

## Strategies for Differentiating Instruction in the High School Arena

Adapted and condensed from the 1999 ASCD book *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners* by Carol Ann Tomlinson.

Nearly all educators agree with the goal of differentiating instruction, but teachers may lack strategies for making it happen. Here are some of the many strategies—in addition to flexible grouping and tiered activities—that teachers can use to avoid lockstep instruction:

- **Stations.** Using stations involves setting up different spots in the classroom where students work on various tasks simultaneously. These stations invite flexible grouping because not all students need to go to all stations all the time.
- **Compacting.** This strategy encourages teachers to assess students before beginning a unit of study or development of a skill. Students who do well on the preassessment do not continue work on what they already know.
- **Agendas.** These are personalized lists of tasks that a student must complete in a specified time, usually two to three weeks. Student agendas throughout a class will have similar and dissimilar elements.
- **Complex Instruction.** This strategy uses challenging materials, open-ended tasks, and small instructional groups. Teachers move among the groups as they work, asking students questions and probing their thinking.
- **Orbital Studies.** These independent investigations, generally lasting three to six weeks, revolve around some facet of the curriculum. Students select their own topics, and they work with guidance and coaching from the teacher.
- **Entry Points.** This strategy from Howard Gardner proposes student exploration of a given topic through as many as five avenues: narrational (presenting a story), logical-quantitative (using numbers or deduction), foundational (examining philosophy and vocabulary), aesthetic (focusing on sensory features), and experiential (hands-on).
- **Problem-Based Learning.** This strategy places students in the active role of solving problems in much the same way adult professionals perform their jobs.
- **Choice Boards.** With this strategy, work assignments are written on cards that are placed in hanging pockets. By asking a student to select a card from a particular row of pockets, the teacher targets work toward student needs yet allows student choice.
- **4MAT.** Teachers who use 4MAT plan instruction for each of four learning preferences over the course of several days on a given topic. Thus, some lessons focus on mastery, some on understanding, some on personal involvement, and some on synthesis. As a result, each learner has a chance to approach the topic through preferred modes and also to strengthen weaker areas.