Differentiating Instruction for Adolescent Literacy Learning

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A dolescents in schools are a culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse group. Some students are excellent readers but others lack critical vocabulary, need comprehension instruction, have specific learning difficulties, speak a nonnative language, are dysfluent, or have had few opportunities to learn how to read critically. Meeting the needs of these diverse students is one of the biggest challenges that teachers face (International Reading Association [IRA], 2012).

Ms. Mohr, for example, teaches a group of 150 eighth-grade students in three language arts and two social studies classes who look like the demographics represented by the NAEP data (see www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/). Ms. Mohr has 89 White, 24 Black, 24 Hispanic, 9 Asian/Pacific, 1 native American/Alaskan Native, and 3 multiracial students.

Of the 150 students, 66 are poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Fifty-nine students come from diverse backgrounds and languages, and 20 students have been identified as learning disabled. Fifty-one students are excellent readers and can comprehend the text at the proficient or advanced level. Sixty-three students are able to read the textbooks at the basic level with superficial comprehension, and 36 students read below the basic level so are not able to read the text with much comprehension at all. Each of these students has different background experiences and preferred learning styles. It is not possible for Ms. Mohr to prepare different lesson plans for each student, but she can differentiate instruction so that all students can learn in her classroom.

What Is Differentiation?
Differentiation is a philosophy that requires teachers to rethink their classroom practices. According to Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010), “Differentiation is an individual-focused approach to teaching” (p. 37). Teachers typically think about teaching to an entire class of students rather than focusing on how to teach to student differences. It’s not that teachers aren’t concerned about each student. It’s just that many teachers haven’t developed the kinds of teaching practices that allow
Differentiated instruction is effective instruction that is responsive to the diverse learning needs and preferences of individual learners. It is a comprehensive framework or organizing structure for how we understand and enact the teaching and learning in our classrooms—all the teaching and learning, not just the instruction we differentiate. (p. 1)

Differentiation is possible, but teachers need to think differently about their instruction.

Differentiation is based on the idea that people learn best when they have instruction just above the level where they are comfortable. Vygotsky (1978) is credited with developing this common sense notion into a theory. He suggested that learners are comfortable in their zone of actual development but learn best in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the level that "stretches" learning. When learners are in their ZPD, they need scaffolding to help them move beyond their current learning ability. Scaffolding can come from a variety of sources, such as content that is just above the learner's reading ability, explicit instructional strategies, the input from more capable peers, and artifacts such as graphic organizers.

Differentiation, therefore, is based on the notion that students need to learn in their ZPD. If students are given work that is below their ZPD, they may become bored, and if they are given work beyond their ZPD, they may become frustrated. The best learning occurs when students are neither bored nor frustrated, which is why teachers need to operate under a differentiation philosophy.

Differentiation, however, is more than a philosophy. King-Shaver and Hunter (2003) viewed differentiation as a way to provide multiple avenues of learning to students. These avenues of learning can be approached in different ways. According to Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association (IRA, 2012), “differentiated instruction may involve adaptations in subject area content, learning and literacy processes, and learning products” (p. 9). Differentiation, therefore, means that teachers need to think about their teaching in a different way by trying to identify student differences and to provide instruction through adapting content, process, or product to address these differences. (See www.schooltube.com/video/cb83856191f9470e8937/ for Rick Wormeli’s discussion on differentiation.)

Knowing Students: The Key to Differentiation

To differentiate, teachers first need to know their students. This is a difficult proposition for secondary teachers such as Ms. Mohr, who has 150 students. When Ms. Mohr began her teaching career, she tried to memorize each student’s name and interests. As she was reading Tomlinson and Imbeau’s book on differentiation, however, she found an idea that she modified to give her a visual prompt that helped her get to know her students.

Each year, Ms. Mohr asks her students to develop a media collage about their lives that expresses who they are. Some students developed postcards with a variety of print photos from their lives on the front and described the significance of each photo in captions on the back. Others students developed digital collages with audio links. The following link is an example of a student collage (padlet.com/wall/upizb9wjv6).

When Ms. Mohr listened to Gemma tell about her life, she had several insights about her. She understood that Gemma was not very interested in reading classical literature but instead loved to read about science-related topics. She didn’t know about Gemma’s Iranian background and thought about how she could include Iranian stories in the class. She also surmised that Gemma was a student who learned through movement. This first introduction to Gemma did not tell Ms. Mohr everything she needed to know to differentiate for her, but it did provide some clues.
A second strategy that Ms. Mohr used at the beginning of the year to get to know her students was to ask them some key questions that helped her know more about their preferred learning styles. She gave each student a large index card. She asked students to put their names in the left-hand corner and to list their interests in the middle of the card. Then she asked students the following questions and had them put the letters that represented their preferred learning styles in the bottom left-hand corner of the card:

1. Do you work best in a quiet or noisy room? Write a Q for quiet or an N for noisy.
2. Are you primarily a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner? Write a V for visual, an A for auditory, or a K for kinesthetic.
3. Do you prefer to work in a group or alone? Write G for group and A for alone.
4. Do you prefer analytical, practical, or creative approaches? Write A for analytical, P for practical, or C for creative.

She then combined this information with school records to develop a fuller picture of each student. On the upper right-hand side of the card, Ms. Mohr wrote other information she had about her students from the students’ permanent files such as their reading level, and in the bottom right-hand corner, she listed school services that the student attended such as a special education or English learner class (see Figure 1).

In the case of Eduardo (names are pseudonyms), Ms. Mohr learned that he likes music, soccer, video games, and cars; he prefers noisy rather than quiet environments for learning; he considers himself to be a kinesthetic learner, which means he prefers to learn through physical activity; he likes to work in groups; and he considers himself to be a practical learner. Ms. Mohr also noted that Eduardo’s Lexile level of 950 would be considered at the fifth- or sixth-grade level, so he was probably reading below grade level. Because Eduardo was a recent immigrant from Colombia, he was in an English-language support class for 40 minutes twice a week. This information helped Ms. Mohr as she thought about ways she needed to differentiate for Eduardo and the rest of her students.

Determining Reading Levels: Cloze Tests

Ms. Mohr found that gathering initial information about her students was useful, but she also felt that she needed a more concrete idea about how well students could read. She had a Lexile level for most students, but she also wanted to know whether her students could read the specific texts. Ms. Mohr decided, therefore, to give students a cloze test, which would give her students a comprehension level for a specific passage (see Figure 2).

A cloze test is an assessment of students’ reading comprehension that is a fairly accurate predictor of whether students will be able to read a specific text. Ms. Mohr wanted to have students read magazine articles in her social studies classes that supplemented her textbook. She knew that giving students a cloze test using that material would give her a rough estimate of which students would be able to read the passage with comprehension and which students would need support reading the words and sentences. Ms. Mohr knew that a cloze test does not measure overall reading achievement, but that it would let her know which students would struggle with this specific reading.

Ms. Mohr knew that the scoring for cloze tests is very different from the way she grades students. After giving the cloze test to the 58 students in her two social studies classes, Ms. Mohr found that most
Differentiate by Content

Once teachers have some sense of their students’ reading ability, they can differentiate by content. Content is what students read or learn. In literacy, content is often print or nonprint material that teachers want students to read and comprehend. In order for a student to be able to comprehend a text, the text should be at the high end of the students’ reading level because readers tend to learn more and increase their capacity for reading when they independently read texts that are at the challenging end of their ZPD (Morgan, Wilcox, & Eldredge, 2000; O’Connor, Swanson, & Geraghty, 2010). The ZPD for every student is different, depending on the student’s ability to read, how difficult the text is, and how interested the student is in the topic.

Readability. How difficult a text is to read depends on the text’s readability. Text difficulty has previously been measured with readability formulas (Zakaluk & Samuels, 1988). In 2002, however, the RAND reading study group identified many other factors that account for readability that were evident in the text, the reader, and the context. When the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) were developed in the United States, the writers made recommendations that students read within a range of grade levels. For example, Standard 10 states that students in grades 6–8 should read independently in the grade 6–8 text complexity band (see www.corestandards.org/). The CCSS then redefined how text difficulty is measured based on three components: quantitative, qualitative, and reader measures. Teachers can use the quantitative data to determine the approximate difficulty of the text and then use the other measures to decide whether the text is a good fit for the students.

For example, Ms. Mohr wanted to select a book that would be interesting for her eighth-grade struggling readers and yet have enough depth for stimulating classroom discussions. She decided to teach Sherman Alexie’s (2007) *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which has a Lexile level of 600. For more about this book, see www.goodreads.com/book/show/693208.The_Absolutely_True_Diary_of_a_Part_Time_Indian?from_search=true

of her students scored around 50%, which is at the instructional level for a cloze test, but 6 students scored above 70% and 11 students scored below 30%. Three of the students who scored below 30% were English learners. Because cloze scores are heavily affected by the syntax of the sentence, Ms. Mohr decided to investigate further by conducting a running record for these three students (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sl8gSL3PZIs for more information about running records). She decided that she needed to differentiate for the 6 students who would not be challenged by reading this passage and for the 11 students for whom the passage was too difficult.
According to the CCSS guidelines, *Part-Time Indian* would be appropriate for second or third graders if Ms. Mohr took only the quantitative measure into account. The content of this book, however, would not be appropriate for young children. Qualitative dimensions of text complexity are measures that need to be evaluated by a sophisticated human reader, one who is able to identify the craft and structure of the text. The qualitative dimensions are (a) levels of meaning or purpose, (b) structure, (c) language conventionality and clarity, and (d) knowledge demands. (See [www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf) for a detailed description of text complexity)

In *Part-Time Indian*, the structure and language of the text are easy and straightforward, which contributes to the low Lexile level. That means that readers will not have to struggle with structures that make texts more difficult, such as foreshadowing and digressions. Even though the language is not complex and is easily accessible to young adolescents, Alexie uses slang and profanity, which are not appropriate for young children. The levels of meaning and knowledge demands for *Part-Time Indian* are mature and require some knowledge of how Native Americans were treated in North America and the struggles they face today. *Part-Time Indian*, therefore, is a good choice for students who struggle with reading at middle or high school because of its readability and its interesting topics.

Ms. Mohr decided to use *Part-Time Indian* as a central text that everyone in the class would read. Because she was familiar with her students’ reading ability, Ms. Mohr knew that the actual reading of *Part-Time Indian* was not challenging for some students, was in the ZPD of others, and was too difficult for a few of her students. To support the students for whom the book was too difficult, Ms. Mohr collaborated with the teachers who were providing support to the special education students and the English learners and asked them to preteach some of the vocabulary. During class, Ms. Mohr provided these students with an audio recording of the book.

To differentiate by content for all of the students, Ms. Mohr developed an overarching question for students to answer and told the students that each of them would read or view two partner texts to help answer the question. Ms. Mohr then assigned each student one of the texts on the basis of their reading ability, and asked students to choose a second text. After students were finished reading, listening to, or viewing the texts, she asked them to work in groups to answer the essential question (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Partner Texts for The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner Texts</th>
<th>Type of Text</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Student Group/ Rationale</th>
<th>Link or Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American Policy: The Reservation System</td>
<td>documentary video</td>
<td>Introduction to the history of the reservation system in the United States, key points and differences about what is being done now by the U.S. Government and the Canadian Government to reconcile past wrongs</td>
<td>All students</td>
<td>To provide background knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Author</th>
<th>Type of Text</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Student Group/ Rationale</th>
<th>Link or Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life on the Reservation Part 1</td>
<td>video</td>
<td>A glimpse into the life on Indian Reservations and the values that Native Americans hold close to them</td>
<td>All students To provide basic understanding of Indian cultural values</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mV4QPyWcifM">www.youtube.com/watch?v=mV4QPyWcifM</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/ First Nations Tribes</td>
<td>maps</td>
<td>Maps that shows the original location of North American and First Nations tribes</td>
<td>All students To give experience reading maps and to provide background knowledge about North American tribes</td>
<td><a href="http://www.manataka.org/images/Native_American_Tribes_Wall_Map_068L.jpg">www.manataka.org/images/Native_American_Tribes_Wall_Map_068L.jpg</a> <a href="http://www.native-languages.org/canada.htm">www.native-languages.org/canada.htm</a> tribalnationsmaps.com/canadian-first-nations-map/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Legal Alien,” by Pat Mora</td>
<td>poetry</td>
<td>Alludes to the difficulties of belonging in two cultures and the resultant redefining of identity</td>
<td>All students To add richness to the unit by including a poem that contains the same themes as the novel</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hanksville.org/voyage/poems/legalalien.html">www.hanksville.org/voyage/poems/legalalien.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First People legends</td>
<td>legends</td>
<td>More than 1,400 legends from the Americas</td>
<td>All readers, but especially struggling readers because of the length of the stories</td>
<td><a href="http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/Legends-AB.html">www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/Legends-AB.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sorry for Not Being a Stereotype,” by Rita Pyrillis</td>
<td>newspaper opinion piece</td>
<td>This tongue-in-cheek op-ed piece raises many of the same issues that the novel addresses from a different perspective and in a different medium. The author raises concerns about the transparency of Native Americans in modern U.S. society, and the fact that this transparency has allowed shameful treatment of Native peoples to persist.</td>
<td>Higher level students To use critical thinking skills by reading a satirical piece</td>
<td><a href="http://www.manataka.org/page392.html">www.manataka.org/page392.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American song</td>
<td>music video</td>
<td>Music from a pow-wow</td>
<td>All students To help students understand cultural music of Indians</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ug2TrGD7INY">www.youtube.com/watch?v=ug2TrGD7INY</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Inconvenient Indian by Thomas King</td>
<td>novel</td>
<td>Historical account of Canadian Indian and his reflection on his identity</td>
<td>Higher level students To read an additional challenging text with similar themes</td>
<td><a href="http://www.amazon.com/The-Inconvenient-Indian-Curious-Account/dp/0816689768">www.amazon.com/The-Inconvenient-Indian-Curious-Account/dp/0816689768</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Indian Education” by Sherman Alexie</td>
<td>short story</td>
<td>Grade-by-grade account of an Indian’s experiences in school</td>
<td>All students To compare the genre of short story with novel and to provide background knowledge</td>
<td>campuses.fortbendisd.com/campuses/documents/Teacher/2009%5Cteacher_20090410_1731.pdf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
If teachers know approximately how well students can read and the readability of texts, they can differentiate by content. Teachers can use the CCSS text exemplars as benchmark texts for each grade level, but those lists are limited (see www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf). To provide teachers with additional options for texts at grade level, my colleagues and I developed a website called Teach the Books You Love (www.ttbyl.net), to help teachers know the quantitative and qualitative readability of multicultural and alternative texts that could be taught to adolescent readers. Many of the more than 100 entries include multimodal partner texts that teachers can use to differentiate by content by providing either more challenging texts or texts that are easier to read.

Differentiate by Process

A second way teachers can differentiate is by learning and literacy processes. Process is how students understand and learn the content. For example, students differ widely in their vocabulary knowledge. Some students may have rich backgrounds in academic language but others, especially English learners, may not know basic words in any content area. To differentiate, teachers can ask students to learn different words (content differentiation), and they can also differentiate by what students are expected to do.

Because vocabulary knowledge varies so widely by students, the 4-square Frayer vocabulary assignment has great potential for teachers to differentiate by both content and process (Frayer, Frederick, & Klausmeier, 1969). For example, Ms. Mohr is in a professional learning community who decided to use the 4-square vocabulary strategy when introducing all of their new vocabulary words. When they began using 4-square, each teacher on the team brought an example of how he or she would use it in the classroom. Mr. Spencer, the math teacher on the team, showed how he could differentiate when he taught a unit on shapes. He gave different groups of students different words, on the basis of their background on shapes. Mr. Spencer gave the English learners who were newcomers the words circle, square, triangle, kite, and pie. He gave most of the class the words circle, square, triangle, equilateral triangle, isosceles triangle, and regular pentagon. He added the terms regular hexagon, isosceles trapezoid, and parallelogram to the list of students who needed to be challenged.

To differentiate by process, Mr. Spencer gave the students a 4-square vocabulary assignment for the term isosceles triangle. He developed two different 4-square vocabulary assignments (see Figure 3). He gave the first one to students who had a solid mathematical vocabulary, and he gave the
supported by the text. Some teachers asked students only for opinions so that the students never actually had to develop a meaning that was connected to the words of the text. The CCSS, however, require students to read texts closely, and many teachers are now asking students to annotate texts. Annotation is another way that teachers can differentiate by process. (To view a teacher conducting a close reading lesson, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=nX3kNi3NkJo)

Annotation is the act of a reader “talking” to the text during reading. Annotation slows down reading and helps readers focus on ideas within the text. Annotating also promotes active reading because students interact with the text, which provides a visible record of how readers are processing the text. Annotations can vary from one reader to another, and annotations can change on the basis of the purpose for reading. (For more about text annotations, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=pf9CTj9dCM)

Porter-O’Donnell (2004) suggested that teachers identify the categories that they want students to focus on while reading. For example, readers often make predictions, ask questions, state opinions, analyze the author’s craft, make connections, and reflect on the content of their reading process. Teachers can differentiate by having some students annotate one of the reading processes and having other students annotate with several of them.

Ms. Mohr uses a variety of differentiated annotation bookmarks in her English language arts classes (see Figure 4). Through her observation of students reading and her formative assessments measures, she works with students about becoming second one to students who were just learning the mathematical terms in English.

To teach the lesson, Mr. Spencer first showed students a variety of images of isosceles triangles and asked them to develop their own definition. After giving students a few minutes to develop a definition, Mr. Spencer asked the English learners to define the term in their preferred language and to draw a picture. He asked the rest of the students to provide examples and nonexamples. To conclude the lesson, Mr. Spencer had the groups share what they had developed so that the English learners could hear the examples and nonexamples and the non-English learners could learn the definition in another language.

Text annotation. Text annotation is another method of differentiating by process and has become increasingly important with the renewed emphasis on close reading. According to Brummet (2010), “close reading is mindful, disciplined reading of an object [text] with a view to deeper understanding of its meaning” (p. 9). There is no distinct line between close reading and reading for pleasure, but, in general, close reading means that students need to slow down and pay special attention to the text. When students read, they are trying to find the “socially shared meanings that are supported by words, images, objects, actions, and messages” (p. 7). When reading a text closely, students become “meaning detectives,” or readers who are looking for clues in the text to back up their interpretations.

The increased focus on close reading comes in response to teachers relying too heavily on having students develop interpretations that were not supported by the text. Some teachers asked students only for opinions so that the students never actually had to develop a meaning that was connected to the words of the text. The CCSS, however, require students to read texts closely, and many teachers are now asking students to annotate texts. Annotation is another way that teachers can differentiate by process. (To view a teacher conducting a close reading lesson, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=nX3kNi3NkJo)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isosceles triangle</td>
<td>A triangle with two sides of the same length</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Nonexamples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pizza slice</td>
<td>Pizza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennant</td>
<td>Flag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cake slice</td>
<td>Cake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition in Preferred Language</th>
<th>Picture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Un triángulo con dos lados de la misma longitud</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Isosceles Triangle" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
period of learning. Teachers can differentiate the outcome of what they expect students to produce. But to differentiate by product, it’s helpful for teachers to plan what they are expecting students to do in advance.

Most seasoned teachers do not develop lesson plans, and this was true of Ms. Mohr. Before teaching a lesson, Ms. Mohr tended to think of the text she wanted to teach, the activities she wanted students to engage in, and what she wanted students to learn. Ms. Mohr was typical, according to Ornstein (1997), who found that experienced teachers are holistic and intuitive when they plan. They tend to begin planning by thinking of activities or texts (Strangis, Pringle, & Knopf, 2006), and they think of objectives during teaching not during planning (Kagan & Tippins, 1992). After Ms. Mohr began focusing on differentiation, however, she realized that she needed to be more intentional in her planning. Although she also was able to differentiate on the fly by adapting assignments when students were struggling, she realized that she needed to consider how to differentiate by content,

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**Figure 4. Text Annotation Bookmarks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Annotation Bookmark #1</th>
<th>Text Annotation Bookmark #2</th>
<th>Text Annotation Bookmark #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Box] Place a box around unfamiliar words</td>
<td>![Box] Place a box around unfamiliar words</td>
<td>![Box] Place a box around unfamiliar words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Star] Place a star next to something important that you need to remember</td>
<td>![Star] Place a star next to something important that you need to remember</td>
<td>![Star] Place a star next to something important that you need to remember</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Question Mark] Place a question mark to show questions or confusions</td>
<td>![Question Mark] Place a question mark to show questions or confusions</td>
<td>![Question Mark] Place a question mark to show questions or confusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Exclamation Mark] Place an exclamation mark to show something surprising, fun, or interesting</td>
<td>![Exclamation Mark] Place an exclamation mark to show something surprising, fun, or interesting</td>
<td>![Exclamation Mark] Place an exclamation mark to show something surprising, fun, or interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Plus Sign] Place a plus sign next to connections</td>
<td>![Plus Sign] Place a plus sign next to connections</td>
<td>![Plus Sign] Place a plus sign next to connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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self-directed readers. Ms. Mohr gives a basic annotation bookmark to students who are new to text annotation and for whom reading is difficult. This bookmark helps students identify new vocabulary words, important information, and questions they have.

Ms. Mohr has a more robust bookmark for students who know these basic reading processes. The second bookmark also includes identifying surprising information and making connections. A few of her students are excellent readers and do not need to annotate texts at this basic level. Instead, they annotate using underlining and margin notes. Ms. Mohr gives these students a bookmark reminding them to make notes in the margins. She adjusts the text annotations that she expects of students through the year and revises her bookmarks accordingly.

**Differentiate by Product**

The product teachers assign indicates how students demonstrate what they have come to know, understand, and are able to do after an extended
of her students, Ms. Mohr developed the following two goals:

1. All students will demonstrate an understanding of the main characters in *Lord of the Flies*.
2. Some students will demonstrate how two characters in *Lord of the Flies* are similar and different.

Ms. Mohr then developed two assignments that she could use to evaluate how well students achieved this goal. For students to demonstrate that they understood at least one of the main characters, she asked them to develop a Facebook page for either Ralph or Piggy (see Figure 5). This product would satisfy the basic goal of having students...
create a product that demonstrated understanding of one main character.

For more advanced students, Ms. Mohr had them develop a Twitter feed from both Piggy and Ralph indicating how they saw the situation differently (see Figure 6). The Twitter assignment would satisfy the second teaching goal in which students would demonstrate their ability to compare and contrast two main characters. Both assignments had students develop a product to demonstrate understanding, and both assignments had students use social media. The assignments also allowed Ms. Mohr to differentiate by product, one of the ways that she was able to adapt her instruction to differentiate for her students.

Moving Forward

It took Ms. Mohr several years to develop a philosophy of differentiation and a pattern of practice that worked for her. Differentiation at the secondary level doesn’t come easily. With expanding teaching loads, increasing student diversity, and more demands on teacher’s time, providing adolescents with the differentiated literacy instruction specific to their individual needs takes effort. However, the International Reading Association states that adolescents who are struggling readers, gifted learners, or English learners, and students all along the continuum of learning, deserve differentiation so that they can advance in their literacy development (IRA, 2012). Teachers can differentiate by adapting content, process, and product. When that happens, adolescents will truly get the literacy instruction they deserve.
**Additional Resources**

**Books**
- Brownlie, F., Feniak C., & Schnellert, L. (2006). *Student diversity: Classroom strategies to meet the learning needs of all students*. Markham, ONT, Canada: Pembroke.

**Websites, Twitter, Podcasts, Media**
- Carol Tomlinson: [www.caroltomlinson.com/index.html](http://www.caroltomlinson.com/index.html)
- Karen Hume on Twitter: [twitter.com/humekaren](http://twitter.com/humekaren)
- Planning template for differentiated instruction: [differentiationcentral.com/examples/InteractiveDILESSON.htm](http://differentiationcentral.com/examples/InteractiveDILESSON.htm)
- Strategies for Differentiation: [www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/differentiating-instruction](http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/differentiating-instruction)
- Text Annotation apps: [appadvice.com/appguides/show/pdf-annotation](http://appadvice.com/appguides/show/pdf-annotation)
- Text Annotation Guidelines (Harvard): [guides.library.harvard.edu/sixreadinghabits](http://guides.library.harvard.edu/sixreadinghabits)

**Questions for Reflection**
- What is your philosophy about differentiating for the students in your classroom?
- In what ways have you differentiated by content?
- How do you differentiate by process?
- In what ways can you differentiate by product?
ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Susan Lenski is a professor at Portland State University. Before becoming a professor, Susan taught school for 20 years, working with children from kindergarten through high school. Susan’s research interests focus on strategic reading and writing for adolescent readers and English learners. She also conducts research on preparing teacher candidates.

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