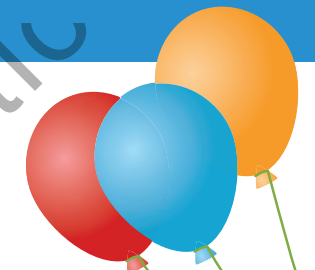


# Differentiated Instruction

William N. Bender

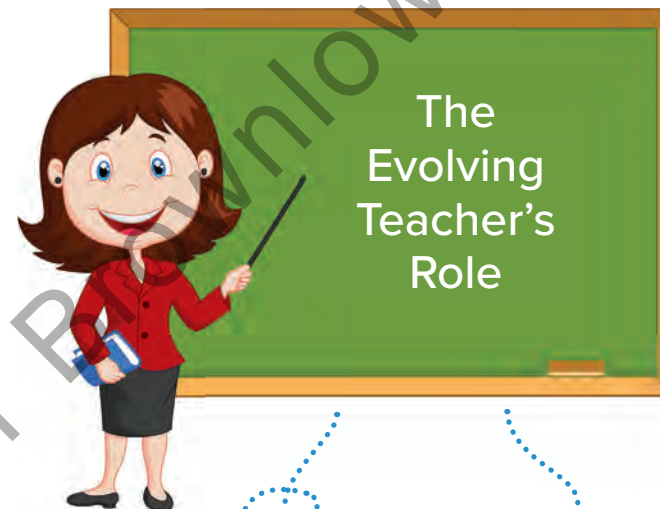


Differentiating instruction means varying **instructional activities** and **instructional products** in order to accommodate the diverse learning needs and learning style preferences of the students in today's classroom.<sup>1,2,4,12</sup>

Carol Tomlinson's concept of differentiated instruction was groundbreaking in 1999 and has now evolved into a dynamic movement to restructure instruction at almost every grade level. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Dr. Tomlinson's work in terms of how teachers plan instruction,<sup>2,9</sup> though her premise was relatively simple; the wide divergence among today's students in learning styles, learning preferences, and achievement levels necessitates a wider array of instructional activities.<sup>10,11</sup> Tomlinson recommended varying instruction in three dimensions: **instructional content**, **instructional process**, and **instructional product**.<sup>11</sup> Variations in instructional content have involved varying the content or depth of content for different learners. *However, the emphasis on high educational standards has, over the last decade, offset this emphasis as instructional content is now specifically delineated by the standards themselves.*

Tomlinson also suggests that instructional process and activities be varied based on the different and distinct ways that students learn, and much of her early work was founded in the theory of multiple intelligences, or different learning styles, proposed by Howard Gardner.<sup>7,8</sup> However, more recently Tomlinson has recommended that teachers use a wider array of learning styles and learning preferences as the basis for development or selection of instructional activities for individual students,<sup>10,12,13</sup> and multiple intelligences theory has been deemphasized in Tomlinson's description of differentiation.

Finally, Tomlinson's emphasis on the differentiation of learning product involved accepting a wider set of options for students to demonstrate their understanding of the content.<sup>11</sup> Rather than exclusively using unit tests, Tomlinson advocates having students demonstrate understanding of the subject matter through art projects, joint projects, engineering work, presentations, or various other creative endeavors.



## The Evolving Teacher's Role

Teacher becomes instructional facilitator.

Teacher offers initial instruction from a variety of sources—other students, online sources, or web-based video—rather than exclusively from teachers or textbooks.

Teacher creates an environment where there will be very few moments when all students in the class are doing exactly the same instructional activity.

Teacher moves away from the traditional whole-group lesson plan.