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## Differentiated Classroom Structures for Literacy Instruction

By: Diane Henry Leipzig (2000)

Differentiating instruction is more complex than just providing different students with different learning experiences. Learn about this distinction by reading classroom examples that contrast differentiated literacy instruction with simply different instruction.

Differentiation isn't just about having different students do different things. Differentiated instruction is based on students' needs.

Below are some classroom structures for literacy instruction that can be differentiated. For each, examples are provided of simply different experiences for students, and differentiated experiences, flexibly adapted to meet students' changing needs.

### Whole Class Structures

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**Different...** Emma writes Morning Messages for her kindergarten class. She has the class perform a choral reading of the message each day. When she noticed that the same three kids were carrying the reading for the rest of the class, she asked them to read the message silently, so that the other students would not simply echo these three readers.

**Differentiated...** When Kate writes a Morning Message for her second graders, she builds in something for each of her spelling/word study groups. One day, she wrote a blank for the *sh* in *share* for one group, a blank for the silent *e* in the word *lake* for a second group, and a blank after *scrub* so a third group could change it into *scrubbing*. During Morning Message, she chooses a volunteer from each targeted group to fill in the appropriate blank.

### Small Groups

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**Different...** Phil has three reading groups in his fourth grade classroom. At the beginning of the year, he conducts an informal reading inventory with each child. He then sorts the students into three groups of equal size: high, middle, and low. For the remainder of the school year, he uses fourth grade texts with the middle group, third grade texts with the low group, and fifth grade texts with the high group.

**Differentiated...** In September, Jill took three running records on each of her first graders. Based upon their instructional levels, she created four reading groups. Every three weeks, she took an additional running record on each student and changed her groups to reflect students' new instructional levels. Over the year, she had from three to six groups, depending on these results.

### Workshops

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**Different...** Debra is teaching her fifth graders how to write persuasive essays. She develops three different prompts for them to choose from. Students can write an essay to convince their parents to

get a pet, to persuade the principal to extend recess time, or to ask their favorite author to come to the class.

**Differentiated...** Rachel teaches her third grade class a writing mini-lesson about dialogue. She circulates the room as students write, and jots down the names of students who are experimenting with dialogue in their writing, noting their use of quotation marks. During independent writing time, she pulls the group of students who were not punctuating their dialogue and teaches a mini-lesson on quotation marks. Then she pulls the group of students who were using quotation marks correctly and introduces the concept of indenting for new speakers.

## Centers

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**Different...** Patty has a spelling center in her third grade classroom. When students arrive at the center, they choose one of three different sorts: *sh* vs. *th*, long /o/ vowel patterns, and *-able* vs. *-ible* words. Students select one of the three card sets from a file box and perform the sort they choose.

**Differentiated...** Joe has an alphabet stamp center in his kindergarten classroom. Each student brings an index card with a picture on it to the center, stamps the initial letter on the card, colors in the picture, and glues it into his/her notebook. Each day, Joe chooses a picture for each student, based upon his observations of the consonants with which the student is familiar.

Adapted from: Leipzig, D. H. (June, 2000). Differentiated or Just Different?

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