

**Understanding Differentiated Instruction**  
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**August 2006**

**Differentiating simply means the teacher's lesson will include instructional strategies that address the different learning styles of all students.** Differentiated Instruction *does not mean* a teacher needs separate plans for every child in class. Differentiating involves a teacher responding to the learning needs of a particular student or a small group of students rather than just doing whole-group instruction that meets the needs of the majority. Designing lessons that include presenting information through **auditory, visual and kinesthetic modes** will address all learning styles.

The **goal** of differentiated instruction is the individual success of every child. Setting high expectations for learning for all students and believing that every student can be successful are important to the process. Teachers must also recognize the tight link between assessment and instruction. Every response from a student should provide useful information to the teacher as to how/whether the student is learning so that the teacher can adjust how the material is being presented. **Flexibility and a full bag of tricks are key to success in differentiating instruction.**

**Elements of the curriculum that can be differentiated are content, process and assessments.** The **content** can be presented in any variety of methods that best meets student needs. For example, within a class students can read novels on their individual reading level, or math manipulatives may be used to help students who need a hands-on approach while the faster learners work problems on paper or on a computer. Graphic organizers can help provide structure and organization to the content. Some students may need one-on-one instruction while a more advanced student may learn more from working on an independent project. Some students may be given less math problems to work or more time to complete an assignment.

The **process** of learning, or how a student makes sense of information, can be varied by providing different **activities** that address the same content. For example, when studying a particular novel, students may engage in reading it aloud, acting out certain scenes, constructing a model town set in that time period, using a Venn diagram to contrast/compare characteristic of the main characters, etc. Varying the activities addresses all learning styles. This can be done by providing two or three different activities within a class period or over the course of several days, depending upon the amount of time to be spent on the lesson.

The **products** of learning are the assessment piece. Teachers can assess in a number of ways that allows for different learning styles. Assessment options may include an end-of-unit project or product, portfolio, presentation before the class, essay test, paper-pencil test, etc. Rubrics can be used provide parameters for acceptable levels of performance.

## **Example of Differentiation (Assessment)**

**English Lesson: Reading a Novel (American Historical Fiction)**

Design a Rubric that allows for student choice:

### Practical Thinkers

- Trace a character's life journey on a map, noting major events at each location.
- Write a last will and testament for a major character, including which personal items he/she will leave behind, to whom they would go and why.

### Creative Thinkers

- Write poems that reflect the values of major characters
- Draw a ten-panel comic strip that depicts the culture, values, traditions or change of a character.

### Analytical Thinkers

- Use a Venn diagram to contrast and compare the culture(s), tradition(s) in this novel to another novel we studied this year.
- Use the computer to create an advertisement for the book that could be displayed in a bookstore. Be sure to indicate why this would appeal to readers interested in the way families change over time.