

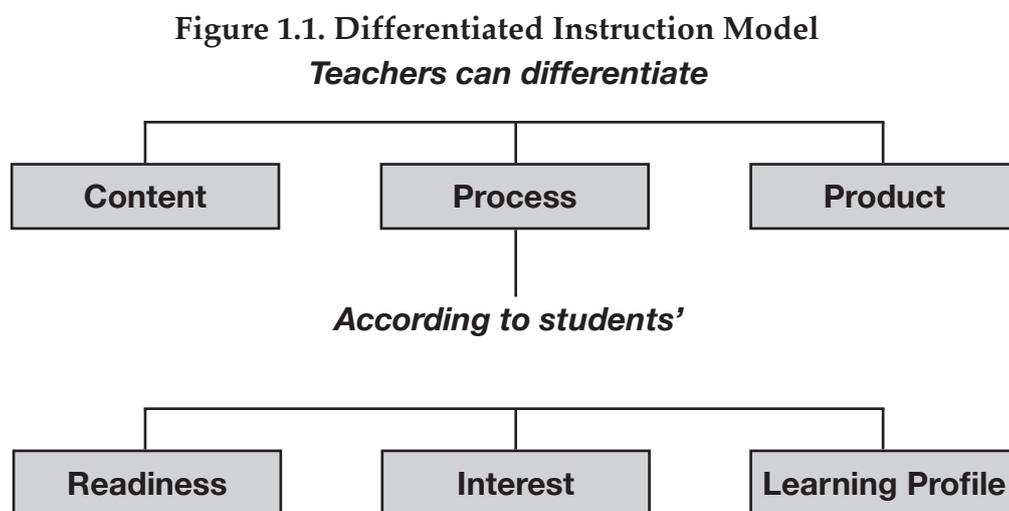
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The Fit of Differentiating by Interest Within a Differentiated Instruction Model

There are many models and conceptualisations of DI, and it is useful if teachers use some type of framework so that planning for differentiation occurs in an effective, strategic way. One framework, developed by Carol Ann Tomlinson of the University of Virginia (Figure 1.1), is represented in a graphic format:



(Tomlinson, 2001)

Teachers can differentiate, or alter the *what* (content), the *how* (process) or the demonstration of understanding (product). The way to decide what to differentiate, or indeed if it is necessary to make these adaptations, depends on the readiness, interest and learning profiles and preferences of each group of learners. Once these decisions are made, the teacher employs strategies to meet student needs often with strategic grouping of students. Differentiating by interest uses students' situational and personal interests to create choices to optimise engagement and learning.

Looking at this conceptualisation of DI, it is apparent that differentiating by interest flows from understanding students, which is the focus of Chapter 2. It is also only one component of differentiation and would not be the only way a teacher would adjust instruction. It is, however, a good place to start.

What Does the Research Say?

In addition to what we know works in practice, there has also been research to support the link between interest and student motivation. It has been suggested that “interest is a doorway to learning” (Tomlinson & Demirsky Allan, 2000, p. 19). This is certainly not a new idea, as evidenced by John Dewey’s book *Interest and Effort in Education*, which was published in 1913. In it he very clearly and eloquently talks about how we must engage student interest to help students learn effectively.

Personal and Situational Interest

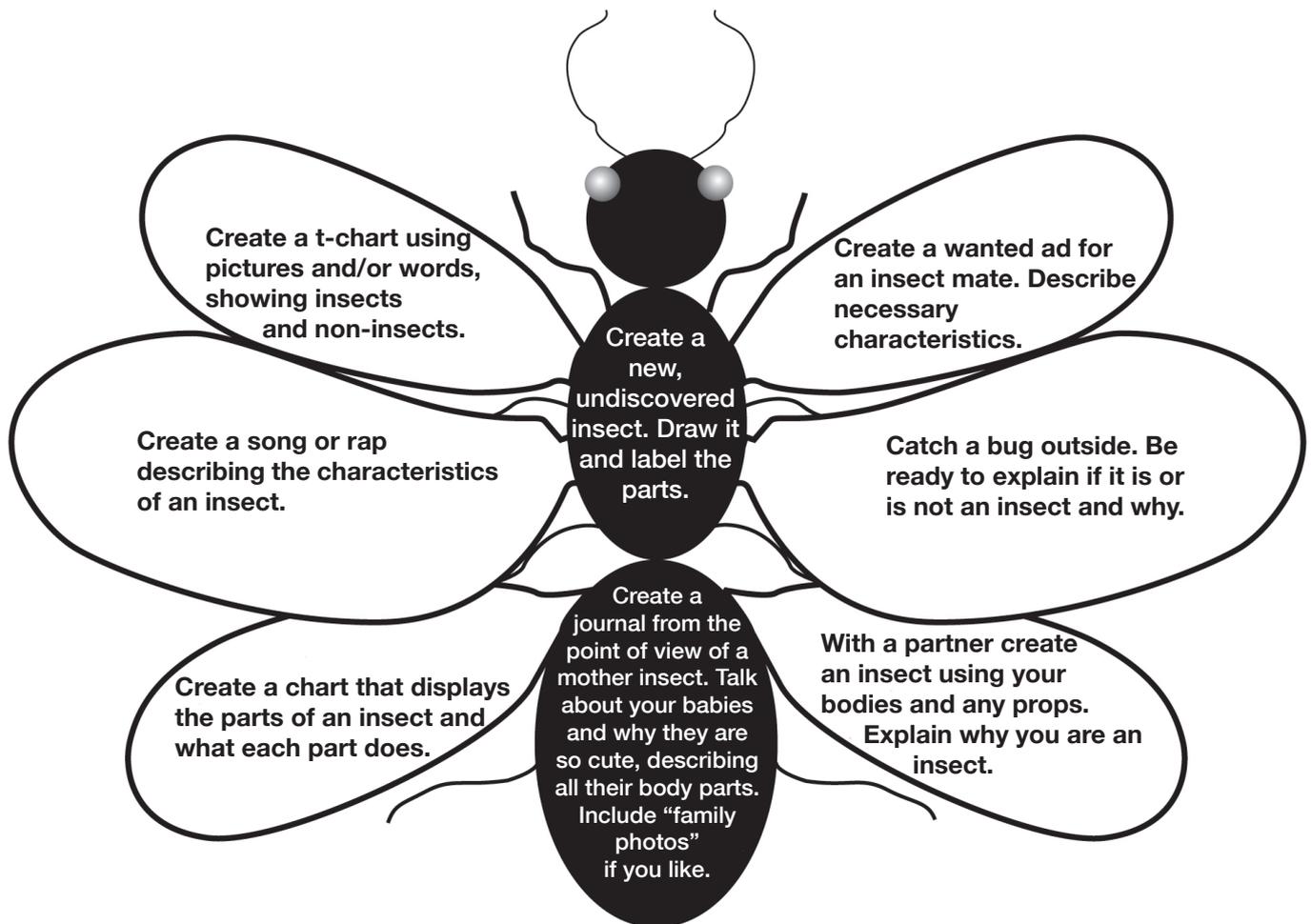
Researchers describe two different types of interest – situational and personal (Bergin, 1999; Schraw, Flowerday & Lehman, 2001). Situational interest arises out of something that grabs the learner’s attention. Some factors that influence situational interest include the use of humour, novelty, social interaction and hands-on activities (Bergin, 1999).

Personal interest is something about which a student is internally motivated to learn. It makes sense that students like to learn about things in which they are already personally interested or are related to some goal they have for themselves. Interest can also exist when students have some knowledge in an area, but perceive that there is some gap between what they know and a larger body of knowledge. Teachers can choose activities that address both types of interest. Choices that create either situational interest or personal interest can be provided within a lesson or unit of study.

Linking Interest and Motivation

Some of the research speaks to the link between interest and motivation. In studies where researchers observed students who were offered a choice of activities, it was found that by offering choices, they felt less external control and more intrinsic motivation (Ishee, 2005; Stone, 1995). Along with this increase in motivation, there also appears to be fewer discipline problems and off-task behaviours when students are able to work on topics of interest (Ediger, 2005; Mandel Morrow, 2004). One study states that “giving students the choice and responsibility for selecting something that would further their own education was a powerful, motivating force, indicating respect for the learner” (Todd, 1995, p. 77). It goes on to suggest that perhaps teachers have been focusing on students’ willingness (or lack of willingness) to work, instead of focusing on the appropriate tools to motivate them, such as independent study. Research shows that interest and motivation are closely linked.

Figure 3.2. Learning About Insects Choice Board



Checklist for Creating a Choice Board

- Identify the KUDos – What do you want the students to Know, Understand and Be Able to Do as a result of completing a choice board task?
- Brainstorm a variety of activities
- Eliminate tasks that will not lead the students to these KUDos.
- Decide on what your choice board will look like. Will you create a noughts-and-crosses, a list of choices or a structure that matches a theme of study?
- How will you have students work through these tasks?
 - Will you have one “core” activity that all students must complete to learn a key concept, and then complete a vertical, horizontal or diagonal line of other activities from there?
 - Will you have a “free space” “or “free choice” somewhere on the board where students can design their own activity?
- Choose the activities from your brainstormed list and place onto the board.
- Decide how the projects will be evaluated.

This checklist can be found on Resource 16.

RAFTs

The acronym RAFT stands for **r**ole, **a**udience, **f**ormat and **t**opic (Santa, 1988). It was originally used for writing assignments in English. In recent years, it has been adopted by those who are interested in differentiated instruction and can involve products beyond just written work. RAFTs help to differentiate because they provide choices for students and can be written so the choices are engaging for students. They can be particularly effective in helping students explore points of view. Figure 3.3 provides an explanation of each component of a RAFT, and a science example follows (Figure 3.4).

Maths:

Graphing: Cubing

Learning Goals

Students will:

Know: How to collect and display data in a variety of graphs to solve a problem (Figure 4.12).

Understand: Graphs can be used as a way to display and interpret data.

Do: Use different types of graphs to find information about a survey question.

Hook

Read *Who's Got Spots?* by Linda Aber

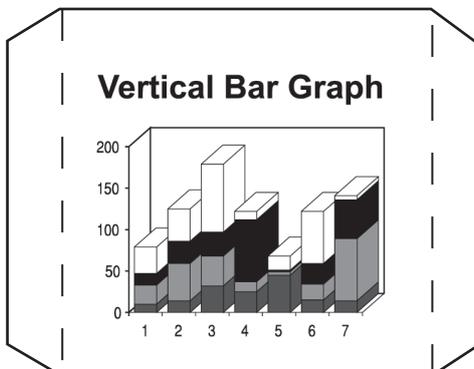
Activities

1. As a class, in small groups or as individuals, students create a survey question with which they can survey other students in the school and collect data.
2. The cube is rolled to determine how they will represent their data.
3. Students collect data through their survey question(s) and display the data in graph form.
4. Students use the data to answer the question and to make conclusions based on the results.

Closure

Students work in small groups or share with the whole class to compare their answers and discuss the data they collected, displayed and answered the question.

Figure 4.12. Graphs



Horizontal Bar Graph

Category	MATHS	SCIENCE
1	40	20
2	60	30
3	80	40
4	100	50

Tally

What is your favourite treat?

Apples	###
Grapes: Red	///
Green	### ///
Cantaloupe	////
Honeydew	//

Pictograph

Category	Count
White with Black Stripes	3
Other	2

