

**Quality Educational Programs, Inc.**

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# **Introduction to Differentiation: Applying Learner-Centered Instruction**

**A Distance Learning Graduate Course**

**Course Proposal**

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Differentiated classrooms feel right to students who learn in different ways and at different rates and who bring to school different talents and interests. More significantly, such classrooms work better for a full range of students than do one-size-fits-all settings. Teachers in differentiated classrooms are more in touch with their students and approach teaching more as an art than as a mechanical exercise.

Carol Ann Tomlinson  
*The Differentiated Classroom:  
Responding to the Needs of All Learners*

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**Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson**

**.\*.**

**The University of Virginia**

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**.\*.**

**Callanan Middle School, Des Moines**

**Parkview Middle School, Ankeny, Iowa**

**Norwalk High School, Norwalk, Iowa**

**Procter Elementary School, Independence, Missouri**

**William Southern Elementary School, Independence, Missouri**

**East Elementary and Middle School, Kansas City, Missouri**

**Hongwangi Mission School, Honolulu, Hawaii**

**Wahiawa Middle School, Wahiawa, Hawaii**

**Elsinore High School, Wildomar, California**

**Ronald Reagan Elementary School, Wildomar, California**

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## Rationale

Some may think that differentiating instruction is a recently hatched idea from whatever it is that educational “innovations” begin. Actually, it is a natural outgrowth of a burgeoning understanding of the ways children learn. A brief background on the evolution of teaching and learning over recent decades is useful for understanding what we now call “differentiated instruction.”

Think back to 75 or 100 years ago. Now, fast-forward to today. In many ways, those years reflect more change for humans than all the years before in recorded history. Think about farming 100 years ago—and today. Think about the practice of medicine 100 years ago—and today. Imagine transportation 100 years ago—and today. Consider the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s changes in engineering, clothing, and communications. The transformation is dizzying! While most of us succumb to occasional nostalgia for the “good old days,” few of us would opt for yesterday’s physicians, communication systems, or fashion.

Although we think of school as a static enterprise, the field of education has grown and changed, too. Today we understand many things about teaching and learning that we had no way of knowing a century, or even a few decades, ago. Some of these insights stem from psychology and the science of the brain. Others come from continuing observation in classrooms. Whatever their genesis, these educational changes are every bit as revolutionary as moving from the pencil to the typewriter to the personal computer.

Despite [this] compelling new knowledge, classrooms have changed little over the past 100 years. We still assume that a child of a given age is enough like all other children of the same age that he or she should traverse the same curriculum in the same fashion with all other students of that age. Further, schools act as though all children should finish classroom tasks as near to the same moment as possible. A school year should be the same length for all learners. To this end, schools generally adopt a single textbook; give students a single test at the end of the chapter, and another test at the end of designated marking periods. Teachers use the same grading system for all children of a given age and grade, whatever their starting point at the beginning of the year.

The curriculum is typically based on goals that involve having children accumulate and retain a variety of facts and skills that are far removed from any meaningful context. Drill-and-practice worksheets are the chief educational technology, and teachers tell students things they must then tell back, a legacy of behaviorism rooted firmly in the 1930’s. Teachers still largely “run” classes, and they are likely to work harder and more actively than students much of the time.

To the degree that we focus on developing intelligence in schools, educators seem convinced that only narrow, analytical slices of verbal and computational intelligence are important. This is almost the same as nearly a century ago when the public believed that a bit of reading, writing, and computation would serve learners well in an adulthood

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dominated by assembly line and agrarian jobs. Schools still prepare children for tests more than life. . .

Many observers have written wisely and well about why schools seem so resistant to change . . . The point here is while the rest of the world seized upon progress over the last century, the *practice* of education remained static. To overcome this, we need to begin our investigation of how to differentiated instruction for a diverse student population with some important assumptions.

- Students differ in experience, readiness, interest, intelligences, language, culture, gender, and mode of learning. As one elementary teacher noted, “Children already come to us differentiated. It just makes sense that we would differentiate our instruction in response to them.
- To maximize the potential in each learner, educators need to meet each child at his or her starting point and ensure substantial growth during each school term.
- Classrooms that ignore student differences are unlikely to maximize potential in any student who differs significantly from the “norm.” This is an issue even in “homogeneous” classrooms where student variance is inevitably great.
- To ensure maximum student growth, teachers need to make modifications for students rather than assume students must modify themselves to fit the curriculum. In fact, children do not know how to differentiate their own curriculum successfully.
- Best practice education should be the starting point for differentiation. It makes little sense to modify practices that defy the best understanding of teaching and learning. As noted educator Seymour Sarason reminds us, any classroom efforts that aren’t powered by an understanding of what keeps children eagerly pursuing knowledge are doomed to fail.
- Classrooms grounded in best-practice education, and modified to be responsive to student differences, benefit virtually all students. Differentiation addresses the needs of struggling and advanced learners. It addresses the needs of students for whom English is a second language and students who have strong learning style preferences. It addresses gender differences and cultural differences. It pays homage to the truth that we are not born to become replica of one another.

As Howard Garner suggests, even if we could figure out how to make everyone a brilliant violinist, an orchestra also needs top-quality musicians who play woodwinds, brass, percussion, and strings. Differentiation is about high-quality performance for all individuals and giving students the opportunity to develop their particular strengths. (Excerpted from *The Differentiated Classroom* by Carol Ann Tomlinson)

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## Video Instructor

### Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson

Much of the video for this course was taped at a three day Differentiated Instruction Best Practices Institute held on the campus of the University of Virginia and conducted by Dr. Carol Ann Tomlinson. Part of participants learning experience in this course will be as virtual attendees to this conference taught by one of the foremost experts in differentiated instruction.

Carol Ann Tomlinson's career as an educator includes 21 years as a public school teacher, including 12 years as a program administrator of special services for struggling and advanced learners. She was Virginia's Teacher of the Year in 1974. More recently, she has been a faculty member at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, where she is currently Professor of Educational Leadership, Foundations and Policy. Also at U.Va., she is Co-Director of the University's Institutes on Academic Diversity. Dr. Tomlinson was named Outstanding Professor at Curry School of Education in 2004. Special interests throughout her career have included curriculum and instruction for struggling learners and advanced learners, effective instruction in heterogeneous settings, and encouraging creative and critical thinking in the classroom.

Dr. Tomlinson is a reviewer for eight journals and a section editor for one. She is author of over 100 articles, book chapters, books, and other professional development materials. For ASCD, she has authored *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed Ability Classrooms*, *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*, *Providing Leadership for Differentiated Schools and Classrooms*, the facilitator's guide for the video staff development sets called *Differentiating Instruction*, and *At Work in the Differentiated Classroom*, as well as a professional inquiry kit on differentiation and most recently co-authored a book with Jay McTighe titled *Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design: Connected Content and Kids*. For Corwin Press, she is co-author of *The Parallel Curriculum Model: A Design to Develop High Potential and Challenge High Ability Learners*. Dr. Tomlinson's books on differentiation have been translated into eight languages. She works throughout the U.S. and abroad with teachers whose goal is to develop more responsive heterogeneous classrooms.

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# Course Title

Introduction to Differentiation:  
Applying Learner-Centered Instruction

## Course Description

"Introduction to Differentiation: Applying Learner-Centered Instruction" is a three semester (five quarter) hour graduate course designed to give K-12 teachers an overview of the theory and research behind differentiated instruction and present them with classroom instructional strategies designed to respond to the varying needs of students. Participants will engage in various learning activities through which they will learn and implement teaching strategies designed to individualize learning activities to take advantage of each student's strengths, interests, and readiness.

In addition, participants learn about assessment approaches that support differentiated instructional practices. Teacher will also demonstrate proficiency in teaching the same content to all students but in ways that engage them at learning levels appropriate to their abilities.

## Course Goals

The goals of this course are to have participants develop an understanding of the underpinnings, parameters, and principles of differentiation; and to guide participants in exploring the model of differentiation through the examination of the model's non-negotiable characteristics and through the application of differentiated instructional and assessment strategies in their own classrooms.

## Course Outline

In the following outline, the term "Course of Study" refers to a study plan that includes required reading, video viewing, worksheets, application assignments and progress reports.

### Session #1: Differentiation: An Introduction

Objective: To have participants understand the scope and sequence of this course, to expose them to key concepts, to have them preview course vid-

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eos and lessons, and to have them set a course goal.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and setting of a learning goal for the course.

Session #2: What is Defensible Differentiation?

Objectives: To have participants develop an understanding differentiation as a responsive rather than one-size-fits-all approach to instruction; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

Session #3: The Elements of Differentiation

Objectives: To have participants develop an understanding of the ways teachers can differentiated through content, process, product, and environment; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Supplementary reading and activities; video viewing or research activity; and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

Session #4: Teacher/Student Relationships and Differentiation

Objectives: To have participants develop an understanding of critical role relationships play and how successful teaching begins with making a connection with students; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

Session #5: Creating the Proper Mindset for Differentiation

Objectives: To have participants develop an understanding that when they believe their studnets are competent and reliable, they create learning en-

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vironments that facilitate students' academic success; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

#### Session #6: The Non-Negotiables of Differentiation

Objectives: To have participants develop an understanding what classroom practices do and do not qualify as differentiation; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

#### Session #7: What Differentiation Is and Is Not: Case Studies

Objectives: To have participants analyze case studies to determine whether or not they qualify as effective differentiated instructional approaches; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

#### Session #8: Differentiation and a Quality Curriculum

Objectives: To have participants develop an understanding how to plan lessons and learning activities based on what students should know, understand, and be able to do; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

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## Session #9: Differentiating with Grouping Strategies

Objectives: To have participants develop and understand the use of grouping students of like ability to work on assignments of varying complexity on the same subject; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

## Session #10: Introduction to Differentiated Assessment

Objectives: To have participants develop an understanding pre-assessment, concurrent assessment and post-assessment practices and how they related to effective instruction; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Supplementary reading and activities; video viewing or research activity; and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

## Session #11: Applying Differentiation: Anchor Activities and Cubing

Objectives: Consultant Susan Bergman shows how to differentiate using cubing, anchor activities and puzzles; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Supplementary reading and activities; video viewing or research activity; and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

## Session #12: Applying Differentiation: Using Primary Sources

Objectives: With this presentation by Rhonda Clevenson, participants will learn how to enrich their lessons with the use of the primary sources including the Library of Congress; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the crea-

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tion and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

### Session #13: Applying Differentiation: Digital Storytelling

Objectives: With this presentation by Dr. Sara Kajder, participants will learn how to engage students in various subject areas with the use of digital storytelling techniques; to have participants create, implement, and evaluate a lesson or unit based either on the techniques demonstrated in the video or strategies suggested in the course text and readings.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of video, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

### Session #14: Applying Differentiation: Classroom Application

Objectives: To have participants review the material presented in the previous three lessons and to select one technique demonstrated and design a lesson or activity based on it; to have participants implement their lesson or activity and evaluate its effectiveness.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, viewing of videos, course of study supplementary reading and activities, and the creation and evaluation of a lesson or unit.

### Session #15: Participant Reflection and Planning for Future Use of Course Concepts

Objectives: To have participants reflect on their course experience and on insights gained in the course; to have participants identify those course concepts that most apply to their teaching situations; to have participants develop a plan for the future use of the knowledge and skills gained in this course.

Assignments and Activities: Required reading in course text, review of videos and assignments, discussions with study team, and the creation of a plan for the future use of the knowledge and skills gain in this course.

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## Participant Characteristics

This course is designed for teachers and administrators in grades kindergarten through twelve. Participants will have a bachelor's degree and a valid teacher credential (if applicable). There are no other prerequisites.

## Instructional Materials

Instructional materials for this course include:

a.) Basic text:

Tomlinson, Carol Ann (1999) *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. Arlington, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

b.) Course Media (All videos produced in 2008):

Video: Differentiation: An Introduction

Video: What is Defensible Differentiation?

Video: The Elements of Differentiation

Video: Teacher/Student Relationships and Differentiation

Video: Creating the Proper Mindset for Differentiation

Video: The Non-Negotiables of Differentiation

Video: Differentiation in the Classroom: Case Studies

Video: Differentiation and a Quality Curriculum

Video: Differentiating with Grouping Strategies

Video: Introduction to Differentiated Assessment

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Video: Applying Differentiation: Anchor Activities and Cubing

Video: Applying Differentiation: Using Primary Sources

Video: Applying Differentiation: Digital Storytelling

c.) Course of Study.

This book contains supplemental articles, summaries of course content, pre-video viewing activities, discussion questions, group activities, individual activities, worksheets, classroom application assignments, and learning reports.

d.) Bibliography.

e) Recommended Reading.

f) Internet Resources.

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## Learning Activities

1. For each of the fifteen (15) sections of this course, participants will complete the following activities:

- a.) Read the assigned chapters of the course text.
- b.) Read supplemental articles in the course of study book.
- c.) Participate in a study/preparation activity with a colleague.

NOTE: While benefits are greatest when participants take this course as a part of a study team, participants can successfully complete course requirements by working with a friend or colleague who is not enrolled in the course; or, by reflecting upon the material and considering how they might use it in their teaching situations.

- d.) View instructional videos.
- e.) Discuss (see above note) course material in terms of participants' own students.
- f.) Record summary of discussion activities in progress report
- g.) Design, implement, and evaluate an application of course content in their teaching situation.

NOTE: If participants are taking this course during the summer or at a time when they do not have access to a classroom, they follow these directions with respect to classroom application projects.

- 1. If they choose to design a classroom lesson or activity for their project, they design it for a class that they have had in the past.
- 2. Instead of implementing their activity in a classroom, they share their activity design with a colleague and ask for their input.
- 3. Based on the input received from their colleagues, they make whatever changes they feel are appropriate to improve their activity design.

- h.) Summarize classroom application design, application experience, and evaluation in progress report.

2. Submit a final paper.

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## Course Outcomes

As a result of their work in this course, participants will be able to:

- 1.) Demonstrate the use of differentiated instructional techniques to create lessons that engage students in learning.
- 2.) Demonstrate proficiency in analyzing and evaluating differentiated lessons taught by other teachers.
- 3.) Demonstrate proficiency in assessing their students' learning styles and preferences.
- 4.) Develop, implement, and evaluate various differentiated instructional strategies designed to maximize learning.
- 5.) Develop a systematic plan to achieve an instructional goal set at the beginning of the course.
- 6.) Develop and describe an action plan to implement and evaluate their systematic plan.
- 7.) Evaluate and reflect upon their course experience and plan for the future use of knowledge and skills gained in this course.

## Progress Reporting and Assessment

Participant achievement will be measured by a combination of the following:

- A. An evaluation of participant's 15 progress reports. (Outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 4.)

Each progress report will be evaluated for:

- completeness and quality of responses.
- accuracy of information.
- appropriateness of classroom application.
- quality of reflection.

- B. An evaluation of participant's professional paper. (Outcomes 5, 6, and 7.)

The professional paper will be evaluated for:

- inclusion of required components.
- synthesis and analysis of course concepts.
- presentation in an organized, professional manner.

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## Internet Resources

### Differentiated Instruction Strategies

<http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/DE/PD/instr/instrsk.html>

Includes information on concept maps, graphic organizers, Jigsaw, learning contracts, lit circles, and other strategies.

<http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/readquest/strat/>

Includes information on carousel brainstorming, clock buddies, column notes, KWL revised, word maps and other strategies.

<http://www.englishcompanion.com>

Includes information on a variety of graphic organizers, reciprocal teaching, using visual aids to improve instruction and other strategies.

### Differentiated Instruction Resources

Enhance Learning with Technology

<http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/differentiatingstrategies.html>

Provides a wealth of information about differentiation with a specific focus on strategies for differentiated instruction. Lots of links to other sites, both on differentiating instruction and other related topics such as brain biology, learning styles, constructivism, sample lesson plans, project base learning, and much more.

What Is Differentiated Learning?

[http://www.scusd.edu/gate\\_ext\\_learning/differentiated.htm](http://www.scusd.edu/gate_ext_learning/differentiated.htm)

A brief, focused definition of differentiated learning from the Sacramento City Unified School District.

How to Differentiate Instruction

<http://www.teach-nology.com/tutorials/teaching/differentiate/planning/>

A commercial site from Teach-Nology with things to sell, it still has good information with useful links to topics such as cooperative learning, lesson plans, inquiry based learning and so forth.

Teaching in a Mixed Ability Classroom

<http://www.weac.org/kids/1998-99/march99/differ.htm>

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An article by Mary Ann Hesse that provides a basis and rationale for differentiating instruction and covers a lot of useful information. Includes a bibliography with links.

#### Differentiated Instruction

<http://www.cast.org/ncac/DifferentiatedInstruction2876.cfm>

A detailed guide to differentiating instruction from the National Center on Assessing the General Curriculum, this site provides a lot of good information. Includes an extensive annotated bibliography with links to other useful sites.

#### Differentiated Instruction Hot List

[http://www.frstd.k12.nj.us/rfmslibrarylab/di/differentiated\\_instruction.htm](http://www.frstd.k12.nj.us/rfmslibrarylab/di/differentiated_instruction.htm)

Provides a wide variety of links to topics that are associated with differentiated instruction, including learning styles, multiple intelligences, critical and creative thinking, layered curriculum, assessment, and many others.

#### Differentiating Instruction for Advanced Learners in the Mixed-Ability Middle School Classroom. ERIC Digest E536.

<http://eric.ed.gov>

An ERIC Digest report on differentiating instruction at the middle school level, based on Tomlinson's work. Offers a rationale for differentiating and research support for the strategy.

#### Preparing Teachers for Differentiated Instructions

<http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.8835d3e3fbb1b0cddeb3ffdb62108a0c/>

An Educational Leadership article by John H. Holloway, it discusses the key elements of putting differentiated instruction into practice, and focuses on barriers to doing this and how they can be overcome.

#### Mapping a Route Toward Differentiated Instruction

<http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.fdd976cd7e54fccddeb3ffdb62108a0c/>

An Educational Leadership article by Carol Ann Tomlinson, it provides a detailed look at two classrooms and the methods used for instruction, then offers alternate approaches that are more appropriate and effective for differentiation.

#### From Theory to Practice: The Challenges of Heterogeneous Classrooms

<http://www.weac.org/kids/1998-99/march99/differ2.htm>

An article that discusses clustering as a strategy for differentiating the heterogeneous classroom. Susan Winebrenner is cited as a resource.

#### What is Differentiated Instruction?

<http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.3adeebc6736780dddeb3ffdb62108a0c/>

Lesson 1 of a series of lessons from ASCD on differentiating instruction, with many links to related articles and other resources. At the bottom is a link to Lesson 2, so this may become an in-depth study if desired.

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### Accelerated and Enriched Mathematics

<http://search.mcps.k12.md.us/query.html?qp=&qt=accelerated+and+Enriched+Mathematics&qs=&qc=&pw=100%25&ws=0&la=&qm=0&st=1&nh=10&lk=1&rf=0&oq=&rq2=0#skip>

A site dedicated to differentiating math, it has many excellent suggestions and links to other web resources.

### Teaching Mathematics to Gifted Students in a Mixed-Ability Classroom

<http://www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-3778.html>

Provides background about differentiation and specific information about working in the area of math.

### Guidelines to Differentiated Instruction

<http://www.cedu.niu.edu/edu/portfolio/diffclass.htm>

A simple and effective template for thinking about the stages and elements of differentiated instruction.