



# DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION



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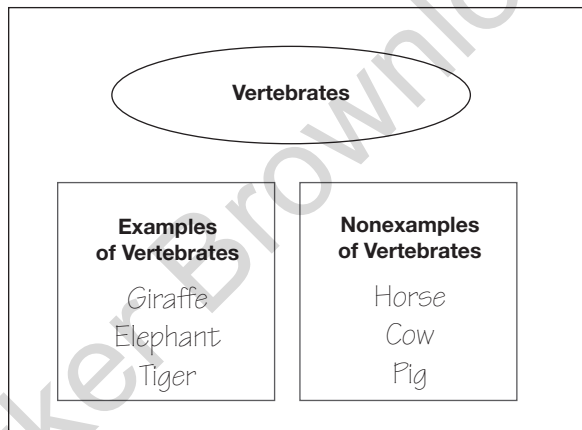
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## What Differentiation Is and Is Not

As part of a pre-assessment for a science unit, students are filling out a chart that asks them to list or draw some examples of vertebrates and some nonexamples. Figure 1 shows how Miguel completed his chart.

Figure 1 **Miguel's Chart**



From this, it looks at first like Miguel is on the right track. Each of the animals he lists in the left column has a backbone, the distinguishing characteristic of a vertebrate. But look at what he has put in the nonexample column. Miguel appears to have classified vertebrates as having something to do with animals he has seen at the zoo and invertebrates as those he might see on a farm. For-

tunately, his teacher asked for examples *and* nonexamples and is now armed with the knowledge that Miguel has some misconceptions about vertebrates that will need to be addressed!

Just as students can have misconceptions about what they are learning, educators can have misconceptions about differentiated instruction. To be sure that we understand what differentiation is, let's begin by considering what differentiation is *not*.

### What Differentiation Is Not

First of all, differentiation is not a new idea. The terms used in this model of instruction may be new to some, but the fundamental philosophy of differentiation—recognizing and responding to students' varied needs—is not.

Think about the teacher in the one-room schoolhouse who had multiple grade levels in her charge. She had to differentiate her instruction to be effective, even though she certainly did not use this term.

Second, differentiation is not the same thing as individualized instruction, although individualized instruction can be seen as a *type* of differentiation. In the differentiated classroom, teachers recognize that each student is an individual and therefore has specific needs that may vary from his neighbor's. But teachers also realize that, given the time constraints they face and the large number of students they deal with on a daily basis, it will be impossible to individualize everything for each student. Nevertheless, these teachers strive to have a few learning options for as much of the instruction as they can, knowing that doing so will provide each student with a better match than a one-size-fits-all classroom could offer.

Third, differentiation of instruction is not a newfangled version of tracking. A lot of discussion exists in education about the equity and efficacy of assigning students to separate tracks of classes. Critics often see such classes as unequal in terms of richness of curriculum and student performance expectations. Particularly, educators worry about students whose test scores, grades, or behavior patterns may keep them from being included in advanced-level or college-prep coursework, severely limiting their future career and educational options.

While tracked classrooms are themselves not as homogeneous as we tend to think and thus need differentiation as well, differentiated classrooms are purposefully heterogeneous. Teachers in differentiated classrooms recognize and rejoice in the heterogeneous mix of student interests, learning profiles, and readiness that is pres-

ent and dedicate themselves to addressing these differences as often as possible. These teachers believe that a rich, stimulating, and challenging curriculum can be made available to all students in every classroom through the use of flexible grouping in terms of student interests, learning profiles, and readiness.

A fourth misconception about differentiation is that all students do in the differentiated classroom is work in groups, leaving no place in this model for whole-group teaching and lecture. On the contrary, we see a variety of grouping configurations in action in the differentiated classroom, including whole-class, small-group, and individual work. The teacher's decision whether or not to group students on a particular day depends most upon the thoughtful consideration of the desired learning outcomes and specific learner needs to determine appropriate instructional strategy. For a particular activity in a differentiated classroom, some students may work in small groups while others work alone or with a partner.

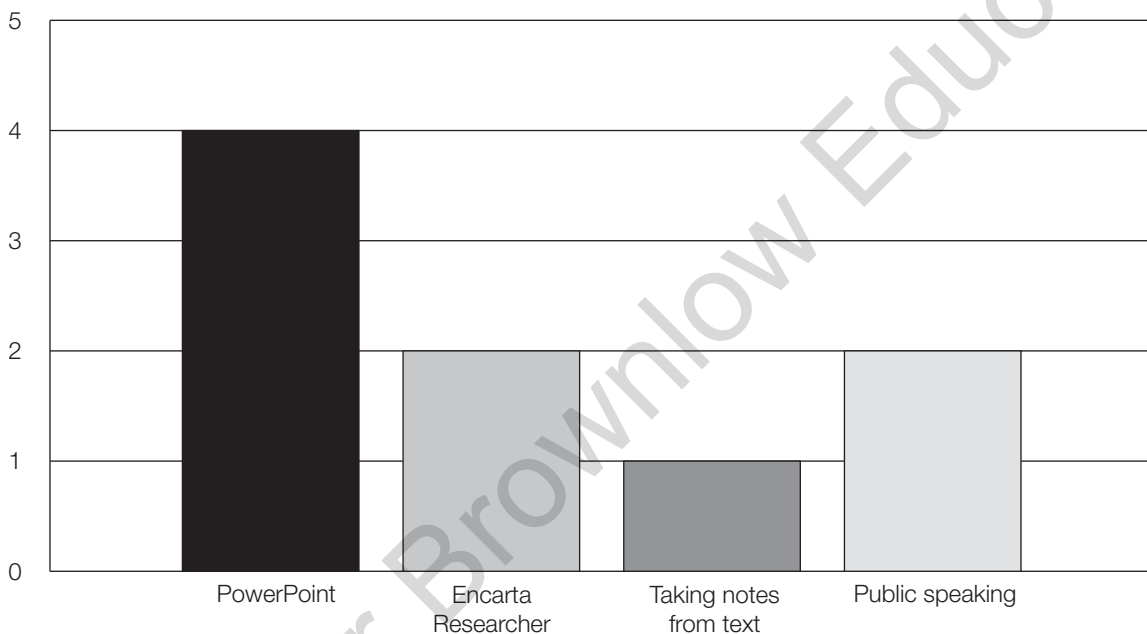
A fifth misconception is that in the differentiated classroom, students work only in ways that are comfortable for them or on topics of interest to them. Teachers worry that this practice will encourage students to stay in their comfort zone and will not teach them to adapt to situations in which their preferences can't or won't be taken into account. On the contrary, teachers in a differentiated classroom are keenly aware of their responsibility to balance attention to students' current interests and comfortable learning modalities with an introduction to new interests and practice with unfamiliar learning modalities. Thus teachers consciously decide about when it is most appropriate to indulge student preferences and when it is better to ask them to stretch.

## Various Charting Formats for Pre-assessments

SAMPLE

### Research and Presentation Skills

How good are you at . . .



You might follow up this assessment by saying on a subsequent day, “Those of you who rated yourselves as a 4 or 5 in PowerPoint should begin with the assignment on the blue paper. If you rated yourself as a 2 or 3, try the assignment on yellow. If you rated yourself as a 0 or 1, try the assignment on pink (or meet with me in a small group for an overview of PowerPoint skills). Once you get started, if you think you have the wrong assignment, let me know.” It is likely that some students will have misclassified themselves, especially if this is the first time you have asked them to rate themselves. Nevertheless, you accomplish two things by doing this. First, it is likely that many students will have a better match of assignment to readiness level that they would if you gave everyone the same assignment. Second, and perhaps most important of all, you are showing students that you will use the information that they provide as part of your efforts to better meet their needs. This is a vital understanding for students in the differentiated classroom to have.



<b>Sternberg Intelligences</b> (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2000)		
<p>Content, processes, and products in the unit that will likely appeal to <b>analytical</b> thinkers (focus on problem solving; ability for critical thinking; preference for analyzing, judging, critiquing, comparing):</p>	<p>Content, processes, and products in the unit that will likely appeal to <b>practical</b> thinkers (ability to translate theory and ideas into practice; preference for applying what is learned, recognizing ideas that have a potential audience):</p>	<p>Content, processes, and products in the unit that will likely appeal to <b>creative</b> thinkers (ability to generate novel and interesting ideas; preference for creating, discovering, inventing):</p>
<p>Times when I could let students choose or ask them to work analytically, practically, or creatively. Indicate for each instance whether students will work in a preferred modality (P) or be asked to stretch (S).</p>		



## Tools for High-Quality

### DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION



## Ensuring Common Goals

Articulating appropriate KUD goals for a unit or lesson is a vital step in setting the stage for high-quality differentiation because all variations of a good differentiated activity should lead to the same or very similar KUD goals. The tools and samples in this section give you the opportunity to analyze sample differentiated activities in numerous subject areas and how they lead to stated KUD goals. Here are some tips to remember when reviewing differentiated activities:

1. Differentiated or not, does this represent good curriculum? Is the task worthy of teacher and student time?
2. Does each task appear to lead to the same goals (KUD)?
3. Do the differentiated tasks seem equally respectful, or do some feel “dumbed down” or “fluffy”?
4. Do all tasks require the students who will do them to stretch as much as possible?

To be respectful, activities must be designed with the student in mind. That is, we cannot make decisions about how (or if) we should differentiate without considering our audience: the students. Some of these tools include sections that may be used to plan differentiated activities and to help you think about issues that may come up as you carry out your plans.





Section: Ensuring Common Goals

## Secondary Social Studies: New World Explorers

SAMPLE

KNOW	UNDERSTAND	BE ABLE TO DO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Names of New World explorers</li> <li>Key events during the explorers' travels</li> <li>Explorers' contributions</li> </ul>	Exploration involves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>risk</li> <li>costs and benefits</li> <li>success and failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct research</li> <li>Share results</li> <li>Demonstrate key knowledge and understandings</li> </ul>

This activity serves as a summative assessment at the conclusion of a unit. Students are assigned either the task on the left or the one on the right.

Using the list of resources and list of product options that I have provided, show how two key explorers took chances, experienced success and failure, and brought about both positive and negative change. Provide evidence.

Using reliable and defensible research, develop a way to show how New World explorers were paradoxes. Include the unit's principles, but also go beyond them.

**Think About:**

1. Study the version on the left. What about this activity makes it good curriculum for all students? Is this activity differentiated? Explain your thinking.
2. Study the example on the right. What makes this version more difficult than the one on the left?
3. In what ways does each activity lead students to the same KUD goals? How might you strengthen that bond?
4. Imagine you have students who would struggle with both of these versions. How could you rewrite the activity so that it is appropriate for these students but still meets the KUD goals?



## DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION



### SECTION

### ENSURING APPROPRIATE CHALLENGE

#### **Tool:** The Equalizer

This tool is useful in the quest to design tasks that are at varying levels of difficulty. Teachers tend to be fairly comfortable relying on a change in level of abstractness and amount of structure to alter the difficulty of a task. The Equalizer helps us widen our view of how to do this.

The tool is composed of nine continuums: foundational to transformational, concrete to abstract, simple to complex, single facet to multiple facets, small leap to great leap, more structured to more open, clearly defined problems to fuzzy problems, less independence to greater independence, and slow to fast. The Equalizer can help you analyze the difficulty level of a particular task and then, focusing on one or more continuums, devise differentiated versions that will “equalize” the challenge of the task so that students at varied readiness levels can work closer to their zones of proximal development. A quick glance at the various continuums can also serve as a catalyst for ideas on how to adjust the difficulty of a task.