

Tagrid Sihly asked:

*What are some ways of differentiating a lesson?*

As all of us teachers know, differentiation in theory is a whole lot easier than it is in practice.

### **Response from Carol Ann Tomlinson**

**Carol Ann Tomlinson** is William Clay Parrish Jr. Professor and Chair of Educational Leadership, Foundation, and Policy at the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia in Charlottesville. She is the author, with Marcia B. Imbeau, of ***Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom*** (ASCD, 2010). She has written numerous books on digital teaching portfolios, and is partnering with Tomlinson to write a book on using technology to differentiate instruction:

#### *Technology as a Tool for Differentiation*

*Differentiation is trying to make the classroom a good fit for a broad range of students to maximize learning. Powerful differentiation happens in the context of an invitational learning environment, quality curriculum, formative assessment that guides teaching and learning, instruction based on on-going assessment information, and classroom procedures that balance structure and flexibility to allow attention to individual differences.*

*Teachers can differentiate content (what students learn or how they get access to information), process (how students make sense of and come to understand content), product (how students show what they've learned), and affect and learning environment (classroom arrangement and climate). Each of these three elements can be differentiated in response to student readiness, interest, and/or approach to learning.*

*Powerful technologies that are increasingly available in contemporary classrooms show great promise for improving teachers' efforts to differentiate. Although they cannot replace quality environment, curriculum, assessment practices, instruction, and routines, the tools can significantly enhance a teacher's effort to "stretch" the classroom to make room for more students to learn more robustly.*

*Technology can address student differences in many ways, including:*

- **Providing** students access to resources at their current readiness level or in a first language,
- **Connecting** members of a class so they can work together beyond the school day,
- **Linking** students who have shared interests independent of their geographic location,
- **Making** abstract ideas more accessible to all learners using vivid graphics, animations, videos, or interactive models,

- **Offering** a variety of tools that support learning tasks such as writing, spelling, or studying,
- **Providing** students access to rich and real content materials such as websites with expert explanations,
- **Allowing** students engaging ways to express their learning, such as animation programs or through avatars.

*A few of the many ways in which technology can assist teachers in designing, managing, and delivering differentiated instruction include:*

- **Monitoring** student knowledge at key points in a lesson and keeping track of student progress,
- **Determining** reading level of text materials,
- **Finding** teaching resources that connect with students' interests and cultures,
- **Creating** personalized lessons for or sharing personalized materials,
- **Communicating** with students and parents.
- **Creating** multi-media lessons that capture the attention of students who learn in a variety of ways,
- **Organizing** lessons and classroom time,
- **Sharing** lessons with colleagues,

*Technology is a tool. It's possible to use that tool with little regard for student differences--and also to use it in ways that honor individual needs and extend the learning potential of every student.*

### **Response from Donalyn Miller**

Donalyn Miller has worked with a wide variety of upper elementary and middle school students and currently teaches fifth grade at O.A. Peterson Elementary in Forth Worth, Texas. In her popular book, *The Book Whisperer*, Donalyn reflects on her journey to become a reading teacher and describes how she inspires and motivates her middle school students to read 40 or more books a year. In her latest book, ***Reading in the Wild***, Donalyn collects responses from 900 adult readers and uses this information to teach lifelong reading habits to her students:

*While teachers focus on standards-based instruction, these standards are often open-ended--allowing teachers and students to select texts to read or topics to explore that match individual students. According to Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999), there are three ways to differentiate a*

*lesson that allow students more choices in their learning by differentiating content, process, or product. Through assessment data, and interest surveys, teachers can guide students toward choices that match their abilities and interests.*

**Content:** *Differentiating content refers to a change in the material being learned by the student. For example, if all students must write a research report, students can select their own topic to research. Teachers can focus instruction on research skills such as locating and evaluating information and citing sources, and students can show their mastery of these skills while pursuing their interests. In reading, teachers can match students with books at their reading level and focus instruction on comprehension or literacy elements. We must determine whether students can't internalize the skill we are teaching them or simply can't access the text we are asking them to read.*

**Process:** *Differentiating process allows students to access the material they are learning in multiple ways. For example, students can conduct research on the Internet, read books about a topic, or interview a local expert. When developing their understanding of a concept, students can create visual representations or write a bulleted list.*

**Product:** *Differentiating product provides students opportunities to show their learning in various ways. Students could write a formal research paper, record a podcast, or create infographics summarizing key points from their research findings.*

### **Response from Jeff Charbonneau**

Jeff Charbonneau is the 2013 National Teacher of the Year. He is a Chemistry, Physics, and Engineering teacher at Zillah High School, in Zillah, WA. You can follow him on Twitter at **@JeffCharbonneau**:

*There are lots of ways to differentiate a lesson. None of them are perfect in all scenarios. Which makes sense. After all, we are talking about differentiation for individual circumstances! Here are a few of the major ideas on differentiation:*

#### **1) Projects**

*Projects are one of the easiest ways to differentiate a lesson. By allowing students to work on different project, often of their own choosing, the teacher can modify the level of depth and scale of the project to fit the current level of student understanding.*

*To take this to the next level, consider sequencing multiple projects one after the other, with students staying on the same or similar topics each time. This allows the teacher to then change the project requirements with each iteration to match the new level of understanding of the student.*

## **2) Video / Flip**

*Flipping, or video recording your lessons allows students to access them either at home, in the school library or on their portable devices. This can allow for students who need to see or hear your explanations multiple times, a chance to do so. This can also be very effective for those student who want to move along at a faster pace.*

*If you do use this method, consider asking your department or school to purchase inexpensive hand-held video/mp3 players for students who do not have access to computers at home. There are several options in the sub \$30 range.*

## **3) A note on deadlines**

*One of the oldest solutions to differentiation is the idea of just simply giving students more time to complete the assignment. While this certainly is a valid strategy, please consider how you as the teacher can also help during this extended time. What additional resources can you give? This can include videos, websites, articles, and additional tutoring. Extra time, on its own, many time is not sufficient.*

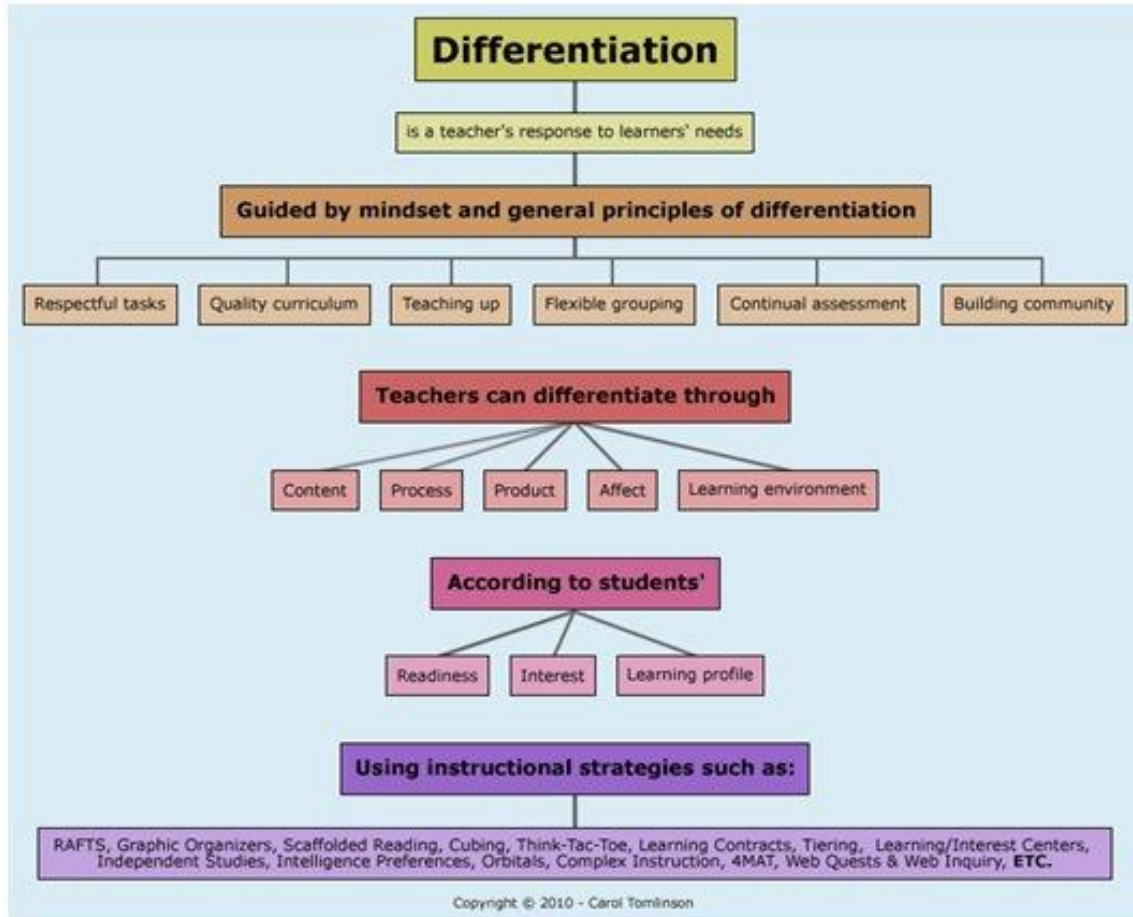
## **4) Assignments that matter**

*Really think about the assignments you give. What is their purpose? What do they demonstrate? Then look at every problem and ask the same question. Assignments should not be measured based on the number of problems, but instead on the impact the assignment has on the learner and the learning process. By getting really specific on what assignments you give and WHY you are giving them, you will often find that the answer on how to differentiate your lessons will become very clear.*

## **Response Ffm Kimberly Kappler Hewitt**

Dr. Kimberly Kappler Hewitt is an assistant professor of educational leadership at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, consultant, and professional developer. She is the author of ***Differentiation is an Expectation: A School Leader's Guide to Building a Culture of Differentiation*** and the editor of ***Postcards from the Schoolhouse: Practitioner Scholars Examine Contemporary Issues in Instructional Leadership***. She can be reached at [kkhewitt@uncg.edu](mailto:kkhewitt@uncg.edu):

*Differentiation is far more than a set of strategies to meet the differing needs of students. It is an approach based on certain beliefs about students (e.g., All students are capable and uniquely talented.) and certain values (e.g., leveraging students' strengths and interests instead of being stuck on students' deficits). This graphic, by Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson, provides a model for differentiation:*



Retrieved from *Differentiation Central*; Copyright, 2010, Carol Ann Tomlinson; used with permission.

Here are three (of innumerable) ways to differentiate a lesson. They are listed by challenge level, from green to black--from least to most difficult (think ski slope difficulty ratings):

### **Green**

Create a RAFT writing activity to extend and demonstrate student learning. Give students choices for Role, Audience, Format and Topic. Here are two examples of RAFT assignments from a 6th grade life science lesson on biological relationships:

**RAFT assignments**

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Flowers	Honey Bees	Persuasive letter	We go together! (Mutualism)
Desert bird	Cactus	Persuasive letter	You will be fine. I promise! (Commensalism)
Stomach or gut	Tape Worm	Persuasive letter	I think it's time to go! (Parasitism)

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Plant	Humans	Rant	All I do is give and give!
Fish	Algae	Friendly letter	Thanks for being you!
Fungus	Rotting log	Diagram	The Circle of Life

Retrieved from [Differentiation Central](#); Used with permission; Go the link to see the complete lesson plan.

**Blue**

Create a Think-Tac-Toe board that provides students multiple ways to learn, practice, and extend their thinking. Students may be asked to complete one task per column, as in this example:

**Think-Tac-Toe**  
Choose one selection from each column.

Plot Elements	Characters	Big Picture
Draw and describe what happens in the beginning, middle, and end of the narrative.	For each of the main characters, draw or find a picture that matches how you imagine the character. Then write a short description of each character's personality.	Design your own book cover for this narrative. The cover should reflect what you feel is most important about the narrative. Explain why you chose to design the cover as you did.
Create a timeline of the 9 most crucial events in the narrative. For each, explain its importance.	Choose one of the main characters. Describe the character as well as the character's importance in the narrative. Explain how the narrative would be different without that character.	Make a quiz about what you feel are the most important aspects of the narrative. Create an answer key for the quiz.
Select a crucial event in the narrative. Give a summary of it, and explain why its importance. Explain how the narrative might end differently if that event had not taken place.	Choose the main character that you believe changes the most throughout the narrative. Explain how s/he changes, what led to the change(s), and why these changes are important to how the narrative ends.	Pretend to be a blogger. Write a review of this narrative. Your review should include a brief summary of the narrative as well as what you feel its strengths and weakness are. How many stars (out of 5) would you give this narrative? Explain why.

*Used with permission*

While Think-Tac-Toe boards are straightforward, much thinking and intentionality go into creating respectful and productive tasks. [Here is a resource](#) by Corine Sikora that introduces and provides examples of Think-Tac-Toe boards, menu boards, and choice boards.

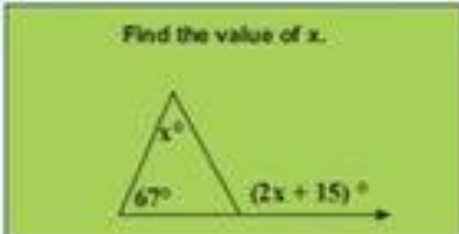
## Black

Tier learning experiences to differentiate for students' readiness levels by providing multiple levels of challenge. Students select their challenge level for a given assignment or assessment according to the principle of "challenge by choice" (while teachers nudge students here and there as needed). [Here is a wonderful site](#) that provides numerous video clips and samples (including the one provided here) for creating tiered learning experiences:

# Tiering Assignments and Assessments

**Green**

Find the value of  $x$ .




**Blue**

In  $\triangle ABC$ , the measure of  $\angle A$  is three times that of  $\angle C$ , and the measure of  $\angle B$  is twice the sum of the measures of  $\angle A$  and  $\angle C$ . Find the measure of each angle.

**Black**

In any  $\triangle ABC$ ,  $E$  and  $D$  are interior points of  $\overline{AC}$  and  $\overline{BC}$ , respectively.  $\overline{AF}$  bisects  $\angle CAD$ , and  $\overline{BF}$  bisects  $\angle CBE$ . Prove  $m\angle AEB + m\angle ADB = 2m\angle AFB$



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