**Differentiation**

**Definition**

An approach to teaching in which the teacher provides learning opportunities tailored to meet the educational needs of individual students at all levels.

“Differentiation is a sequence of common sense decisions made by teachers with a student-first orientation. It’s making sure each students learn what he or she should learn by establishing clear goals, assessing persistently to see where each student is relative to the goals, and adjusting instruction based on assessment information . . . so that each student can learn as much as possible as efficiently as possible.” (Carol Ann Tomlinson, 2010)

**Key Principles for Differentiation**

* Learning Experience – based on diagnosis of student readiness, interest and/or learning profile
* Content, Activities and Products – developed in response to the varying needs of varied learners
* Teaching and Learning – focused on key concepts, understandings and skills
* All Students Participate – in “respectful” and engaging work
* Teacher and Students – work together to ensure continual engagement and challenge for each learner
* The Teacher – coordinates use of time, space and activities
* Flexible Grouping – ensures consistently fluid working arrangements, including whole class learning, pairs, triads and quads, student-selected groups, teacher-selected groups, and random groups
* Time Use – flexible in response to student needs
* Management Strategies – a variety of strategies used to target student needs such as learning centers, interest centers, compacting, contract, independent study, collegial partnerships, tiered assignments, learning buddies, etc.
* Individual and Group Criteria – clearly established that provide guidance toward success
* Students Are Assessed – in a variety of ways appropriate to demonstrate their own thought and growth

Instruction can be differentiated in many ways, but they will all boil down to one or more of the following, first popularized by Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson at the University of Virginia:

* **Content.** The content is your legally mandated curriculum. It's what students are supposed to learn.
* **Process.** Process means the way in which your students learn the content.
* **Product.** Product refers to the way in which your students prove they learned the content.
* **Affect.** Affect concerns the socio emotional factors that influence learning. We might need to adjust something in order for students to feel safe and invited.
* **Learning environment.** The learning environment is the physical setup of the learning situation, such as whether a class is self-contained, inclusive, small, large, or multiage.

**Gifted & Talented**

* Need to move through the curriculum faster and in more depth
* Are more able to retain information the faster it is delivered
* Find abstract and complex content more academically rewarding
* Engage in a ‘searching’ behavior to find answers, develop understanding
* Often aimed at generating abstract rules for application later

**Differentiating Curriculum for The Gifted**

* Encourage independent thinking
* Encourage abstract and complex thought
* Be accepting of debate, discussion and questions
* Facilitate discussion
* Use open ended projects
* Group activities

**Techniques**

* Use divergent questioning to encourage higher order thinking skills
* Give students time to think about questions asked
* Pause for thought
* Think-pair-share
* Who wants to be a millionaire
* Probe – follow up answer to clarify understanding or develop ideas
* For higher order questioning – don’t reply with ‘that’s correct’
* Be a Devil’s Advocate

Peter Lydon, 2010