

## Overview

### What is Differentiated in the Differentiated Classroom?

*When we talk about the differentiated classroom, we are referring to the many aspects of the teaching and learning process that may be differentiated – that is, the things that may be approached in different ways for the different students in your classroom. Four of the most important are:*

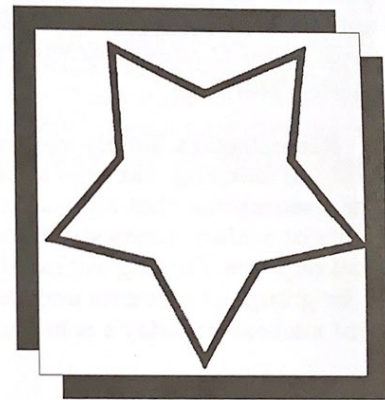
**1. Content:** This includes the ideas, skills, knowledge, and information being studied. Usually, content is structured by state standards, district curriculum guides, textbooks, and teacher-developed units of work. All students must learn the content, but they can learn it in different ways. Some students may learn it in more depth and complexity while others will learn the basics of content knowledge.

**2. Process:** This includes the various ways students interact with and think about the content. Often processes are defined by the different levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. For example, processes at the knowledge level might consist of memorizing, reciting, and defining while processes at the analysis level could involve comparing and contrasting, classifying, or subdividing.

**3. Products/Performances:** This includes the multitude of ways students can demonstrate what they understand, know, and can do as a result of their learning. Allowing for different products and performances is often the easiest way to begin differentiation in your classroom. Giving students a choice to develop one of several products to demonstrate their learning is motivational, takes learning styles into account, and creates variety in the classroom.

**4. Learning Environment:** This includes the physical classroom or learning space, how that space is used, available resources, and grouping patterns for students. A classroom where students always sit in rows in the same assigned seats is not an optimal environment for differentiation. A classroom with flexible grouping and seating arrangements, a variety of resources, and wall and shelf spaces to use for learning and displays of student work is a classroom that invites differentiation.

Throughout this book you will discover many differentiation strategies that cover these four areas. Pick the strategies and techniques that are the best fit for you. Because differentiation can be done in many ways, each differentiated classroom has a unique look and feel.



## Four Important Concepts

*There are four important concepts that help shape a differentiated classroom. Consider all four as you think about differentiation in your classroom or school. They are:*

- **Flexibility**

The hallmark of a differentiated classroom is flexibility. Teachers skilled in differentiation must be flexible in their planning, flexible in how they structure groups, flexible in how they teach to various learning styles and modalities, and flexible in how fast or slow they proceed according to the individual learner. While flexibility is essential, it is also difficult because school systems prescribe the number of hours of instruction and the number of days in the school year or grading period. Some even stipulate the unit or pages of a textbook that must be covered within a given week.

Whatever the outside constraints, it is important to keep a flexible mind set. Try teaching in new ways. Give students multiple opportunities for learning. Be continuously creative in your teaching. This is all a part of flexibility.

- **Planning**

All good teaching requires planning. This is certainly true in a differentiated classroom where you must look beyond the grade-level standards and curriculum and focus on the learning needs of each student. Without careful planning, learning time can be wasted or the classroom can quickly degenerate into chaos.

On the other hand, no teacher has unlimited planning time. Most teachers are stretched with all the obligations and duties that are part of teaching in today's schools. Throughout this book, you will find practical, easy-to-use planning models and strategies that will make differentiation easier for you to implement. As you read, choose those you think will work best for you. Start with one or two and incorporate them into your normal daily or weekly planning. Eliminate strategies that don't work, and build on and enhance those that do. You will find that planning becomes easier and easier the more you differentiate on a regular basis.

- **Resources**

A differentiated curriculum requires many different resources. This may be quite a change if you have been using one textbook, with every child on the same page. Most schools already have many resources that are appropriate for differentiated classrooms. Rediscover the books, workbooks, manipulatives, computer software, and reference materials in your classroom, book room, or file cabinets. Ask yourself how you can use these materials to meet the needs of individuals or small groups of students.

Know what resources your school has. Often teachers have access to plenty of resources but need to spend time locating and organizing them and then choosing the ones that are appropriate to use. This is time well-spent and in the long run will save you planning time. Ask your school media specialist to help you find the resources you need for a differentiated unit or lesson. He or she is often your best human resource in locating other resources.

## Overview

An excellent web site for locating many resources useful in differentiating curriculum and instruction is [www.differentiatedresources.com](http://www.differentiatedresources.com). Log on to find resources in various categories, grade levels, and subject areas.

- **Choices**

Learning activities in a differentiated classroom often involve student choices. These choices include products and performances based on learning styles, learning modalities, Bloom's Taxonomy, or multiple intelligences. This does **NOT** mean giving students unstructured or unlimited choices. It **DOES** mean having a set of standards-based activities from which they can choose, at least some of the time.

In this book you will find a number of ways to design curriculum and learning activities that give students choices. Curriculum compacting, learning contracts, learning centers, independent study, tiered lessons, the ILP™ format, and Tic-Tac-Toe all are embedded with student choice. A word of caution – some students think that having choices means they can do nothing if they so choose. I believe that learning time is simply too valuable. For this reason, this is my rule about *choice*:

**Carolyn's Basic Rule for a Differentiated Classroom**

*The one choice you never have  
is the choice to do nothing!*