

# Differentiation in the String Classroom

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*"If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn."* Ignacio Estrada

## What is differentiation?

- Providing students various ways to access information through content and process.
- Constructing teaching materials, learning environment, product, and assessment so that all students can learn.

*"Differentiation means giving students multiple options for taking in information. Differentiating instruction means that you observe and understand the differences and similarities among students and use this information to plan instruction."*

Carol Ann Tomlinson

## Basis of Differentiation

- All students can learn!
- All students learn differently!
- All students have unique strengths!
- Music is for EVERYONE!
- We need to intentionally teach all students.

## The Variety of Student Learners in the Ensemble

- Multiple intelligences (different strengths)
- Learning preferences (aural, visual, tactile, concrete, global etc.)
- Special learning circumstances (dyslexia, physical, hearing, ADHD, etc.)
- Background (economic status, culture, language, etc.)
- Learning speed (speed of information in-take)
- Personality types (introvert, extrovert, etc.) (personality tests)
- Gender (perceptions of instruments)
- Music experience (none to a lot)

## Setting the Stage: Motivation

- Affective: social, fear, academic grades, praise, belonging, music, relationship with teacher
- Slower-paced learners: leadership in non-musical ways, rotate seats, one achievable piece
- Classroom culture: belonging to group. Are they not trying or am I not teaching to their learning preference? Are there socio/emotional issues?
- Faster-paced learners: extra projects, lead sectionals, peer help, layer, grading, auditions, promote private lessons and youth orchestras, find new music and celebrate it in class, performance for class

Underlying it all:

*"People will forget what you said, what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Maya Angelou

## Rehearsal/Teaching Strategies

*"Differentiating instruction may mean teaching the same material to all students using a variety of instructional strategies, or it may require the teacher to deliver lessons at varying levels of difficulty based on the ability of each student."*

Cathy Weselby October 1, 2014

<https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/examples-of-differentiated-instruction/>

## Aural Teaching

- Modeling

- Memorizing music
- Teach a piece aurally
- Warm-ups without music
- Chunking
- Listen to piece
- Recording
- Drum beat

### Visual Teaching

- Modeling
- Videos/streaming
- Method books
- Rhythm and pitch flashcards
- Highlighting music
- Note reading

### Beginning Instruction

- Kinesthetic experience
- Paper checklist for posture/positions
- Pictures of good/bad posture
- Master class format with a student
- Fix-the-teacher format
- Evaluate each other's (peer) bow hands
- Echoes
- Notes on board/screen point and play say names

### Middle and High School Instruction

- Choosing repertoire by grade level with awareness of how that varies section to section.
- Leveling repertoire within a section – creating alternate parts, both easier and harder.
- Teaching technique in different tempos, ranges, bowings, articulations etc.
- Teaching repertoire aurally and visually

### Ideas for Higher Level Questions

#### QUESTION STARTERS

|                   |                 |          |           |            |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Analyze           | Analogy         | Predict  | Compare   | Agree      |
| Evaluate          | Problem Solving | Critique | Justify   | Prioritize |
| Hypothetical      | Visualization   | Compose  | Decide    | Discuss    |
| Point of View     | Brainstorming   | Create   | Interpret | Imagine    |
| Reversal Thinking | Creativity      | Perform  | Rewrite   | Solve      |

#### SAMPLE QUESTION STARTER

- How would you play this \_\_\_\_\_?
- How would you grade \_\_\_\_\_?
- Rank the importance of \_\_\_\_\_?
- What choice did you make \_\_\_\_\_?
- Explain your reasoning \_\_\_\_\_?
- How would evaluate our \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is your favorite \_\_\_\_\_? Why?
- What would you suggest \_\_\_\_\_?
- What would happen if \_\_\_\_\_?
- Devise a way to \_\_\_\_\_?
- How would you improve \_\_\_\_\_?

#### EXAMPLE OF THE END OF QUESTION

- aggressively, excited, shocked
- the intonation at the key change
- rhythm, intonation, right notes in sight reading
- bow speed, bow placement, F# or F natural
- for using your bow as a sword, for jumping over the chair
- rhythm, intonation, dynamics
- song, composer, piece we played
- for the violas to be heard at letter B
- everyone watched the conductor, we used less bow
- be more focused in rehearsal, unpack faster, hear the cello
- our intonation, our dynamics, the first note, our posture

Create a poem that explains \_\_\_\_\_?  
How would you portray \_\_\_\_\_?  
How could you verify \_\_\_\_\_?  
How could you adapt what we have learned\_?  
Can you think of an alternative to\_\_\_?  
How could you modify the plan \_\_\_\_\_?  
What would you recommend \_\_\_\_\_?  
Give arguments for \_\_\_\_\_?  
What is the impact \_\_\_\_\_?  
What makes that \_\_\_\_\_tricky?

the meaning of this piece, difference in dynamics  
anger in your bow, pure joy in our sound  
that we start together, use the same style of spiccato  
to the next piece we play, to the other piece  
playing through the song when you practice  
to mess around during sectionals  
what song we play, how make sure everyone learns music  
practice records, playing tests  
of practice, of not matching bow style, of listening  
section, piece of music, key signature

## Leveling Repertoire in the First Year of Instruction

Examples from *Sound Differentiation for Beginning String Orchestra*

*"If you have told a child a thousand times and he still does not understand, then it is not the child who is the slow learner."*

Walter Barbie

### Isolate Skills

- Pizzicato
- Air bow
- No slurs
- Sing it
- Say the note names
- Say and clap the rhythm
- Sustain pitches
- Slow to fast

### Teaching Technique

- Play scales in different octaves simultaneously
- Repeat first octave while others play two or three
- Playing rote tune or scales with different rhythmic values (whole, half, quarter, eighth, etc.)
- Shifting to different positions (some stay in first, third, fifth, etc.)
- Using different bowings (no slurs to complicated slurs)
- Play in different tempos (slow to fast with some dropping out)
- Bounce tempos (70, 90, 71, 91, 72, 92 etc.)

### Exploring Genres

- Many eclectic styles have built in differentiation. Examples within fiddling are back-ups, chopping, tunes, and breaks.
- Fiddle, Rock, Jazz, Latin, Mariachi, Pop - teach tune first to all, teach all bass line and harmony parts.
- Teaching different genres is differentiation itself.
- Appeals to different motivations.
- Each genre will appeal to someone.

### Layering

- Working on notes only.
- Play with dynamics.
- Play with a certain sound.
- Play at a certain part of the bow.
- Play at MM = ?
- Raise expectations every time, always taking it to a higher level.
- Everyone should have success on a least one layer.

### **Grading and Assessment**

- Every student does not need to take the same test.
- Create levels of success.
  - ^ MM=70, 80, 90. Play 4 bars, 8 bars, 16 bars.
  - ^ Choose different parts of the piece.
- Create a musical improvement plan.
- Create performance points - peers, parents, groups.
- Create rubrics for practice and at variety of levels.

### **Additional Strategies**

- Rhythmic: Count rhythms, rhythm duets, body percussion, movement, walk and play, clap, march, stomp, air-bow, rhythmic flashcards, play with rhythmic drum beat
- Harmonic: sing, phrasing, say note names, accompaniment, meaning in the music, examples of great artists, guest artists, recordings, describe sound you want, i.e. peaceful water at sunrise, crashing waves, rolling waves.
- Technical: bunny/fox, march and air-bow, use pencil, peer evaluate proper bow hand, describe how to make a bow hand to a parent, 4 steps to a bow hand, bow lanes, number for bow speed, lbs. of weight.
- Student Ownership: chamber music, sectionals, pair and share, self assessment, how to practice, let them ask questions, work with a partner and decide exactly how to bow a passage
- Student Engagement: circle rehearse, model playing, teacher moves around the room, visual aid, manipulatives (coke can, straws)

**Are you teaching the curriculum or the kids?**

There is a big difference.

**Teach the kids that are in front of you!**

**Don't let the fear of not being able to do enough, prevent you from doing what you can!**