

# 4 PRACTICAL STEPS TO WHOLE CLASS DIFFERENTIATION

INCLUDE EVERY CHILD IN EVERY LESSON

SEÁN DELANEY

Resource for Teachers based on

*Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have: A Guide to Career Success*

by Seán Delaney

Available from <https://www.routledge.com/Become-the-Primary-Teacher-Everyone-Wants-to-Have-A-guide-to-career-success/Delaney/p/book/9781138675636>

**BECOME THE  
PRIMARY  
TEACHER  
EVERYONE  
WANTS TO HAVE**

A GUIDE TO CAREER SUCCESS

SEÁN DELANEY

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# Differentiating Instruction in Whole-Class Lessons

In every classroom children differ. Some complete work fast, others work slowly; some produce work that is accurate and precise, others produce work containing errors. You can include every child in whole-class lessons while challenging each one appropriately. Build differentiation into your lessons with these four practical steps on (1) selecting a task (2) launching the task (3) discussing solutions and strategies, and (4) getting children to reflect on and record their learning. Ideas for challenging exceptionally able children complete this resource. I suggest introducing one element at a time into your practice to see how it works.

For more on differentiating instruction see Chapter 4, especially pages 94-100, in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have: A Guide to Career Success* by Seán Delaney

**1. Select a Task:** Choose tasks which all children can begin, where most children can achieve some success and where some children can excel.

## Sample Tasks to Support Differentiation in Your Lessons

- How could someone travel from Dublin to Galway?
- Describe a summer scene.
- What are native Irish trees?
- A swimming pool is 50 metres long. How far have I travelled if I swim 1 length, 2 lengths, 5 lengths, 10 lengths,  $\frac{1}{2}$  length?
- Name a fraction that is equivalent to one half. Are there other fractions that are equivalent to a half? If so, how many more?
- Complete the following equation:  $\_\_\_ + \_\_\_ = 12$ . Are there other numbers that could be used to complete the equation? How many others?

**2. Launch the task:** Carefully clarify that all children know what they have to do to attempt the task.

- Identify the subject knowledge needed to attempt the task
- Check if children have the subject knowledge they need
- Check that children know what they must do to begin and complete the task
- Have children work on tasks sometimes in pairs and sometimes alone

**3. Discuss solutions and strategies:** Talk to children about how they attempted and solved the task using these five strategies for inclusion:

### ***Ask Different Kinds of Questions***

- What is  $x \div y$ ,  $x \times y$ ,  $x - y$ ,  $x + y$ ?
- How did you get that answer?
- Why did you do it that way?
- Compare how your/his/her way is different or similar
- How do we define a \_\_\_?
- What is another way of expressing that?
- Describe what you did
- Explain that for the class

### ***Invest in Substantial Answers***

- Pose a question and wait several seconds
- When every child has had time to think, nominate a child to answer
- Encourage the child and give them time to produce the answer
- Expect children to justify answers; don't indicate, initially at least, if the answer given is right or wrong

### ***Target Questions Strategically***

- Sometimes ask a child who is listening and who has a good chance of answering
- Sometimes ask a child whose answer may surface a common difficulty – their error becomes a resource for the class; thank the child for raising it
- Sometimes ask a child who will almost certainly answer correctly (to move the discussion along)
- Sometimes ask a bellwether child to answer; this will help you monitor how well most children are following the discussion

### ***Monitor Participation in the Discussion***

- Occasionally allow the discussion to get more complicated by letting children explore complex topics like infinity or negative numbers
- Occasionally allow a discussion to become easier by revising a topic previously taught
- If children seem disengaged, physically move towards them, mention their name, or direct an easy question to them

### ***Encourage Children to Revoice***

- What I think you're saying is \_\_\_\_\_. Is that right?
- Can you repeat exactly what \_\_\_\_\_ said?
- Can you put into your own words what \_\_\_\_\_ said?
- Do you agree with what \_\_\_\_\_ said?

**4. Reflect and Record:** Find out how all children are thinking by asking them to respond, in writing, to prompts such as the following:

- I think the answer is \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_
- I learned that \_\_\_\_\_
- I am confused about \_\_\_\_\_
- A question I have is \_\_\_\_\_

### Exceptionally Able Children

For more on teaching high achievers see pages 107 – 110 in *Become the Primary Teacher Everyone Wants to Have: A Guide to Career Success* by Seán Delaney

- Seek a mentor (e.g. parent, grandparent, local expert, retired teacher) to challenge child in child's area of exceptional ability (e.g. science, writing, music, sport)
- Teach child how to work independently
- Have child work with children in an older class for a specific subject
- Have child participate in a suitable online course
- Engage child in computer programming using *Logo*, *Scratch* or *Python*
- Solve challenging problems in pairs or small groups
- Propose interesting, challenging projects for child to pursue

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