

# Differentiation in the visual arts classroom



# What is differentiation?

*“Differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Whether teachers differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction.”*

[Tomlinson](#)



# Differentiation in art means providing for the individual needs of the students in your art class so that they all make progress.

Firstly, you need to know your students. This means looking at their data. Who has English as an additional language? Who has special educational needs? Who are you going to extend and who is going to find things difficult? Knowing this is all part of differentiation in the art classroom. Make sure this information is in your planner. It may well become pertinent as you build up a picture of your students and notice successes or problems.



# Effective planning includes thinking flexibly about how to organise teaching and learning

Eg., a class may all be working in the same learning area and participating in shared learning activities. At the same time, some students may be working with ***different content, within different curriculum levels, toward different learning outcomes, or in relation to different assessment criteria.*** The students and their whānau should contribute to decisions on these different approaches in the light of the outcomes that are of value to them.



# Differentiation by **content**

In art education, content can be varied using demonstration and step-by-step instructions, art prints, supplementary texts, student choice, curriculum compacting, learning contracts, technology, and internet resources. These could include

- Putting text materials on tape and/or video
- Using spelling or vocabulary lists at readiness levels of students;
- Presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means;
- Meeting with small groups to re-teach an idea or skill for struggling learners, or to extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners.

# Differentiation by **process**

Each student has a preferred learning style, and successful differentiation includes delivering the material to each style: visual, auditory and kinesthetic, and through words. Some students need multiple opportunities to engage with a range of materials to support their understanding, and that these opportunities may involve using assistive technology or simple adaptations

This process-related method also addresses the fact that not all students require the same amount of support from the teacher, and students could choose to work in pairs, small groups, or individually. And while some students may benefit from one-on-one interaction with you or the classroom aide, others may be able to progress by themselves. Teachers can enhance student learning by offering support based on individual needs.

Examples of differentiating the process:

- Provide textbooks for visual and word learners.
- Allow auditory learners to listen to audio books.
- Give kinesthetic learners the opportunity to complete an interactive assignment online.

# Differentiation by **product or outcome**

The product is what the student creates at the end of the lesson to demonstrate the mastery of the content. This can be in the form of tests, projects, reports, or other activities. You could assign students to complete activities that show mastery of an educational concept in a way the student prefers, based on learning style.

Examples of differentiating the end product:

- Read and write learners write a short essay.
- Visual learners create a graphic organizer of the content.
- Auditory learners give an oral report.
- Kinesthetic learners build a diorama illustrating the content.

# Differentiation by **learning environment**

The conditions for optimal learning include both physical and psychological elements. A flexible classroom layout is key, incorporating various types of furniture and arrangements to support both individual and group work. Psychologically speaking, teachers should use classroom management techniques that support a safe and supportive learning environment.

Examples of differentiating the environment:

- Break some students into reading groups to discuss the assignment.
- Allow students to work individually if preferred.
- Create quiet spaces where there are no distractions.



# What are the supports?

the supports – what is provided to assist the student to access and achieve educational outcomes, including materials, people (such as specialist teachers), specific teaching strategies, changes in the classroom and environment, and so on.



*Teachers are responsible for planning, developing, and reviewing the classroom curriculum. Making curriculum accessible for all students may require "thinking outside the square" in daily practice. This requires you to be prepared to do things differently, to work towards a shift from being a "routine expert" to an "adaptive expert" (Timperley, 2011). You will best achieve this when working as part of a collaborative, supportive learning community. [TKI](#)*

Task: The following table lists some of the ways in which teachers shift their practice as they plan to meet the needs of all their students. (The last three rows are specific to secondary teachers.) **Working within a group** of teachers, discuss how your beliefs and attitudes are reflected in the table. You may want to consider your own experiences as a student and a trainee teacher on placement.

<i>Moving from</i>	<i>Moving to</i>
Beliefs and attitudes that limit opportunities to learn	Beliefs and attitudes that support opportunities to learn
Low expectations of student learning, progress, and achievement	High expectations of student learning, progress, and achievement
A one-size-fits-all curriculum	Curriculum access that may differ for different students, but curriculum for all
Teachers not knowing how to teach some students	All teachers being capable of teaching all students, with support when required
A belief that “It’s not a classroom teacher’s job to teach ‘these’ students.”	A belief that the learning of all students is the responsibility of all teachers
An attitude that any student with special education needs will require a teacher’s aide	Support in the classroom that is coordinated and appropriate

<i>Moving from</i>	<i>Moving to</i>
The teacher's aide working with the student	The teacher's aide supporting the teacher to include all students
A belief that "These students do not belong in a mainstream class, they belong in the unit."	A belief that all students belong in the classroom, learning within the NZ Curriculum
Teachers feeling isolated	Coordinated support for teachers and students
Someone else planning for students with special education needs	Collaborative planning with the LSC/SENCO, student, and whānau
Teachers teaching their subject	Teachers teaching all students
An examinations-only focus	All students having the opportunity to undertake appropriate assessment
Restricted options and pathways post school	Meaningful pathways supporting citizenship, full participation, and lifelong learning

## Sources:

[Differentiation and adaptation \(TKI\)](#)

[What is differentiation in art?](#)

[What is differentiated instruction?](#)