

Unit 4 content
Know Your Players: Differentiating for ELLs

Assess for Success

Now that you have clearly outlined the objectives of your lessons, you need to consider how you will determine how well students have achieved these goals. Before you look at the actual assessment product, think about your measurement tool. How will students know what your expectations are? As adults, when you are being evaluated for your performance, you want to know the grading criteria, don't you? It's only fair. It's important that you also empower students with clearly defined means of measuring their product. Evaluating rubrics are one way to provide clarity and transparency about how you will be assessing student work. They also help you to maintain consistency; and by clearly outlining what is expected, they set students up for success.

Take a moment to locate the goals that you identified in the last unit; you will need them to design your measuring tool. Part one of this unit's assignment is to design a rubric that will give you and your students a clear definition of how they will be evaluated. This rubric should encompass your learning goals, but be generic enough to allow students to demonstrate their mastery in a variety of ways. In other words, create a rubric that can be applied to a variety of finished products. In the last unit, you were asked to create assessments, or end products, that take into consideration students' varying learning styles, abilities, and specifically ELLs' language classifications. In this unit you will design one rubric that can be applied to a variety of final products. For now, look at part one of this unit's assignment. You are going to create a rubric.

Rubistar <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php?screen=NewRubric>, a website that allows you to design customized rubrics for all purposes, and create a rubric. If you have completed the Testing & Evaluation course then you are already familiar with this resource. For others that prefer to create rubrics through another electronic method (such as *Excel* or a *Word* table), go for it! Just make sure that your rubric measures each of your goals and clearly outlines how your students will be evaluated. It should be clear and uniform, yet generic enough to assess a variety of products. Remember, the key word here is *variety*. The big idea is that there can be, and *should* be multiple paths that students can travel to reach the same destination: your goals. Why multiple paths? The simplified answer is: Not all students learn the same way. And we know this.

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But what does this really mean? Here is an example of a grading rubric for the goals that were provided as an example in the last unit.

Reading - Analyzing Information : Analyzing Text Structures and Text Features				
Teacher Name: Ms. Joseph				
Student Name: _____				
CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Summarization	Student uses only 1-3 sentences to describe clearly what the text is about.	Student uses several sentences to accurately describe what the text is about.	Student summarizes most of the text accurately, but has some slight misunderstanding.	Student has great difficulty summarizing the text.
Analyzes important information	Student expresses all the main points of the text.	The student expresses most of the main points of the text.	The student expresses some of the main points of the text but leaves out significant points.	The student cannot express important information with accuracy.
Analyzes important details	Student highlights several details for each main point.	Student highlights several details for most main points.	Student expresses some of the important details of the text but leaves out significant points.	Student cannot locate details with accuracy.
Relates Graphics to Text	Student accurately explains how each graphic/diagram is related to the text, and accurately determines whether each graphic/diagram agrees with the information in the text.	Student accurately explains how each graphic/diagram is related to the text.	Student accurately explains how some of the diagrams are related to the text.	Student has difficulty relating graphics and diagrams to the text.

Differentiated Instruction Defined

There is lots of talk about *Differentiated Instruction (D.I.)* these days. There seems to be a sense of urgency about making sure that differentiated instruction is “happening” in all of your classrooms. But what is differentiation really all about? Is it just the latest educational jargon or will it play a role in shaping what is considered effective teaching? Read this brief article ***Differentiated Learning*** by Tracy A. Huebner to get a clearer idea of what you currently know about the importance of D.I.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb10/vol67/num05/Differentiated-Learning.aspx>.

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As was summarized in the article, differentiated instruction is about designing goals and learning opportunities that are accessible to students at varying levels of cognitive complexity, background knowledge, and learning preferences. Now let's dig a little deeper. What does this look like? Why is it necessary? And what is realistic within our classrooms today?

PARENT TIP:

Help parents understand what Differentiated Instruction is by sharing this article on Duke University's website, ***What Every Parent Should Know About Differentiated Instruction?*** http://www.dukegiftedletter.com/articles/vol9no1_connex.html.

Differentiated Instruction expert, **Carol Ann Tomlinson** <http://www.ascd.org/professional-development/oscb/faculty/Tomlinson-C.aspx> offers, "differentiating instruction means 'shaking up' what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn" (Tomlinson 2001, p, 1). She argues that the instructional delivery within many classrooms today is unitary. However, content, process, and product (curriculum) Tomlinson explains, must be differentiated to meet the readiness levels (amount of prior knowledge, practice, and/or skill), interests, and learning profiles of all of our students. There's no doubt about it, the challenge of a teacher to keep these three components in mind (for each learner) when designing instruction is complex. It's sort of like being an orchestra conductor, composing and directing a symphony of various musicians and instruments. While this is a dramatically simplified description of D.I., the point is this: Every student in your classroom is as unique as a fingerprint. No two students have the same exact background knowledge or experiences, interests, or learning preferences. So it makes sense that not all students are going to approach learning in the same exact way. If we remain focused on the *learning*, your approach becomes more student-centered rather than teacher-centered. And this is a good thing as it allows you to become facilitators of learning –not one-way deliverers of knowledge. More authentic student engagement and ownership is often the result.

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Let's break down the idea of curriculum (content, process, and product). In it's simplest definition, the three key components of curriculum are:

1. **Content**- taking information in (the what and the how)
2. **Process**- making sense of ideas
3. **Product** - expressing what is learned

Another way to think about curriculum is: Input, Processing, and Output. This is how we learn. First information goes in. Then it is processed. Then it is shared as a product. When you dig deeper, you see how this becomes more complex once you start considering all of the individuals in your classes. It's important to know that Dr. Tomlinson's explanation of (and instructions for) differentiated instruction goes far deeper than you will attempt in this course. You are going to start small. Why, you may ask? Because anyone that has spent real time contemplating differentiated instruction understands that there is a lot to understand! In fact, if attempted all at once, it is easy for teachers to quickly become overwhelmed. But, not starting at all is not an option; you have to start somewhere and we will start small?

At the very least, differentiating instruction means providing various avenues for students to acquire content; make sense of ideas; and develop products that allow each individual to learn effectively. It is the **HOW** that gets hairy. Moreover, one factor that is necessary for DI to happen successfully is dedicating regular time to **plan** and **reflect**. And if there is one thing that most teachers complain about, it is not having enough time. So, you are going to start by introducing and incorporating a little at a time. There is no magic wand or perfect formula to make DI happen instantly and successfully in your classrooms. You can, however, start by making some manageable yet significant choices that will have a powerful impact on each of your students, not just ELLs.

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Know Your Players

In order to make content, process, and product accessible to all of your learners, you have to consider *who* your learners are and *how* each individual best takes information in; makes sense of it; and expresses what they learn. One powerful way to do this is by assessing each student's readiness, interests, and learning preferences. Here are some important components of each:

- **Readiness Level:** Background knowledge; experiences; cognitive complexity (ability level)
- **Interests:** Likes/dislikes; passions; motivations; hobbies
- **Learning Preferences:** Multiple Intelligences; VAK

Once you have assessed “where they are,” in relation to your learning goals, then you respond. This is where choices must be made and this is where it gets layered. Before we move forward into those strategic choices, let's apply what you know about *who* your students are and *how* they learn. You will start by addressing interests and learning preferences.

Interests and Learning Preferences

Think about your own students. Choose four students and jot down what you know about each student's interests, and learning preferences. There are many resources available that provide information about learner profiles that include VAK learning styles and Multiple Intelligences.

Click here: <http://www.businessballs.com/howardgardnermultipleintelligences.htm> if you would like to use some of these elementary and secondary level surveys to find out more about your students. You may choose to use these or other **tools** to find out more about your students' interests and learning profiles, or you can simply use information that you have already gathered about each.

Below is an example of Part 2 of this unit's assignment.

Student:	Interests:	Learning Preferences:
Ex. Sammy	Likes learning about insects and animals	Likes to create things with his hands like puzzles, Legos (kinesthetic) and likes to work with peers (interpersonal).

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Readiness

Great. Now that you have a snapshot of some of your students' interests and learning preferences, think about readiness. There is a lot to consider when it comes to students' readiness. Dr. Tomlinson outlines various layers of student readiness that contribute to how you design your instruction. For the purposes of this course, you are going to focus on students' readiness under the following categories: background knowledge, cognitive complexity, and language.

Background Knowledge

As mentioned earlier, every student is as unique as a fingerprint. A large part of what constitutes their uniqueness is what they have been exposed to, otherwise known as background knowledge. This has huge implications on your instruction. For example, an elementary school teacher is going to introduce a unit on ecosystems of Florida. A student that has grown up in Florida, visited the Everglades, and had conversations with her family about native wildlife and plants are going to be at a different readiness level than a student that just moved from Manhattan and has never seen a live alligator. It is important to know that students' background knowledge is going to change with different topics.

Cognitive Complexity

There are a number of frameworks that outline different levels and layers of cognitive complexity. For the purpose of consistency, refer to Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge.

Attachment: Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge Correlation chart.

Language

Language readiness is of particular concern when designing instruction for ELLs. You understand that language is the vehicle through which we teach our content. It is a means to an end, but oftentimes, it gets in your way. Before you can make informed decisions about how to appropriately design learning opportunities for your English

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learner, you have to find out “where they are.” In Broward County, Language Classification designations are used to describe students’ level of English acquisition. Click the links below to access a chart that describes indicators for each language classification at either the **elementary** or **secondary** level. These indicators give you a better understanding of what kinds of expression is typical for students at each stage of language acquisition.

Think again about your students. Choose three ELLs in your class or your school and find out what their language classification is. This is Part 3 of this unit’s assignment. One way to find students’ language classifications is in Virtual Counselor. If you do not have access to this database, you should also be able to find language classifications within students’ ELLSEP (English Language Learner Student Education Plan) folder. Each student that is active in the ESOL Program has an individual ELLSEP folder that is maintained by the school’s ESOL Coordinator.

Student	Current Language Classification
Ex. Marie Jean Pierre	A2

Students’ proficiency in their First Languages (L1)

It is important to ask questions about your ELLs’ language proficiency skills in their first language. This is often done as part of their programmatic assessment when they register for school. The responses we receive will help inform how we proceed. Here’s why: A student that has strong language skills in their first language will be able to transfer those skills to their new language: English. Students, that do not have strong skills in their first language, however, will be learning these skills for the first time –in a new language. Ask questions like:

- How many years of school did *Student* complete in their home language?
- Were there gaps in his/her academic career?
- Were there any concerns academically in *Student’s* home language?
- What are the literacy skills of *Student* in his/her first language?

The answers to these questions will have a big impact on your approach.

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Recap:

In this unit you created a rubric that gave you and your students a clear definition of how they will be evaluated and you identified students' interests, learning styles, and language readiness. This is a critical piece of the student-centered differentiated instruction. Equipped with important information about *who* your students are and how they learn best, we are able to make informed curriculum decisions.