



Pr Pointers

“I must make every effort to patiently love the struggling students into persevering.”

*Andy Baumgartner
1999 Teacher of the Year*

Resources

[www.caroltomlinson.com/
index.html](http://www.caroltomlinson.com/index.html)

Find various links to practical applications for helping all learners from the differentiated learning expert, Carol A. Tomlinson.

[www.internet4classrooms.com/
di.htm](http://www.internet4classrooms.com/di.htm)

This i4c site offers various links on differentiating techniques, classified under these categories: Learning Styles, Instructional Theory, Practical Tips for the Classroom, and Sample Units and Lessons.

Expert Tip

“When we design clothes for people we consider their height, weight, and shape because those things influence the size of the clothing. As we know, not every student wears the same size, and of course we don’t force them into a size Small when they need a Large. Not every student has the same background and experience and so is not necessarily as knowledgeable or skillful in every topic or skill as other students. This is why adjustments need to be made in their learning.”

Gregory, G. H., and C. Chapman. 2002. Differentiated instructional strategies: One size doesn’t fit all. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

For Today’s Teacher

Retooling Differentiated Instruction

By Julie Anna Hartwell

In a differentiated classroom, teachers vary what they teach (content), how they teach it (process), and how they assess what they’ve taught (product). While differentiated approaches may not be used daily, student progress determines its frequency and duration in the instructional process. Use these tips to retool and jump-start differentiation of instruction in your classroom.

D Deny! Deny! Deny the urge to follow automatically last year’s course syllabus. Differentiate instruction with an exciting virtual field trip highlighting career connections, or a cooperative learning activity that introduces a curriculum unit. You can return to some of the more routine lessons after you stir up excitement and set the instructional tone for the year. Place students into flex groups by career interests and ask them to brainstorm ways the course subject matter is used in their chosen career field. Use their responses to introduce topics covered in the course. Don’t be afraid to think outside the box! You can do it!

I Initiate a plan. Differentiated lessons require planning. Flex groups can be formed, group assignments adjusted to fit learner modalities, and assessment plans identified before the lesson begins. One approach is to pre-plan your differentiated strategies: Week 1: Group students by quiz grades and vary the assignment to address group deficiencies/strengths.

Week 2: Use heterogeneous groups.

Week 3: Use learning centers of activities that re-teach or extend student learning.

Week 4: Insert mini-lessons for advanced or struggling students.

You make the call. Create a plan that suits the needs of your students, but be ready to adjust if necessary.

F Find a friend. You do not have to go it alone! Ask a colleague teaching the same course to develop lessons or design assessments with you. Collaborate with teachers at other schools; blog about the success of your lessons and project ideas.

F Focus on the data. Differentiation begins and ends with data. The data tells you how to form student groups. Perhaps one week you group students by quiz or chapter test grades. The next week use heterogeneous groups with peer tutors. Regardless of the lesson, student grouping must have a data-based rationale. Remember, data informs your instruction.

E Experiment! Make this year the year you integrate an outdoor lab or Web-based learning station. Reflect on the positive, as well as negative outcomes of each differentiated activity, considering discipline, time management, student comprehension, etc. Keep the strategies with positive outcomes, restructure the ineffective practices, and try again. Vary the number of learning stations, activities, and student pairings. The sky’s the limit! Differentiation allows experimenting with new group configurations, assessments, and activities to invigorate the learning process. Read [Miss Daniels’s Differentiated Classroom Scenario](#) for more ideas.



R Refer to the literature. Professional organizations and state/district agencies have many Web sites that offer techniques and tools to refine your differentiating practices. Get started with the resource links provided (see Resources).

E Engage students. Bell-to-bell instruction is a critical component of differentiation. Each instructional moment must be maximized. Integrate performance assessments, manipulatives, games, and instructional technology to engage and motivate students.

N Never settle for business as usual. Modify instruction to suit student learning needs and constantly assess student progress. Ask questions that challenge the learner—questions that begin with “why,” “how,” and “what if.” Increase your use of application and analysis questions. Ask questions that stretch student thinking beyond the content delivered during the lesson.

T Teach the standards. All instructional strategies, including differentiation, must work in conjunction with, not supplant the standards. An innovative, interactive, performance assessment is inappropriate if it does not reflect requisite standards. Check with your district office to ensure that you are using current academic standards. Standards are periodically revised, so check if you are unsure.

I Interview your students. Ask your students what hindered their academic performance. Watch their faces for signs of confusion during the lesson. If they seem especially quiet, ask them to summarize what you’ve just taught. Always ask questions. Listen to their responses and adjust instruction to meet their needs. Don’t wait for questions; initiate a discussion. Every great coach listens to the players in the game!

A Ask why. Self reflection is central to delivering lessons that meet student needs. Take a moment at the end of the day or while preparing the next lesson to reflect on the instructional experience. Ask yourself questions:

- Why** was everyone alert and attentive today?
- Why** were there so few discipline interruptions during the lesson?
- Why** did students score low on the test?
- Why** was the homework assignment confusing to students?
- What** did I do to engage LD students?

The answers will provide starting points for a targeted mini-lesson, learning station activities, or student grouping options. Always ask why.

T Take inventory. Informally and formally assess student progress. When students find a concept difficult or assessments reveal little comprehension, address it. Set up a mini-lesson group with students who are having the most difficulty. Allow the rest of the class to practice independently or in pairs. Assign students to learning stations. Offer tutoring during lunch. Addressing deficiencies immediately prevents students from becoming frustrated and allows you to thoroughly cover course standards.

E Exercise the possibilities! Differentiation is about making instruction a reflective, interactive process, much like driving. When driving, you constantly check your speed, and keep a watchful eye on obstructions in the road, other drivers, and pedestrians. Do the same when engaging in instruction. Constantly check student progress, and keep a watchful eye on student reaction and engagement. Also check alignment of instructional delivery and standards.

How is the school year going so far? Challenge your students and yourself— differentiate to suit learner needs. Your professional practice will never be the same!

Julie Anna Hartwell, a former math teacher and adjunct professor, has delivered numerous professional development sessions on differentiated instruction. She is a Professional Member of KDP and Education Associate with the South Carolina Department of Education. You may contact her at juliehartwell@bellsouth.net.

ProPointers is e-published quarterly by Kappa Delta Pi for its practitioners and administrators.

Submit questions, comments, content suggestions, or articles to ProPointer editor Karen Allen, karena@kdp.org.