

“Differentiating instruction means that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn.”

*-Carol Ann Tomlinson, 2001, *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms**

- **Center on Student Learning.**

- *Believe you are teaching the student more than teaching the subject.*
- *Ask probing and clarifying questions.*
- *Make sure students understand the learning targets—those of the course and their personal learning goals.*
- *Describe and demonstrate what quality looks like. If you use a mastery rubric, have exemplars.*
- *Consistently ask:*
 - *How can I get to know my students and their needs?*
 - *What is most important and enduring for my students to learn about this topic?*
 - *How can I ensure each of my students learns as effectively and efficiently as possible?*
 - *How will I know whether my students have learned what matters most?*

*-Carol Ann Tomlinson & Jay McTighe, 2006, *Integrating Differentiated Instruction & Understanding by Design: Connecting Kids and Content**

- **A positive and safe classroom climate and culture needs to be developed early and supported throughout the school year.**

- *Student empathy is a powerful element in having such a culture.*
- *Foster mutual respect for all learners.*
- *Provide encouragement and support for all students. Show students you believe all students can learn.*
- *Know your students’ strengths and weaknesses; help them to know this as well.*
- *Help students set personal goals and reflect on their growth. This will help eliminate negative comparison between students. “How are you doing on your goals?” “Do you want to set a new goal?” “What will it take to get you there?”*
- *Establish criteria for classroom routines that are clear and support student success.*

- **Respectful Tasks: All activities, lessons, units, assessments, etc. must be designed with a specific student-learning goal.**
 - *Who is this for? Why do they need it? How/when does it best fit with their learning needs/process?*
 - *Use a wide range of teaching strategies designed for your learners.*
 - *Vary student grouping based on the purpose of the activity in addition to the learners' needs.*

- **Student grouping is dynamic, flexible, and varied. It is based on a variety of factors, changes often, and is the norm in classroom with successful differentiation practices.**
 - *Dynamic grouping works in tandem with a positive and safe classroom culture/climate. It keeps students from feeling isolated or trapped in rigid ability groups.*
 - *Ability groups should be skill or content specific. Students should move between levels reflective of what they know or can do. Find student strengths and create opportunities for every student to experience each level. Activities in various ability levels should have the same level of engagement and "fun".*
 - *Label groups to reflect the skill or content students will be working on, or the learning style or interest-area that unites them. Avoid generic names, like animals, that are static.*
 - *Offer guided student choice in groups when appropriate. "If you missed questions 2, 3, or 7 on the pre-assessment, or are still confusing ___ with ____, then you would benefit from the activity group ___ will be doing today."*
 - *Model metacognitive thinking about group choice. "I know a lot about soil because my aunt has a farm and I help her in the summer, but I don't know very much about water cycle—how does the rain get into the clouds?—so I think I would learn more in the water cycle group."*
 - *When students understand their own learning styles and preferences, they respond more positively to various instructional groups. "I know friends are in a different group, and I'd like to be with them, but I'm probably learning more by working with these kids because we think at the same speed."*

- **Students need to be able to understand and express what they do and do not know, what skills and knowledge they have and are working toward mastering, where they are in their learning.**
 - *Understanding that all students have different strengths and weaknesses and that everyone is working toward learning goals will help avoid negative competition (not all competition is negative in learning).*
 - *Student awareness of their learning helps to create relevancy for them. Relevancy is one of the most powerful factors in student motivation.*
 - *In the American school system, grade leveling may necessitate communication/knowledge of student learning to be based on two sets of expectations: the grade level standards and the specific learning goals of each student, which may be above or below their “grade level”.*

- **Communicate clearly with student families about what Differentiation in your classroom looks like and why it is best for all students.**
 - *Understanding at home will add to the positive climate in the classroom.*
 - *Involve student families in activities to help them understand that student learners have different entry points to content and skills, and different learning styles that impact how each student learns best.*
 - *Let student families experience flexible grouping strategies you use in your classroom during a Back-to-School or other parent night event. Create a Differentiation 101 for Parents event if your school does not have an opportunity.*
 - *Be clear that your benchmark expectations are rigorous for all students, and that all students should be learning something new everyday. Therefore, with different entry points and learning styles, the pathway to new learning might look different for each student in your class.*
 - *If you use newsletters or have a website to communicate, think about three levels of curriculum information:*
 - *Our Benchmark Goals and Common Activities This Week/Month*
 - *What Students Might Do After They Meet The Benchmark*
 - *What Student Might Do To Catch Up To The Benchmark*