



FALCON FRIDAY FOCUS

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In
Monroe

Good Morning, MCSD Staff!

Differentiation— it has been a ‘hot topic’ for a while now. But unlike other educational topics, differentiation, is here to stay. Why? Because adjusting your instruction to meet ALL of your student’s need is the right thing to do. Period.

Some of you might be thinking...”There is no way I can plan 30 different lessons for all of the students in my class!” I am not asking you to do that. Actually, differentiation does not equal individualization. That is a myth. Differentiating instruction is doing what's fair and developmentally appropriate for students. It's a collection of best practices strategically employed to maximize students' learning at every turn, including giving them the tools to handle anything that is undifferentiated. It requires us to do different things for different students some, or a lot, of the time. It's whatever works to advance the student. It's highly effective teaching.

Some teachers make the mistake in thinking that multiple groups in class or multiple choices for a final unit project means that they are differentiating. This may or may not be an indicator of differentiation. The important factor is whether those students were grouped, or those project choices were offered, on the basis of specific information the teacher knew about his or her students. (See how important formative assessment is?) If teachers divide students into groups or offer project choices without regard for students' needs, it's called "being creative" or "breaking up routine," not "differentiated instruction." It becomes differentiated practice when teachers use assessment to guide instructional decisions. In an effort to promote such practices, it's completely reasonable for principals to ask teachers, "Tell me how you used assessment to guide an instructional approach this week."

In this edition of the FFF, I included some differentiation resources, reasoning, and processes. Take a few minutes to look over these resources and reflect on how well you are differentiating in your classroom.

Christie Biggerstaff, Instructional Supervisor

*There is NOTHING more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals.
~ Thomas Jefferson*



Differentiation: What is it, and how do I incorporate it into my classroom?

Differentiated instruction, according to Carol Ann Tomlinson is the process of “ensuring that what a student learns, how he or she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he or she has learned is a match for that student’s readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning.” Teachers can differentiate through four ways:

1) **Content:** The content of lessons may be differentiated based on what students already know. The most basic content of a lesson should cover the standards of learning set by the state. Some students in a class may be completely unfamiliar with the concepts in a lesson, some students may have partial mastery of the content - or display mistaken ideas about the content, and some students may show mastery of the content before the lesson begins. The teacher may differentiate the content by designing activities for groups of students that cover different areas of Bloom's Taxonomy.

2) **Process:** This stage of differentiation allows students to learn based either on what method is easiest for them to gain knowledge, or what may challenge them most: some students may prefer to read about a topic and others may prefer to listen or acquire knowledge by manipulating objects associated with the content. Information may be presented in multiple ways by the teacher, and may be based on any available methods or materials. Many teachers use areas of Multiple Intelligences to provide learning opportunities.

3) **Product:** The product is essentially what the student produces at the end of the lesson to demonstrate the mastery of the content. Teachers may assign students to complete activities that demonstrate mastery of an educational concept (writing a report), or in a method the student prefers. The product is an integral component of the differentiated model, as the preparation of the assessments will primarily determine both the ‘what’ and ‘how’ instruction will be delivered.

4) **Learning Environment:** Environment is important as it creates the conditions for optimal learning to take place. According to Tomlinson, “environment will support or deter the student’s quest for affirmation, contribution, power, purpose, and challenge in the classroom.” The learning environment includes the physical layout of the classroom, the way that the teacher uses the space, environmental elements and sensitivities including lighting, as well as the overall atmosphere of the classroom.

