**Differentiation - some ideas for classroom practice**

**Why differentiate?**

* No two children are alike.
* No two children learn in the identical way.
* An enriched environment for one student is not necessarily enriched for another.
* A one-size-fits-all approach to classroom instruction is ineffective for most students and harmful to some.

**Some guidelines for learning-profile differentiation**

* Remember that some, but not all, of your students share your learning preferences.
* Help your students reflect on their own preferences.
* Use both teacher-structured and student-choice avenues to learning-profile differentiation. Much can be accomplished by asking students to make some of their own choices.
* Select a few learning-profile categories for emphasis as you begin.
* Watch individuals in your class for learning clues, to talk with them about what works and doesn't work for them, and to invite them to make suggestions or pose alternatives that seem more promising

**Where to begin?**

Begin differentiating at a pace that is comfortable for you. Choose some approaches to differentiation that tend to take less preparation time, then build it up year by year. Get students to think about how their preferred learning styles. *(See sample students’ Learning Profile Questionnaire: Appendix 2)*

**Low-preparation differentiation:**

* choice of books
* homework options
* use of reading buddies
* varied pacing with anchor options
* student-teacher goal setting
* work alone / together
* flexible seating
* varied supplementary materials
* options for various modes of expression
* varying scaffolding – providing structure likely to lead to student success
* think-pair-share
* use of collaboration, independence and cooperation
* open-ended activities
* varying questions: based on student readiness, interests and learning styles – use open-ended questions where possible and use wait time before taking answers.
* mini workshops
* jigsaw: students work with peers who study one facet of a topic – they then return to a ‘home base’ group to piece together all the pieces.
* negotiated criteria: teacher specifies whole-class requiremennts for task success but student also contributes some criteria of personal interest.
* games

**More high preparation differentiation:**

* tiered activities
* tiered products
* independent studies
* multiple texts
* alternative assessments
* learning contracts
* 4-MAT: mastery of information / understanding of key ideas / personal involvement / creating something new related to a topic. Each of these 4 preferences is present.
* multiple-intelligence options
* compacting: 3-step process: 1) assesses what student knows about material and what he/she still needs to master; 2) plans for learning what is not known excluding from what is already known and 3) plans for freed-up time to be spent in enriched study.
* spelling by readiness
* entry points: encourage student to explore a topic through a learning preference (narrational, visual, experiential etc)
* varying approaches to organising ideas: students can use summarising, mind-mapping, concept mapping, storyboarding, outlining
* mentorships: students work with mentor – goals need to be clear and agreed upon
* interest groups – gives students opportunity to pursue areas of special interest to them
* stations / learning centres: collections of materials learners use to explore topics or practise skills.
* group investigation
* teams, games and tournaments
* choice boards
* WebQuests (http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest/html)
* think-tac-toe

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* simulations (role plays)
* graduated rubrics
* flexible reading formats
* student-centred writing formats

**Tips:**

Use an anchor activity to free you up to focus your attention on your students. Use specified activities to which students automatically move when they complete an assigned task. (reading, journal writing, managing a portfolio, vocabulary, spelling etc.)

Create and give task cards or assignments to individuals or groups.

Assign students into groups or seating areas smoothly. ( eg: list names by colour or overhead transparency.)

**Differentiating Content**

* concept based teaching – patterns of language, making connections, building networks of meaning
* using multiple texts and combining them with a wide variety of other supplementary materials
* building a classroom library
* print rich environment
* collecting magazines, newsletters, brochures, other print materials
* matching resource materials to interests, learning profiles, learner readiness
* introducing topic in different ways (with multiple intelligences in mind)
* mini-lesson – working with small group/ individuals to clarify / explain
* a variety of support systems (peer mentors, reading partners, levels of scaffolding, audio or visual recordings)
* key ideas – flow chart / concept map
* key words – vocabulary charts

Differentiating content in ways likely to tap in to students’ learning profile:

* tape-recording key materials so that auditory learners can listen rather than being solely dependent on visual contact with materials;
* using role-play or asking students to volunteer to act out what they have read;
* introducing ideas to students using graphic organizers to show them how parts of their study fit the big picture of meaning;
* using a range of visual aids or *realia* so that students can hear and see ideas.

**Differentiating Process** - offering more than one way to make sense of what’s important

A good differentiated activity is something students make or do

* in a range of modes at varied degrees of sophistication in varying time spans
* with varied amounts of teacher or peer support
* using essential skills and essential information
* to understand an essential idea/principle or answer an essential question.

Match complexity of task to student’s current level of understanding and skill.

Give students choices about facets of a topic in which to specialise or help them link a personal interest to a goal.

Encourage students to make sense of an idea in a preferred way of learning.

Have students work in small groups or independently.

Use tiered assignments or parallel tasks at varied levels of difficulty.

**Some Classroom activities**

* questionnaire
* comparing and contrasting
* games / guessing games
* opinion poll
* visual stimulus / artwork
* songs
* puzzles / quizzes
* storytelling
* discussion / debates
* pair /small group work
* brainstorming
* roleplay
* research
* video work
* computer-aided language learning
* questions and answers
* guided writing
* matching exercises
* cloze / gap-filling exercises
* worksheets
* free writing
* vocabulary practice
* hot seating

**Note on Collaborative Learning**

Students need to be taught the skills, tools and strategies to work effectively with others. Effective collaborative learning needs thoughtful and gradual integration with planned, direct teaching of targeted skills and development over time. Before undertaking cooperative learning tasks, teachers need to consider the skill level and range of strategies that students are proficient in and then plan units of work which draw on these skills or strategies. Some units will require the direct teaching and practising of new skills before students undertake the unit.

*(See teachers’ checklist for group work: Appendix 1)*

**Think, pair, share:**

This strategy encourages students to think first by themselves and then discuss their opinions with a small group of people. In groups, students consider a question or issue. They begin by reflecting on their opinions and ideas on the topic and recording them on a template, pairing up with the student next to them to discuss their ideas and opinions. The next stage of the process requires the team to come together and share their ideas and collate a group response. This should then be fed back to the class as a whole.

**Pair talk:**

Pupils work together in pairs – possibly friendship, possibly boy–girl, etc. Each pair then joins up with another pair to explain and compare ideas. Easy to organise even in cramped classrooms. Ideal to promote high levels of participation and to ensure that the discussions are highly focused, especially if allied to tight deadlines. (Tell students how long they have to complete task.) Use in the early stages of learning for pupils to recall work from a previous lesson, generate questions, work together to plan a piece of writing or to take turns to tell a story. Use pairs to promote ‘response partners’ during the drafting process, and to work as reading partners with an unfamiliar text. Ideal for quick-fire reflection and review and for rehearsal of ideas before presenting them in the whole class.

**Pairs to fours:**

Pupils work together in pairs. Each pair then joins up with another pair to explain and compare ideas.

**Listening triads:**

Pupils work in groups of three. Each pupil takes on the role of talker, questioner or recorder. The talker explains something, or comments on an issue, or expresses opinions. The questioner prompts and seeks clarification. The recorder makes notes and gives a report at the end of the conversation. Next time, roles are changed.

**Envoys:**

Once groups have carried out a task, one person from each group is selected as an ‘envoy’ and moves to a new group to explain and summarise, and to find out what the new group thought, decided or achieved. The envoy then returns to the original group and feeds back. This is an effective way of avoiding tedious and repetitive ‘reporting back’ sessions. It also puts a ‘press’ on the envoy’s use of language and creates groups of active listeners.

**Snowball:**

Pairs discuss an issue or brainstorm some initial ideas, then double up to fours and continue the process, then into groups of eight in order to compare ideas and to sort out the best or to agree on a course of action. Finally, the whole class is drawn together and spokespersons for each group of eight feed back ideas. A useful strategy to promote more public discussion and debate.

**Tic-tac-toe:**

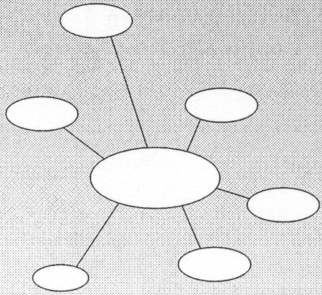
Tic-tac-toe, also known as Think-tac-toe, is a differentiation tool that offers a collection of activities from which students can choose to do to demonstrate their understanding. It is presented in the form of a nine square grid (similar to noughts and crosses) and students may be expected to complete from one to “three in a row”. The activities vary in content, process, and product and can be tailored to address different levels of student readiness, interests, and learning styles. The centre square may be left open for the student to select an activity of their own. Tic-tac-toe activities may be given to every student in the class, higher ability students for extension activities, or lower students for review and practice. Involvement in this strategy encourages independent learning. Teachers should check in with students periodically and require students to keep a log of their progress. In place of lengthy activities, the tic-tac-toe board may also be used with shorter, open-ended questions posed at varying levels of Blooms Taxonomy. *(see template in Appendix 3)*

**Placemat:**

The placemat is drawn on a large sheet of paper. The page is divided so that each group member has a section to write in with a square or circle in the middle to record the group response. Students are given an issue, topic or question to consider and they begin the process by considering their responses and ideas. Responses are recorded in their section of the placemat. Students share their perspectives and an agreed team response is recorded in the middle of the sheet. Possible follow-up activities could include all class members walking around the classroom, considering the responses given by different groups and how they varied from their own.

**Sunshine wheel or Spider Diagram:**

The sunshine wheel or spider diagram is used to brainstorm ideas in groups. The central topic is written into the middle and then the arms or circles on the outside are used to record student responses. They could be emotions associated with a word, components that make up an object or thing, adjectives to describe an object. Also useful for productive writing exercise to brainstorm vocabulary needed for writing task.



Depending on the developmental level of students, teachers can easily adapt this tool to make it more challenging and extend thinking in a particular direction. Teaching this tool is also a possible beginning step in introducing students to the process of mind mapping.

**A to Z:**

In groups, students brainstorm and research words and terminology associated with a topic that begin with the different letters of the alphabet. Answers are recorded on a preprepared sheet next to the relevant letter. Depending on the developmental level of students, teachers may wish to extend the task by requiring students to find a greater number of words or by challenging them to think outside of the square by listing adjectives or synonyms. Dictionaries and other reference materials can be consulted for the activity. Teachers may adapt this strategy to encourage the drawing of diagrams and pictures next to the relevant letter. Students need to be able to explain the meaning and relevance of any word placed on their sheet.

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| --- |
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## Four corners:

Four corners is a strategy for developing students' collaborative skills, encourage reflection and for developing empathy for other peoples’ points of view. The corners of the classroom represent strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Students reflect on their response to an issue, statement or questions and which of the corners best captures their perspective and opinion. Students move to the relevant corner and pair up with another student in that corner to discuss their perspective on the issue. Students can also be paired with a student from the opposite perspective to discuss the issue with their partner.

## Three step interview:

Students are encouraged to interview class members, share their thinking and ask questions on an interview topic. Students are divided into teams of three and are assigned a role as an interviewer, reporter or interviewee. The roles rotate after each interview. At the completion of a unit of work students can use this process to share and learn more about each other’s topics. Students might, for example, interview each other about their thoughts on a book they have just read.

## Role play and drama:

Role play and drama can be a positive way for students to work collaboratively to research and express their ideas. Role-playing scenarios and strategies, for example, can help students develop collaborative skills and deeper understanding.

**Hot Seating:**

A non-didactic way of the teacher giving information to the class, without giving up the stoplight!

Best done with desks cleared and class sitting in horseshoe around the *hot seat.* Teacher anounces that she will play a character and that she will be this character only when sitting in the *hot seat.* (A small piece of costume – bag or scarf – helps everyone distinguish between the teacher being in and out of role.) The reason for portraying the character is firstly explained. (eg looking at character from play / novel) Write up precise learning objectives.

Ground rules established – no comments on students’ questions or teacher’s answers except by asking another question.

The teacher sits and takes questions in role, providing answers which invite further questions.

Variations:

Students can research and prepare questions beforehand.

Answers can be recorded.

Individual students can take the *hot seat*, especially after research, perhaps as homework.

Group Hot Seat: students work in small groups to prepare the character. The group puts forward a ‘front’ person with the others sitting behind as ‘alter egos’ ready to be consulted.

Objects rather than human characters can be hot seated – especially good for languages.

‘In conversation with...’

Students can be set research tasks as a result of the Hot Seat interview.

Court of Law scenario: cross-questioning to find out if character was guilty or not guilty?

**Buzz Groups:**

Prepare one of two questions on the subject to give each group. Divide the members into small clusters of four to six. A leader is chosen to record and report pertinent ideas discussed.

**Rainbow groups:**

A way of ensuring that pupils are regrouped and learn to work with a range of others. After small groups have discussed together, pupils are given a number or colour. Pupils with the same number or colour join up, making groups comprising representatives of each original group. In their new group pupils take turns to report back on their group’s work and perhaps begin to work on a new, combined task.

**Jigsaw:**

The advantage of a ‘jigsaw’ is that it offers a structure for group work, and promotes a range of speaking and listening. This is a four-stage process involving home groups and expert groups:

*Home groups*

The teacher divides the whole class into small groups (commonly four pupils per group). These are teacher-initiated in order to make each group reflect the balance of the whole class – gender, ability, attitude. Each group is given a common task. Handouts are employed in order to set the task. Reading material is kept to a manageable length and complexity. If the home groups are of four, then there are four questions or tasks within the main task – one for each member of the group. Questions or tasks are allocated within each group, through negotiation between the pupils.

*Expert groups*

All the pupils who have selected a particular question or task regroup and work together on what is now a common problem and outcome. By the time this stage of the section is completed, each has become an expert on this matter, through discussion and collaboration with the other ‘experts’.

*Return home*

Original groups reform. Dissemination begins. The pupils know that there will be a follow-up task requiring understanding of all four questions or sets of information, not just their own speciality. All the pieces of the jigsaw have to fit together.

*Final task*

The home groups are set a final task. This could be a group outcome, or an individual task. The crucial element is to ensure that pupils have to draw on the combined ‘wisdom’ of the home group in order to complete it successfully.

**Spokesperson:**

Each group appoints a spokesperson. The risks of repetition can be avoided if:

■ one group gives a full feedback, and others offer additional points only if they have not been covered

■ each group is asked in turn to offer one new point until every group ‘passes’

■ groups are asked to summarise their findings on A3 sheets.

***LEARNING PYRAMID: AVERAGE RETENTION RATE***

**Differentiating Products**

The knowledge, understandings and skills that the product must incorporate need to be clear. The assignment should make clear to students what knowledge, understanding and skills they must include in their work, and the stages, processes and work habits they should demonstrate as they work. Often a requirement of the curriculum, but can be used to apply the same ideas and skills.

* Identify what students must know, understand and be able to do as a result of the unit.
* Identify one or more formats for the product.
* Determine expectations for quality in content, process and product.
* Decide on scaffolding you may need to build in order to promote success: brainstorming, developing criteria for success, time lines, goal setting, critiquing and revising/editing.
* Differentiate version of the assignment based on student readiness, interest and learning profile.
* Support your students’ use of varied modes of expression, materials and technologies.
* Give students choices.

**Possible Products**

* Design a webpage
* Develop a solution to a community problem
* Create a public service announcement
* Write a book
* Design a game
* Produce a travel guide
* Generate and circulate a petition
* Write a series of letters
* Present a mime
* Lead a symposium
* Conduct a series of interviews
* Develop a collection
* Submit writings to a journal, magazine or newspaper
* Interpret through multimedia
* Design a structure
* Collect and analyse information
* Plan a journey
* Make a woodcut / painting / model
* Write letter to the editor
* Design political cartoons
* Formulate and defend a theory
* Conduct a training session
* Design and teach a class
* Do a demonstration
* Present a news report
* Write new code of conduct for school
* Create authentic recipes
* Choreograph a dance
* Present a mock trial
* Compile and annotate a set of Internet resources
* Design a new product
* Write a song
* Create a subject dictionary
* Make and carry out a plan
* Write a musical
* Develop a museum exhibit
* Be a mentor
* Write or produce a play
* Compile a newspaper
* Write a biography
* Present a photo-essay
* Hold a press conference
* Develop and use a questionnaire
* Conduct a debate
* Made a video documentary
* Create a series of illustrations
* Write a poem
* Develop an advertising campaign
* Compile a booklet or brochure
* Draw up a set of blueprints
* Present a radio programme
* Do a puppet show
* Create a series of wall hangings
* Design and make costumes
* Generate charts or diagrams to explain ideas
* Present an interior monologue

**Appendix One**

Teacher checklist for group work:

* Students understand the task goals.
* Students understand what’s expected of individuals to make the group work well.
* The task matches the goals (leads students to what they should know, understand and be able to do.)
* Most students should find the task interesting.
* The task requires an important contribution from each group member based on the student’s skills and interests.
* The task is likely to be demanding of the group and its members.
* The task requires genuine collaboration to achieve shared understanding.
* Time lines are brisk (but not too rigid).
* Individuals are accountable for their own understanding of the task.
* There’s a ‘way out’ for students who are not succeeding with the group.
* There is opportunity for teacher or peer coaching and in-process quality checks.
* Students understand what to do next after they complete their work at a high level of quality.

**Appendix Two**

* Learning Profile Questionnaire: How do you like to learn?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Yes | No |
| 1 | I study best when it is quiet |  |  |
| 2 | I am able to ignore the noise of other people talking while I am working |  |  |
| 3 | I like to work at a table or desk |  |  |
| 4 | I like to work on the floor |  |  |
| 5 | I work hard for myself |  |  |
| 6 | I work hard for my parents or teacher |  |  |
| 7 | I will work on an assignment until it is completed no matter what |  |  |
| 8 | Sometimes I get frustrated with my work and do not finish it |  |  |
| 9 | When my teacher gives an assignment I like to have exact steps on how to complete it |  |  |
| 10 | When my teacher gives an assignment, I like to create my own steps on how to complete it |  |  |
| 11 | I like to work by myself |  |  |
| 12 | I like to work in pairs or in groups |  |  |
| 13 | I like to have an unlimited amount of time to work on an assignment |  |  |
| 14 | I like to have a certain amount of time to work on an assignment |  |  |
| 15 | I like to learn by moving and doing |  |  |
| 16 | I like to learn while sitting at my desk |  |  |

**Appendix Three**

**Choice Board Activity (Think-tac-toe) examples**

**Language/Level: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Unit/Theme: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Verbal/Linguistic**  • Write instructions  • Keep a personal journal  • Create a poem  • Create TV ads  • Read stories to others  • Retell in your own words  • Teach concept  mapping  • Create crossword  puzzle | **Logical/Mathematical**  • Create a time line  • Compare/contrast  ideas  • Create an outline for a  story  • Design a map  • Decipher codes  • Create patterns  • Design a game to show... | **Visual/Spatial**  • Create a poster  • Draw a map  • Create visual diagrams  • Draw from different  perspectives  • Create a comic strip  • Graph results of a survey |
| **Interpersonal**  • Tell stories  • Teach a cooperative  game  • Role play a situation  • Discuss and come to a  conclusion  • Survey or interview  others | Free  Choice | **Body Kinesthetic**  • Make up a cooperative  game  • Practice physical  exercise  • Conduct hands-on  experiments  • Construct a model or  Representation |
| **Musical Rhythmic**  • Create raps  • Play musical instruments  • Write to music  • Teach dance steps  • Make up sounds and  sound effects  • Write a jingle  • Create rhymes that... | **Naturalist**  • Collect and categorize  data, materials, or ideas  • Discover or experiment  • Take a field trip  • Study means of survival  • Adapt materials to a  new use  • Label and classify | **Intrapersonal**  • Keep a personal journal  • Write about personal  experiences  • Think about and plan…  • Review or visualize  • How would it feel to…  • Imagine and write about the future |

(Directions to students: Choose activities in a tic-tac-toe design. When you have

completed the activities in a row–horizontally, vertically, or diagonally–you may decide to be finished. Or you may decide to keep going and complete more activities.)

Centre square left for student’s own activity/question/ idea.

**Resources:**

<http://daretodifferentiate.wikispaces.com/Choice+Boards> (templates for differentiated activities)

[](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0439650917/ref=ox_sc_act_image_1?ie=UTF8&m=AHRB2OK2Q2YCL)

[Differentiation in Action: A Complete Resource with Research-Supported Strategies to Help You Plan and Organize Differentiated Instruction—](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0439650917/ref=ox_sc_act_title_1?ie=UTF8&m=AHRB2OK2Q2YCL) David A. Sousa;

[](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/1899836764/ref=ox_sc_act_image_2?ie=UTF8&m=A396YYT4ENRD2M)

[Teacher's Toolkit: Raise Classroom Achievement with Strategies for Every Learner](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/1899836764/ref=ox_sc_act_title_2?ie=UTF8&m=A396YYT4ENRD2M) - Paul Ginnis; **Paperback**

[](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/013119500X/ref=ox_sc_act_image_3?ie=UTF8&m=AHRB2OK2Q2YCL)

[How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms (Merrill Education/ASCD College Textbooks)](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/013119500X/ref=ox_sc_act_title_3?ie=UTF8&m=AHRB2OK2Q2YCL) - Carol Ann Tomlinson; **Paperback**

<http://epltt.coe.uga.edu/index.php?title=Bloom%27s_Taxonomy>

Blooms Taxonomy: information on the different levels of thinking and questioning levels

also: check out Laura Davis Blooms Taxonomy Made Easy: [http://www.slideshare.net/LauraDavis/blooms-taxonomy-made-easy?utm\_source=slideshow02&utm\_medium=ssemail&utm\_campaign=share\_slideshow\_loggedout#](http://www.slideshare.net/LauraDavis/blooms-taxonomy-made-easy?utm_source=slideshow02&utm_medium=ssemail&utm_campaign=share_slideshow_loggedout)