

Princeton Public Schools
Office of Curriculum and Instruction

**Our schools are places of care where every child is known, every culture valued,
and where kindness and courage are modeled.**

Differentiated Instruction

What is Differentiated Instruction?

Differentiated Instruction is responsive teaching. It is a research-based, high impact teaching practice that recognizes and responds to the many ways learners can vary, including ability, attitude, interest, knowledge base, skill level, experiential background, and culture.

Differentiated Instruction requires teachers to intentionally seek to know who their students are and how they learn best. Based on this knowledge, teachers tailor instruction to optimize understanding. Teachers can differentiate through content, process, and/or product according to students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. When they do so, instruction is more successful and effective.

Why is it significant?

Differentiated Instruction increases learning for all students at every level and from every background. It fosters students' self-confidence, helps students make personal connections, promotes engagement in learning, and encourages students to be advocates for and assessors of their own learning. At its essence, Differentiated Instruction is an appreciation for and a focus on each individual student's interests, knowledge, and talents. It acknowledges that students' needs can vary physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially. A classroom where differentiation is the norm is an exciting, active, student-centered classroom where every child feels seen, heard, and respected. It is a place where every child can succeed and is expected to do so. Because every child is known, it can be a joyous place to learn.

How is it done?

To differentiate instruction, a teacher needs to offer a reasonable range of approaches to provide multiple pathways for student success. Differentiated Instruction does not mean "all things for all students" or designing a different lesson plan for each student in a class. Instead, by providing different ways for all students to access the same essential knowledge, skills, and understandings, it recognizes that one size does not fit all when it comes to learning. When planning a lesson or unit, a teacher can differentiate content (what is taught), process (how it is taught), and/or product (how students demonstrate understanding).

Among the strategies that highly effective teachers use are:

- Providing student choice
- Using flexible grouping
- Creating learning/interest stations
- Using a workshop approach (Readers/Writers Workshop)
- Conducting frequent ongoing assessment, formal and informal
- Assessing students in multiple ways
- Using pre-assessments to determine students' starting points
- Planning a variety of instructional tasks and experiences
- Considering Multiple Intelligences when planning
- Compacting the curriculum
- Offering a range of challenging assignments

How can I learn more?

Here are some references on this topic.

Tomlinson, Carol Ann and McTighe, Jay. Integrating Differentiated Instruction + Understanding by Design. ASCD. Virginia, 2006.

Tomlinson, Carol Ann. How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms, 3rd edition. ASCD, Virginia, 2017.

From the Organized Classroom website:

<https://organizedclassroom.com/7-myths-differentiated-instruction>

From the Edutopia website:

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/differentiated-instruction-resources>

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