

Tiered instruction

When using ‘tiered’ instruction, teachers make slight adjustments within the same lesson to meet the needs of students. All students learn the same fundamental skills and concepts but through varying modes and activities. The tiers appropriately challenge students at their ability levels. The teacher’s challenge is to make sure all tasks, regardless of the tier level, are interesting, engaging, and challenging. Activities and assignments can be adjusted in any of the following ways:

- level of complexity
- amount of structure
- materials provided
- time allowed
- pacing of the assignment
- number of steps required for completion
- form of expression (letter, essay, report, research paper, short story, speech)
- level of independence required.

Six ways to tier a lesson

- Tier by challenge level (Bloom’s Taxonomy).
- Tier by complexity (When you tier by complexity, you address the needs of students at introductory levels as well as the needs of students who are ready for more advanced work).
- Tier by resources (When you choose materials at various reading levels and complexity of content, you are tiering assignments by resources).
- Tier by outcomes (Students use the same materials but the end products vary).
- Tier by process (The end products are the same but the ways students arrive at those outcomes may vary).
- Tier by product (Group by multiple intelligences or learning styles followed by assignments that fit those preferences).

References

(Heacox, *Differentiation Instruction in the Regular Classroom: How to Reach and Teach All Learners, Grades 3 - 12*, 2002)

Examples of tiering

1. Tiering by challenge level

Using Bloom's taxonomy can be a useful guide for developing tasks at various challenge levels.

Example:

Activities for book talk presentations.

Lower levels of Blooms:

- list story elements (knowledge)
- book summary (comprehension)
- support a conclusion about a character with evidence from the book (application).

Higher levels of Blooms:

- Discuss the theme or author's purpose for writing the book (analysis)
- Create a new ending for the story (synthesis)
- Critique the author's writing and support your opinion (evaluation).

2. Tiering by complexity

When you tier by complexity, you provide varied tasks that address a student's level of readiness, from introductory levels to more abstract, less concrete, advanced work. Be careful to provide advanced work to the higher level student, rather than just more work.

Example:

After whole group class reading of a current events issue in a magazine such as global warming, students complete a related activity differentiated by complexity.

Tier one: Students are asked to write a public service announcement using jingles, slogans or art to convey why global warming is a problem and what people can do to prevent it.

Tier two: Students conduct a survey of peer awareness and understanding of global warming. They design a limited number of questions and decide how to report their results such as with charts or in a newscast.

Tier three: Students debate the issue about the seriousness of global warming with each side expressing a different viewpoint. They must provide credible evidence to support their opinions and arguments.

3. Tiering by resources

Use materials at various reading levels and complexity to tier by resources. Students using tiered resources may be engaged in the same activity or they may be working on a different, but related activity.

4. Tiering by outcome

Students all use the same materials but what they do with the materials is different.

Example:

Pattern block maths

Tier one: Identify all the ways you can group your pattern blocks.

Tier two: Identify all the different patterns you can make with your pattern blocks.

Tier three: Create a bar graph to show all the different kinds of pattern blocks in your bag.

5. Tiering by process

Students work on the same outcomes but use a different process to get there.

Example:

What are the characteristics of a hero?

Tier one: Make a chart of specific heroes and what they did to make them become a hero.

Tier two: Choose two or three heroes and compare them in a Venn diagram.

Tier three: List personal characteristics exhibited by heroes and rank them from most to least important.

6. Tiering by product

Groups are formed based on learning preference using Gardner's multiple intelligences.

Example:

For a unit on the solar system, Study of rotation and revolution of the earth.

Tier one: Create a flip book, diagram, or model showing the rotation of the earth around the sun (visual-spatial).

Tier two: Position and move three people to demonstrate the concept of the revolution and rotation of the earth with respect to the moon and sun (bodily-kinaesthetic).

Tier three: Make a timeline of a year detailing the position of Queensland with respect to the sun (logical-mathematical).

Steps to create a 3-level tier

1. Identify key concepts, skills and essential understandings that you want all students to achieve. These elements become the basis for your 'on-level' tasks.
2. Identify how you will cluster groups/activities. Although you can create multiple levels of tiers (2-6), keep the number of levels consistent with your group of students. Don't make three tiers if only two groups of students exist in your classroom—those students who are working at the appropriate level and those students who are require extra support, for example.
3. Select elements to tier (see 'Six Ways to Tier a Lesson' above).
4. Create your 'on-level' tier (Tier one).

5. Next, design a similar task for learners who require extra support. The task should make adjustments based on student readiness (Tier two).
6. If needed, develop a third, more advanced activity for learners who have already mastered the basic standard or competency being addressed. Make sure the task actually requires higher-level thinking than the 'on-level' tasks. The advanced tier shouldn't just be more of the same thing (Tier three).

As you construct the tiers make sure that in order for students to accomplish a higher level, they must also have an understanding of the lower levels.

References

Heacox, D. (2002). *Differentiation Instruction in the Regular Classroom: How to Reach and Teach All Learners, Grades 3 - 12*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.