

# STONINGTON SCHOOL NEWS

NOVEMBER 2009

Stonington Public Schools/572-0506

ISSUE 3

## *Differentiated Instruction: Effective Learning for All Students*

Douglas Hammel  
Principal, Deans Mill School

---

*"If you were to fold your hands together naturally, you would have a comfortable, close fit. The goals of curriculum differentiation are to find the closest, most comfortable fit between the learner and the curriculum ...varying the process or content or product to match the needs of the learner can help us reach that close fit." – Dr. James Curry*

There are many ways to view teaching and learning, and there are many theories about what effective teaching and learning should look like. This is what keeps the practice of teaching dynamic, exciting, and evolving. However, there are some basic assumptions that nearly all agree on. One such "truth": not all students learn in the same way. Recent research and educational practice has provided an approach to planning and delivering instruction that keeps this at its core. This approach is *differentiated instruction*.

Differentiated instruction recognizes that students enter a classroom bringing with them different experiences, interests, learning styles, attitudes, and skill sets. By approaching lesson and activity planning in a way that takes these differences into account, teachers look to maximize the "fit" between the content of the lesson (the ideas being taught) and the needs of each individual learner. The ultimate goal of this approach is to design activities and instruction in a way that meets each child where he/she is as a learner.

At Deans Mill School, and in schools throughout the country, teachers are engaged in professional development and conversation about how to best plan differentiated instruction. The three key components to effectively capitalizing on this approach are:

- The curriculum or content being taught (the "what")
- The type of instruction that is used (the "how")
- The way in which the learner demonstrates understanding (the "product")

In a differentiated classroom, students gain access to the content through a variety of materials. These materials may include textbooks, video, web sites, teacher notes and presentations, field trips, hands-on experiences, classroom visits, etc. The idea is to present the content in a manner that will speak to the diversity of the learners in the classroom.

In a differentiated classroom, how the teacher organizes and presents the material is also important. In some instances a whole-group presentation may be appropriate to introduce a concept, but is usually followed by work in smaller groups. To effectively differentiate, these small learning groups are not fixed, but should change based on a variety of considerations. Using flexible groups, learners are grouped with peers based on the concept, the task, student interest level, prior knowledge, or experience level. In a differentiated classroom the formulation of groups is an active process, constantly being evaluated and adjusted to best meet the needs of each learner.

In a differentiated classroom the manner in which students demonstrate their learning is also varied. Depending on the content, students demonstrate their understanding using a variety of products: paper and pencil tasks, interviews, projects, presentations, drawings, songs, etc. By allowing varied means of expression, the differentiated classroom encourages creativity, and meets the needs of each learner.






At Deans Mill School, grade-level teams meet weekly to discuss their teaching and the learning and progress of their students. During these meetings, teachers are able to discuss lesson plans, student activities, and assessment techniques that have been effective in meeting the needs of their diverse students. Through this professional conversation and sharing, teachers are able to expand and improve their practice, as we strive to make the school a place where all students are challenged and where students can meet their potential as learners.

### References

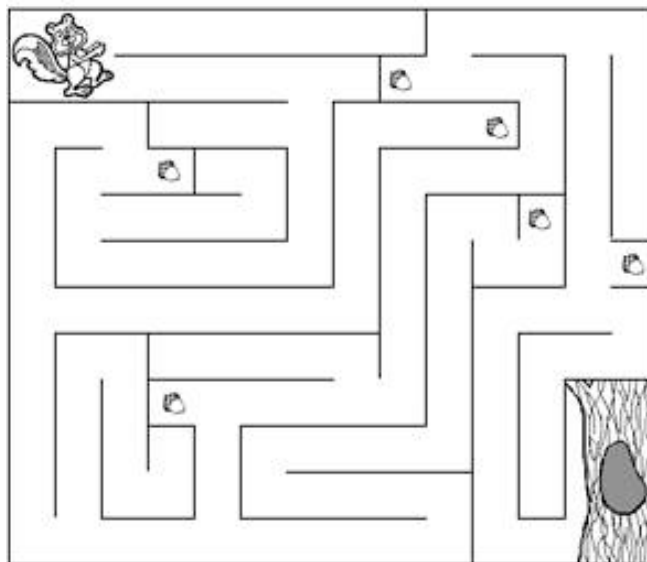
Hall, T. (2002). *Differentiated instruction*. Wakefield, MA: National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum.  
Tomlinson, C. A. (1999) *The Differentiated Classroom*, Alexandria, VA: ASCD

# NOVEMBER 2009

## SPS DISTRICT CALENDAR

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT
1	2	3 6:00 PMS SBIT mtg. 7:00 DMS PTO mtg.	4 7:00 SHS Cross-District SBIT mtg. 6:30-9:30 SHS SAT Prep	5 Elementary Early Dismissal- Parent/Teacher Conferences 5:00 SHS Student Government Fall Feast	6	7 7:30 SHS SATs  Veterans Day Parade
8 	9	10 5:30 MMS SBIT mtg. 6:30 WBSS PTO mtg. 7:00 MMS PTO mtg.	11  No School  Veterans Day	12 7:00 Central Office BOE mtg.	13 4:30-6:30 SHS Leanne Masterjoseph Reception	14 
15	16 7:30 WBSS Family Reading Night	17	18 6:00 SHS Winter Sports Banquet 7:00 PMS PTO mtg.	19 6:00 Crickets Parent Night 7:00 PMS PTO mtg.	20 7:00 SHS – drama production “Our Town”	21 7:00 SHS – drama production “Our Town”
<b>11/16-20 DMS PTO Book Fair</b>						
22 2:00 SHS – drama production “Our Town”	23	24	25 Early dismissal  4:30-6:00 SHS Bon Fire	26 10:00 SHS vs. WHS Football Game   Happy Thanksgiving	27 No School	28 
29	30					

*Help the squirrel collect his acorns for winter.*



Collect the acorns and take them home