Differentiation for all learners is possible when we make it easier for teachers to accomplish.

In our democracy, the educational system is charged with preparing every student to become an active participant in our civic process, as well as to get ready for college and careers. This need has become even more urgent as a result of growing English Language Learner populations and mainstreaming of special education students. In order to ensure that all learners can succeed, research shows that we must differentiate instruction.

The body of scholarship on the value of differentiated instruction has mushroomed in the last few years, and teachers have become more discerning in choosing materials to support differentiation. Moving from a "one-size-fits-all" approach, teachers now look for a variety of additional resources such as videos, activities, and worksheets to support different student populations. Recent focus on struggling readers has resulted in a resurgence of the popularity of leveling text—in which some students get an on-level Student Edition and some get a below-level Student Edition. However, experts argue that true differentiation does not mean just providing two levels of text nor modified worksheets and tests. Instead, it means adopting a holistic approach that centers on the learner. Higher expectations can be met not by watering down the curriculum, but by giving all learners just the right level of support so they can read complex text, acquire core content knowledge, and tackle rigorous questions.
What if we could reimagine Social Studies instruction so that all students have access to rigorous content and respectful work?

Differentiation: a teacher’s proactive response to learner needs

What is Differentiated Instruction?

Carol Ann Tomlinson, an acknowledged expert in this area, recently defined differentiated instruction in this way: “Differentiation is a teacher’s proactive response to learner needs shaped by mindset and guided by five elements of differentiation—Environment, Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, and Classroom Management. Teachers can differentiate through content, process, product, and affect/environment according to the student’s readiness, interest, and learning profile.” There are several factors in successful differentiated instruction:

- Meaningful work, authentic inquiry
- Flexible pacing and grouping
- Emphasis on thinking skills and allowing for a range of responses
- Allowing for student choice
- Ongoing assessment, varied assessment

In truth, the concepts behind differentiated instruction are not new—many teachers consider this “plain old good teaching.” Many of the best techniques and resources for differentiating instruction are already in use in classrooms today. However, what could be revolutionary is actually being able to accomplish differentiation in today’s busy classrooms. When looking at how to ensure that all learners have access to content and are able to make progress, it is clear that we need new ways to make differentiated instruction easier and more effective.

Best Practices in Action: Pearson Social Studies

The team of authors, experts, and teacher collaborators who developed Pearson Social Studies programs believe that:

- All students should have access to rigorous content and respectful work;
- Materials should allow content, process, and product to be differentiated according to students’ readiness, interest, and learning profile;
- All levels of learners should be supported in making substantial growth, there should be ongoing assessment of this growth, and students should be assessed in a variety of ways; and
- Differentiated instruction should be possible for teachers to accomplish within the resources and time they have.

Pearson’s new Social Studies programs on Realize were designed for this exact purpose.
Differentiation is variation of instruction

One key element of effective differentiation is to vary content, process, product, and affect/environment to address student differences in readiness, interests, and learner profiles. Instead of eliminating access to complex text by giving students lower level texts, Pearson Social Studies offers support for varying instruction in multiple ways. Topic and lesson materials are chunked into smaller, manageable pieces, and comprehensive instructions, rubrics, and extra support are provided for assignments. All materials are enhanced with rigorous higher-order thinking questions. Explicit instruction is provided for reading in the content area, especially through extra support for Primary Source activities. All digital activities focus on the core content for each lesson, with an emphasis on tested standards. In this way, teachers can be assured that no matter which resources students use, they are helped to focus on the “key takeaways” that they need to master for that lesson. Here are some of the many resources in Pearson Social Studies programs that teachers can use to vary instruction:

### Content
- Student Text
- Lesson Summaries (English and Spanish)
- Audio Support (English and Spanish)
- Editable Presentations
- Flipped Videos
- Interactive Features
- Core Concepts

### Process
- Interactive Reading Notepad
- 21st Century Skill Tutorials
- Active Classroom Strategies
- Topic Inquiry: Projects, Discussions, DBQ Essays

### Product
- Lesson Synthesis Activities
- Quizzes
- Topic Synthesis Activities
- Topic Tests
- Benchmark Tests
- Topic Inquiry End Products

### Affect/Environment
- My Story Videos
- Essential Question Activities
- Start Up Activities
- Classroom Discussion Board
- Rubrics
- Professional Development
Differentiated instruction should begin with helping students make a personal connection to the content they are about to learn because this gives them a kind of “mental velcro” that allows it to stick in their brains over time.

Professional development on differentiating instruction is provided in the Differentiated Instruction Overview in the course. It gives examples of how to use these resources for different populations.

**Differentiation is intentional planning**

One of the key elements of effective differentiated instruction is proactive, up-front planning for all learners. According to Tomlinson, half of the battle of delivering great differentiation is doing the up-front planning required. If you plan instruction by thinking ahead about the needs of all learners, then it makes instruction for the whole class much more effective.

**A model for all learners** Based upon this guidance, our team developed a new framework of instruction to address all learners—Connect, Investigate, Synthesize, and Demonstrate:

- **In Connect,** students get ready to learn by making a personal connection or linking to prior knowledge.
- **During Investigate,** students acquire key knowledge and practice key skills using narrative text, interactivities, and Active Classroom exercises.
- **Synthesize** helps students extend their understanding by applying what they learned in a quick “pull-it-all-together” exercise before they move on.
- **Demonstrate** gives students feedback about which objectives they learned and which they still need to master.

This simple model provides continuous guidance to teachers and students through on-going assessment.

**Pacing** One of the key challenges identified with traditional programs is how to get through the content teachers need to cover by the end of the year. Therefore, this program incorporates support for flexible pacing as well as many tools to save teachers valuable in-class time for differentiation and higher-order thinking. Topic and Lesson Organizers show pacing and Flipped Videos allow you to assign prework. Quick Instruction suggestions for each lesson objective help you see how to move through content rapidly, and Further Instruction suggestions allow you to go deeper with each objective.

**Specific ELL and DI activities**

Teacher Support provides an easy-to-use organizer that provides an overview of each topic with pacing suggestions. It also offers in-depth teaching suggestions for the teaching of every topic, lesson, and resource—including 4 levels of English Language Learner suggestions and Differentiated Instruction.
Instruction suggestions for different student populations.

**Active Classroom strategies:** To engage all of the learners in the class and boost participation, teachers can use Active Classroom strategies. Paired with every Interactive Feature in Pearson Social Studies programs, these strategies harness research on best practices to increase participation, raise student energy levels and attentiveness, check understanding, and differentiate instruction. Active Classroom strategies are used to facilitate a quick, in-class experience that covers and reinforces core content. They also provide teachers with the opportunity to model critical thinking skills and to encourage students to support their arguments with evidence from text and primary sources.

**Differentiation is focused on the student**

**Student experience** Connecting to students’ own experiences and prior knowledge is one of the most effective ways to provide differentiated instruction. Brain research shows that making a personal and emotional connection to content helps a person retain that content. By creating this connection, participation, engagement, and understanding are boosted for all levels of learners. For this reason, each topic of instruction starts off with a My Story Video. Developed in partnership with NBC Learn, these videos tell the stories of people who had personal experiences related to the content students will be learning about. In addition, teachers can connect to students’ own experiences through essential questions. An Essential Question posed at the beginning of each topic helps students connect to prior knowledge, develop curiosity, and make connections to other disciplines or the real world. Using essential questions to create intellectual meaning and stories to create emotional meaning have both been shown to increase long-term understanding and retention of learning.

**Student ownership** At the most fundamental level, using a digital course provides students with the element of choice and encourages ownership of their own learning. 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, each student can choose how to navigate the content and what assets to replay or use as study tools. Providing multiple ways to learn increases accessibility because students can interact on their own with digital content, and it gives them the tools and resources that they need to proceed at their own pace. Even if a teacher assigns the Flipped Video to the entire class, having access to this video at any time means an individual student can choose to rewatch it, turn on closed captioning, stop and start, and replay key portions as many times as they need in order to understand. No longer does a student have to rely solely on in-class reviews for a test—every learner can review content in whatever mode that helps them retain content best.

**Differentiation as inquiry creates meaningful work**

Beyond just delivering the content through multiple modalities, teachers can frame instruction with inquiry for maximum impact. Over the past ten years, there has been a growing body of research about the effectiveness of inquiry-based instruction for meeting the needs of all learners. Project-Based Learning has been shown to have significant impact on students’ content and skills mastery and their application to real-world challenges. Many teachers are using Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a way to help all of their students learn, apply, and retain content knowledge.

Preparing students for college, career, and civic life means preparing them to take part in meaningful conversations in which

>“[We need to] build students’ academic communication skills, which are the skills that tend not to be practiced in social situations outside of school, particularly in low-income homes and communities that do not speak mainstream dialects of English. These highly valued oral skills are not emphasized in most state tests, curriculum programs, or intervention efforts, yet academic and professional success depends on them. They are major gatekeeper skills, and too many students who lack them are being stopped and turned away at this gate.”

—Zwiers and Crawford
If the number one enemy of differentiation is **time**, what if new technology could provide quicker ways to assign different materials to classes, groups, and individual students?

They can formulate an argument or point of view, elaborate and clarify their point, support their ideas with examples, build on or challenge someone else’s ideas, listen, paraphrase someone else’s ideas, and summarize conversation points. To this end, Pearson partnered with the Buck Institute and Constitutional Rights Foundation to provide step-by-step resources for three different forms of inquiry—Project-Based Learning team projects, Document-Based Question writing assignments, and Civic Discussion activities.

Designed to be accomplished without adding a lot of extra time, this overarching Topic Inquiry is introduced at the beginning of the topic, worked on throughout the topic, and used as a performance-based, authentic assessment at the end of the topic. Each Inquiry comes with step-by-step instructions and rubrics that support all learners. The Inquiry was designed so teachers could assign only the ones they want to use, as well as to provide suggestions for varying the end product for different students or to make it less technology dependent.

**Differentiation is ongoing assessment**

To differentiate successfully, teachers need to measure each student’s progress and adapt instruction to further this progress. All levels of learners should be supported in making substantial growth, there should be ongoing assessment of this growth, and students should be assessed in a variety of ways.

**Formative assessment** Each lesson in Pearson Social Studies provides a quick auto-graded quiz that gives your students instant feedback about which objectives they learned and which they still need to master. This formative assessment provides each student with remediation recommendations based on their individual performance.

**Summative tests** At the end of every topic, there is a summative test. This test provides a more comprehensive assessment that includes primary sources, maps, and other visual stimulus, and rigorous open-ended writing prompts.

**Portfolio and authentic assessment** The student work throughout the year in the Pearson Social Studies programs can be used to build assessment portfolios. Topic and lesson Synthesis activities are perfect to show growth over time. End products of the Topic Inquiry assignments—Projects, Civic Discussions, and Document-Based Question essays—are excellent examples of student work that show understanding and standards mastery.

**What if Differentiated Instruction Was Easier?**

If there is a gap between what we know we should be doing and what we are actually able to accomplish in today’s classrooms, what is the fundamental issue at the heart of this problem? **Time**. Due to growing class sizes, reduced planning time, and shrinking resources, most teachers find it nearly impossible to select and provide the appropriate materials for each individual student within the time they have available. Using the current way of doing things, it takes too long for teachers to continuously assign, assess, and remediate content and skills to
make them accessible for every student. However, due to breakthroughs in the infrastructure needed for personalizing learning through technology, teachers and students can reimagine how they teach and learn social studies now.

**Quick ways to differentiate assignments** Based on the principle of flexible pacing and grouping, Pearson Social Studies programs on Realize allow the teacher to quickly and easily create groups and make assignments to whole class, group, and individuals. Teachers can set up different groups and assign students to appropriate groups, such as English Language Learners, Above Level, On Level, and Below Level, as well as Teams. Then the teacher can easily assign certain resources to each group. For example, in just a few clicks, a teacher could create a group of students who are English Language Learners, and assign that group to read a text selection and do an ELL activity from the Teacher Support. Or a teacher could assign the same activity, such as to explore an Interactive Gallery of primary source images, but give modified assignments for each group, such as researching a related image and explaining the connection between the images for the advanced group, finding a related text excerpt for the on-level group, and capturing the main idea of the gallery with supporting examples for the below-level group. Each student can be in multiple groups, making it easy for teachers to create heterogeneous teams and to support students who have several special needs at once (for example, to support a child who is gifted and has a learning disability).

**Assessing progress with built-in data dashboards** One of the most powerful uses of technology is to provide instant access to data based on individual progress. Using Pearson’s Realize platform, teachers can see how they are doing and make adjustments and decision based on performance before summative tests. The system generates an easy-to-understand visual dashboard mastery report. Teachers can use this data to ensure that students have acquired core content and identify those areas in which re-teaching is needed for mastery.

**Personalized remediation for every student** Even more powerfully, in addition to showing progress towards mastery, the Realize system suggests resources that teachers can assign to students to help them remediate content based on the standards they have not yet mastered. Teachers can even set up this remediation to happen automatically. Providing this level of support for different students would be very hard to achieve without the computing power of this integrated system.
Integrated professional development  The teachers on Pearson’s team made sure that professional development was included as a key part of the online teaching resources. Professional development on differentiating instruction is provided in the Differentiated Instruction Overview, giving examples of how to use these resources for different populations. There are also high-quality professional development training modules that teachers can access 24/7 for free on topics such as Project-Based Learning, Civic Discussions, Literacy, and 21st Century Skills. In addition, teachers can access in-depth technology training at myPearsonTraining.com.

Pearson Commitment

In conclusion, Pearson is committed to helping educators offer effective differentiated instruction. Accessibility is not about offering the same thing at different levels, but ensuring that each student’s work is interesting, appropriate, well supported, and worthy. Pearson respects teachers’ dedication and time, so we built instruction materials that make it easier to achieve true differentiation. We invite you to reimagine personalized teaching and learning using our new Social Studies programs.

REFERENCES


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