



TIERING LESSONS!

When you tier an activity you are providing different levels of that activity to meet the different degrees of student readiness for the concept you are teaching.

(Note: Readiness is not the same as overall ability because it is specific to the concept being taught!)

This means that you must do a pre-assessment of students to know where they are before you start.



A Metaphor for Tiering

Dear Colleagues!

Last year we were able to have Karen Hume visit and speak to us as a staff. Her book, **Start Where They Are** is the basis for much of this newsletter this month.

The premise of her work (and of differentiated instruction in general) is that we need to know where students are in their learning and be able to start there with our teaching to move them forward. This means that we need to have some strategies up our sleeves that will help us to assess what students know and then have some ways of differentiating our teaching so that all students are able to find an entry point and can gain from the knowledge we are trying to impart.

This edition of Shared Secrets then focuses on tiering and on the theory behind it.

Last year we also asked students about choice in their work and found that they recognized that when they were given choice they were more likely to succeed, more engaged and more apt to retain the information. So, here is a way to provide choice (one of the ways of engaging the teenage brain) and of using background knowledge and student readiness to build students who fully grasp the work we are doing in school: or what I like to call “learning”!

An example of a pre assessment task might be as simple as asking students the unit or topic’s essential questions and then asking students to respond to one or more of the following prompts:

I know/I don’t know

I can explain/ I cannot explain

I remember / I don’t remember

I like/ I don’t like

I am looking forward to/ I am not looking forward to

I am good at/ I am not good at

Other things to consider when **tiering** would be that all of the activities must:

- deal with the same objective or specific learning outcome
- be equally interesting
- take approximately the same amount of time

This strategy allows you to cover the content at the level that students are able to achieve. As students explore the content they can move forward and will be able to grasp the concepts more fully. However, if you do not “start where they are”, you may not be able to move students at all.



WHY WE SHOULD TRY IT

The brain research is clear about the power of giving students choice and in building good solid connections in the brain to knowledge already there (creating dendrites). Tiering allows for both of these factors. Students who have choice in their learning activities focus more attention on those lessons. When the brain is engaged and paying attention, learning is more apt to occur. In terms of building dendrites and connections in the brain, tiering allows students to start with the knowledge they have and build on it, thus connecting to existing dendrites and growing more possibilities for fuller, stronger learning.

WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE IN YOUR CLASS

In **Start Where They Are** there is a great example of a grade 7 teacher (Bob) who uses a tiered assignment on similes with his grade 7 class. He started by giving them a simple 3 question pre-assessment quiz.

What is a simile?

Please provide an example of a simile.

Please identify what is being described and what is being compared in the following sentence: "Cale's binder has been dropped so many times, it looks like a beat-up old truck!"

Then Bob created three groups based on the readiness of the students. Then he created three assignments that were similar but differentiated based on the readiness of the students. (To see the blackline masters for this assignment, click on [this link](#) that will take you to the assignment he gave.) (You can also watch a video of Bob teaching this to his class by following [this link](#).)

The main concept to keep in mind is that the activities must be based on the work that is being studied but tiered to meet the needs of those who are struggling, those capable, and those who are advanced.



How do we measure success?

Related Ideas:

Considerations for Assignments Tiered by Student Need

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Concrete	Mostly concrete with some abstraction	Abstract
Minimal number of steps	Can require more steps to complete the assignment	Can be more open-ended, leaving decisions about how the assignment is completed to the student
Reading level is appropriate to participants, may be below grade level	Reading level is at grade level	Reading level is above grade level
Activity may be partially completed (to provide students with support via examples) or by the teacher	Activity is completed by students with some support provided by the teacher or in print	Activity is more open-ended than levels 1 and 2. Support is provided by the teacher as needed.

