Hall, Nicole Strangman, and Ann Meyer

Note that differentiation relates more to addressing students' different phases of learning from novice to capable to proficient rather than merely providing different activities to different (groups of) students.

John Hattie, *Visible Learning for Teachers*

# Key Points

- Differentiation is the **foundation** of effective teaching, from planning to instruction to student product.
- Differentiation is **proactive**, based on the strengths, or readiness, of your learners.
- **Formative assessment is essential.**

# Reactive vs. Proactive Differentiation

Reactive Differentiation	Proactive Differentiation
Is curriculum centered.	Is learner centered.
Is based on summative assessments or on what the grade level expectation for readiness are (i.e. “all fifth graders should come to me knowing this”).	Is based on preassessment and ongoing formative assessment.
Uses a deficit model, “What are the students missing? What problems will they have?”	Uses a strength model, “What can my students already do? How can I build upon these strengths?”
Is reactive, “My students don’t seem to be getting it. What can I adjust in this moment?”	Is proactive and planned, “My students have this piece, I can build on that.”
Tinkers with one-size-fits-all instruction. Makes small adjustments to fill perceived gaps.	Is robust, consistent, reflective, and coherent-designed to address the range of learner readiness.
Uses static small group instruction. Small groups are determined by learner deficit, or labels, and members change infrequently (i.e. ELL group, low group, “my 18s,” etc.)	Uses a variety of flexible small groups. Members change continually based on student readiness, current task, etc.
Students are all given the same resources.	Materials are varied for differing instructional groups.
Pacing is determined by scope and sequence.	Pacing is adapted in response to student strengths/needs.
Pacing is set to address the needs of the majority of learners. Those who have mastered concepts are forced to wait for the rest of the class. Those who are having difficulty mastering a concept are forced to move ahead before they attain mastery with the promise that they will be reintroduced to the concept when the class “circles back” or in the next grade level when the concept is readdressed.	Time is viewed as a flexible resource. Pacing is based on learner readiness, acceleration for those who have demonstrated mastery, additional time is given for those who need more practice.

# Differentiation

is a teacher's **proactive** response to learner strengths/needs

shaped by mindset

and guided by the general principals of differentiation and UDL

An environment that encourages and supports learning

Leading students and managing routines

Assessment that informs teaching and learning

Quality curriculum

Instruction that responds to student variance and engagement

Teachers can differentiate through

## Content

The information and ideas students grapple with to reach learning goals

## Process

How students take in and make sense of the content

## Product/ Representation

How students show what they know, understand, and can do

## Learning Environment

The climate or tone of the classroom and level of student engagement

according to student's

## Readiness

A student's proximity to specific learning goals

## Interests

Passions, affinities, kinships that motivate learning

## Learning Profile

Preferred approaches to learning

Through a variety of instructional strategies, such as

**Learning/Interest Centers · RAFTs · Graphic Organizers · Scaffolded Reading/Writing · Tiered assignments · Learning Contracts · Menus · Tic-Tac-Toe · Complex Instruction · Independent projects · Expression/Representation Options · Small-Group Instruction**

# Vocabulary to Help in Planning Differentiation

## Differentiate **WHAT?**

Content  
Process  
Product  
Learning  
environment

## Differentiate **HOW?**

Student readiness  
Student interest  
Student learning  
profile

## Differentiate **WHY?**

Access to learning  
Motivation, relevance,  
engagement  
Efficiency of learning  
Appropriate challenge  
Opportunity to  
express learning

# Human Digestive System

4<sup>th</sup> grade Science  
by Howard Miller

## Students will (KUDs):

**(U) Understand** the big idea. In this case, that (a) the human digestive system is an example of a system: a collection of two or more parts that act together to affect the whole thing, and (b) that each part is related to the others in some way.

**(K) Know** the names and functions (jobs) of the major digestive system organs listed below, and include them in a song, story, or diagram: mouth; teeth; saliva; epiglottis; esophagus; stomach; small intestine; villi; large intestine.

**(D) Demonstrate** their understanding using the correct structure and function vocabulary to show how a piece of food moves through and provides food for the human body-from the time it enters the mouth to the time it leaves the body.

## WHAT?

- Product

## HOW?

- Interest
- Learning profile

## WHY?

- To provide maximum opportunity to demonstrate learning
- Engagement
- Efficiency

## Kate

- Annotated diagram
- Girl eating a cookie
- Worked alone

## Emma

- Story
- Family eating broccoli
- Worked alone

## Small Group

- Song/skit
- Boy eating pizza
- Student choice group of four

# 3 Most Important Take Aways

- Differentiation is the **foundation** of effective teaching, from planning to instruction to student product.
- Differentiation is **proactive**, based on the strengths, or readiness, of your learners.
- You can't differentiate if you don't know your students' strengths. **Formative assessment is essential.**

# References

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[www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org) Carol Ann Tomlinson (May 2014)