



# Strategies to Differentiate Instruction

October 4, 2021

Rachael Havey – Director,  
Professional Learning

# Knowledge is Opportunity



Cognia is a global nonprofit that has the knowledge to help schools improve outcomes for all learners.



# Our Vision

To impact and inspire education providers to advance and enable pathways for success for all learners

# Our Mission

To serve as a trusted partner in advancing learning

# We know schools because we're in schools



Accreditation  
& Certification



Assessment



Improvement  
Solutions



Professional  
Learning

# Learning targets



- **Define** differentiated instruction
- **Explore** differences between a differentiated classroom and a traditional learning environment
- **Gain** a deeper understanding of key components of differentiated instruction
- **Increase** level of awareness of specific differentiated instructional strategies through modeling and strategy debriefing

# Activity: Formative assessment / entry slip

What words do you associate with differentiated instruction?



# Activity: Deep definition

What is your definition of differentiated instruction?



# Activity: Deep definition

- Pass your definition of differentiated instruction to the person on your **left**.
- **Underline** the most important word or phrase in the definition.
- Pass to your **left**. Repeat. You can star or circle. Repeat.
- Create a group definition ensuring all underlined words and phrases are used.





“ There is no one book, video, presenter, or website that will show everyone how to differentiate instruction. . . . Instead, let’s realize what differentiation really is: *highly effective teaching*, which is complex and interwoven; no one element defining it.”

Rick Wormeli



“ [Differentiated instruction is] not an approach but a basic tenet of good instruction, in which a teacher develops relationships with his or her students and presents materials and assignments in ways that respond to the student’s interests and needs.”

Carol Ann Tomlinson



# Strategy debriefing: Entry/exit slip and deep definition (classroom example)



## **Entry Slips/Exit Slips**

Learners individually write responses to questions/problems posed either at the beginning or end of class. It is used as a formative assessment; student understanding of a concept can be quickly evaluated.

## **Deep Definition Activity**

Learners review others' definitions, examine for key words, and use key words to create a group definition. This can be used as a cooperative learning activity to drive individual understanding.

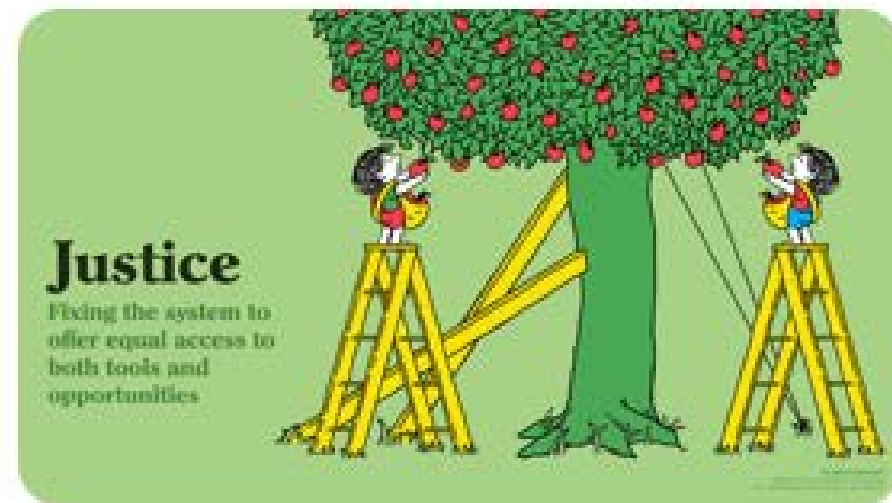
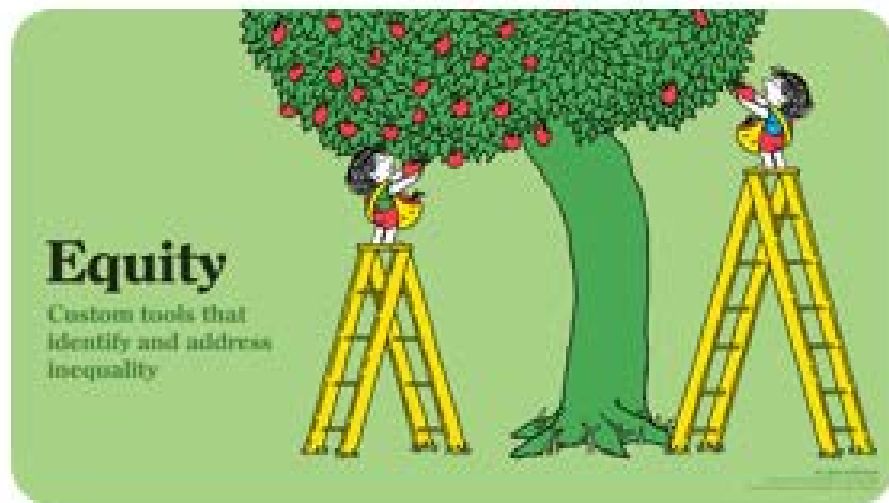
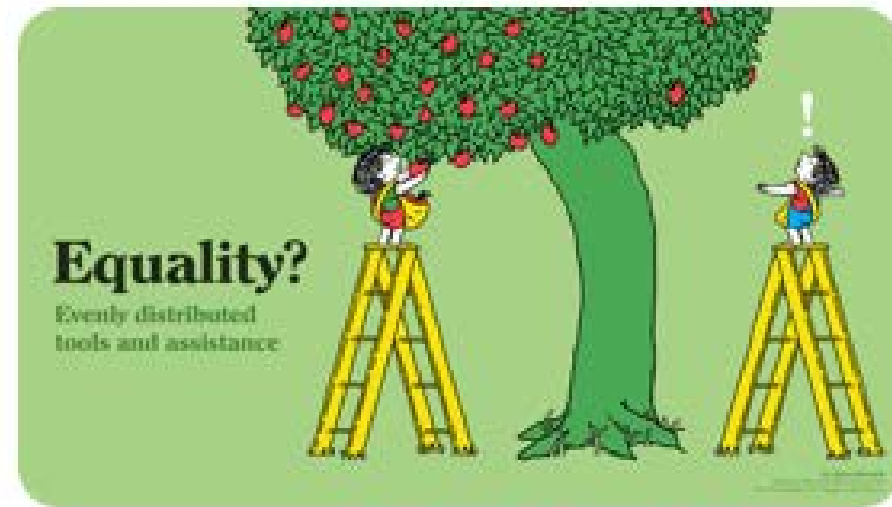
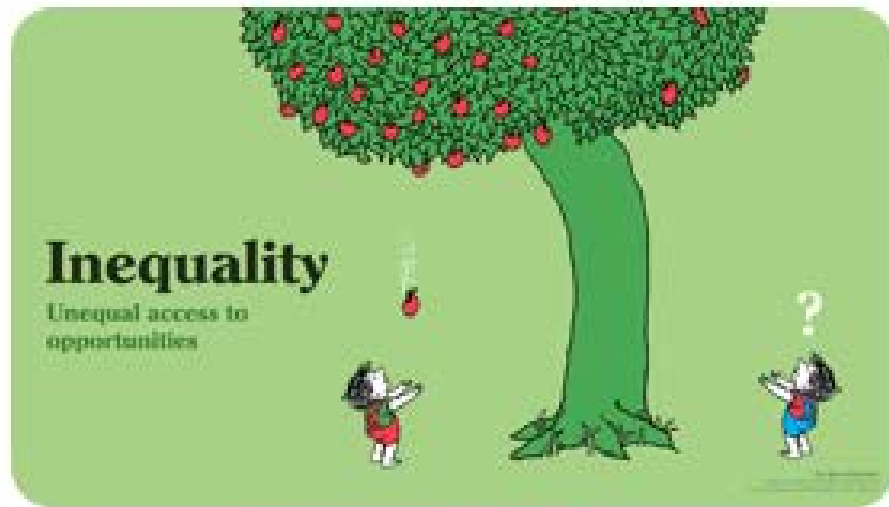
# Why differentiate?

- 25% to 37% of students learn in “spite of us.”
- 15% to 25% of students are identified as having some exceptionality and receive additional resources.
- 37% to 50% learn “because of us” based on teacher skills/efforts, appropriate instruction, and assessment aligned to Core Content State Standards.
- Differentiation allows us to give all diverse learners in our classrooms “the opportunity to learn to their full potential.”

(adapted from Gregory and Chapman, 2013)



# Activity: Fair vs Equal

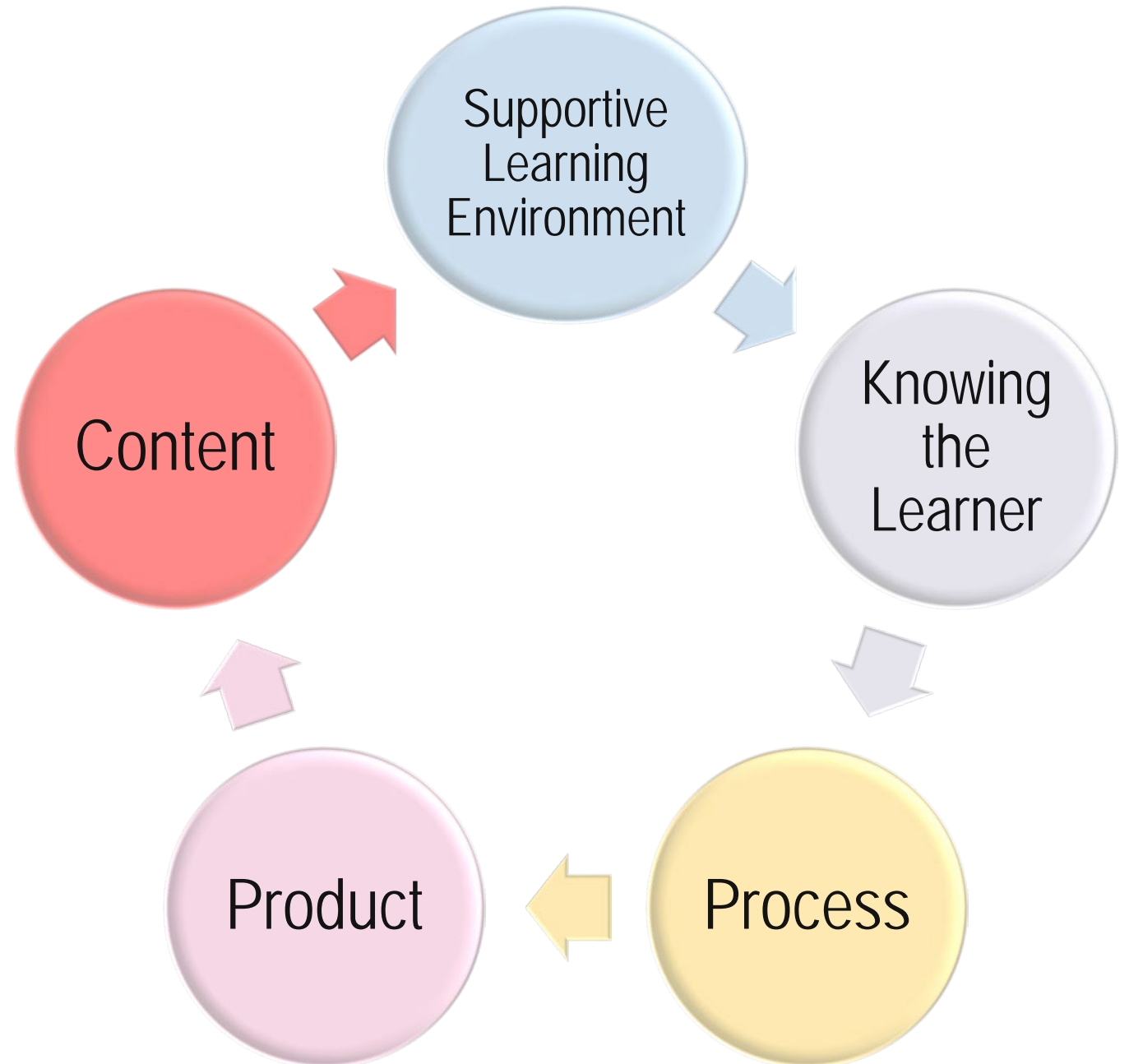


# Activity: Barriers

- Students will be unprepared for tests.
- Differentiation equals individualization.
- Differentiation means unbalanced workloads.
- Lack of mastery at the same time as classmates means lack of credit.
- “I taught it. It is up to the student to learn it.”
- Students won't be able to compete in the real world.
- If we don't differentiate, students will toughen up.
- There is only one way to differentiate.



# Key components for differentiating instruction



# Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool<sup>®</sup> (eleot<sup>®</sup>): Supportive Learning Environment indicators

1. Learners demonstrate a sense of community that is positive, cohesive, engaged, and purposeful.
2. Learners take risks in learning (without fear of negative feedback).
3. Learners are supported by the teacher, their peers, and/or other resources to understand content and accomplish tasks.
4. Learners demonstrate a congenial and supportive relationship with their teacher.



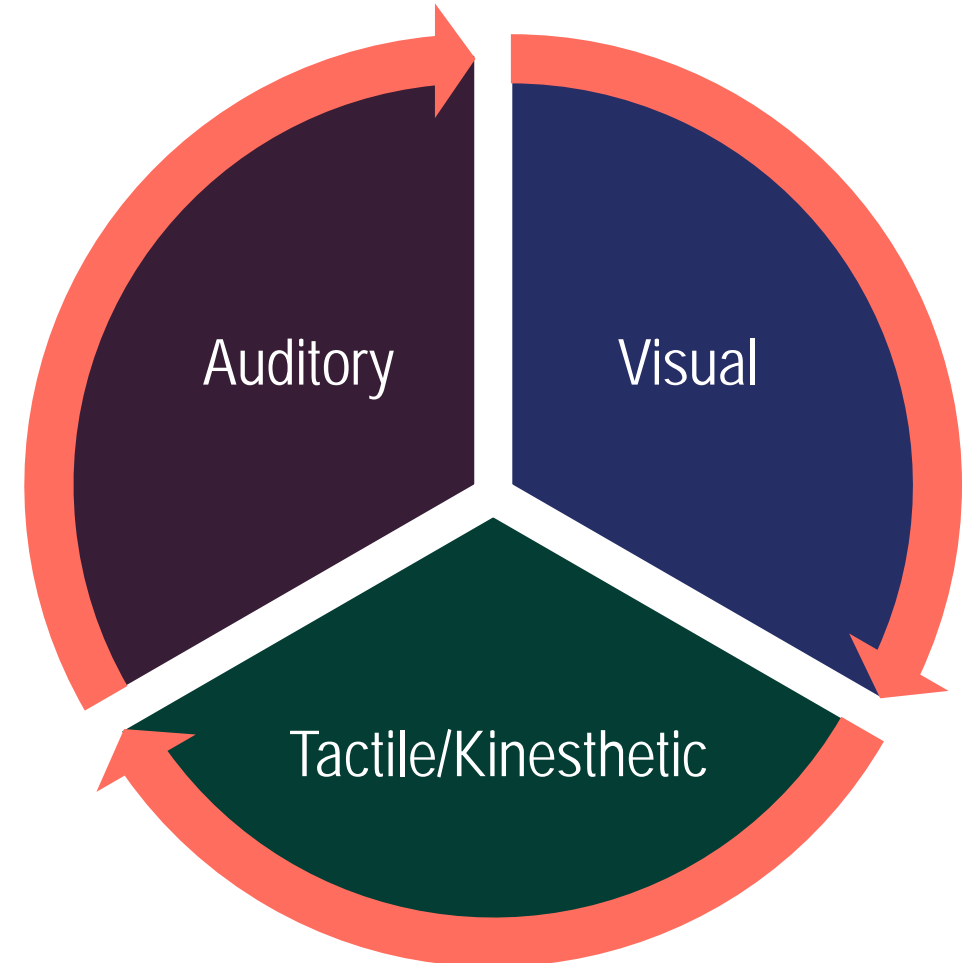
# Knowing the learner: Learning profile components

## Learner interest

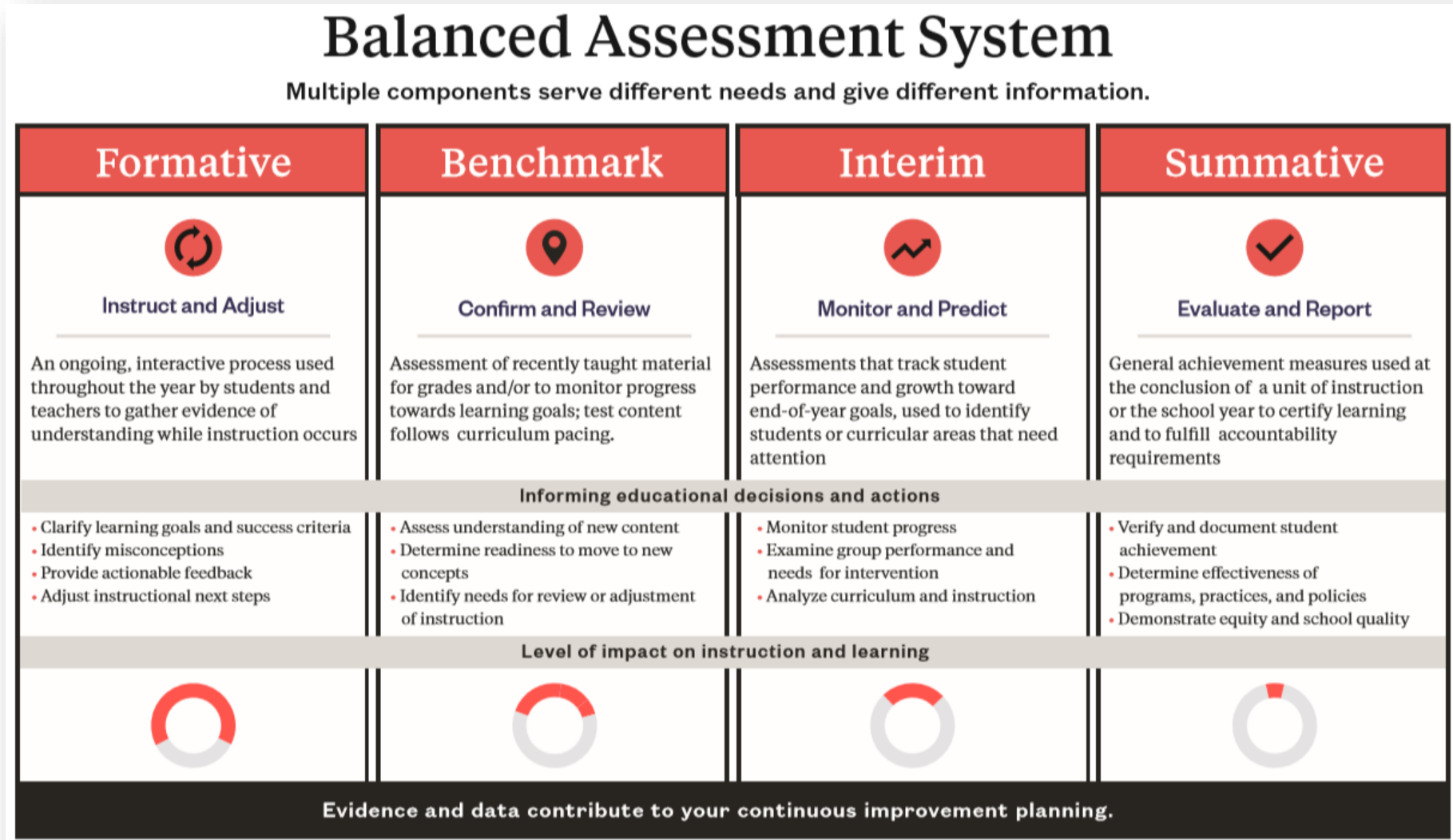
When a topic connects to what students like to do, **engagement deepens** as they willingly spend time thinking, dialoguing, and creating ideas in meaningful ways.

(McCarthy, 2017)

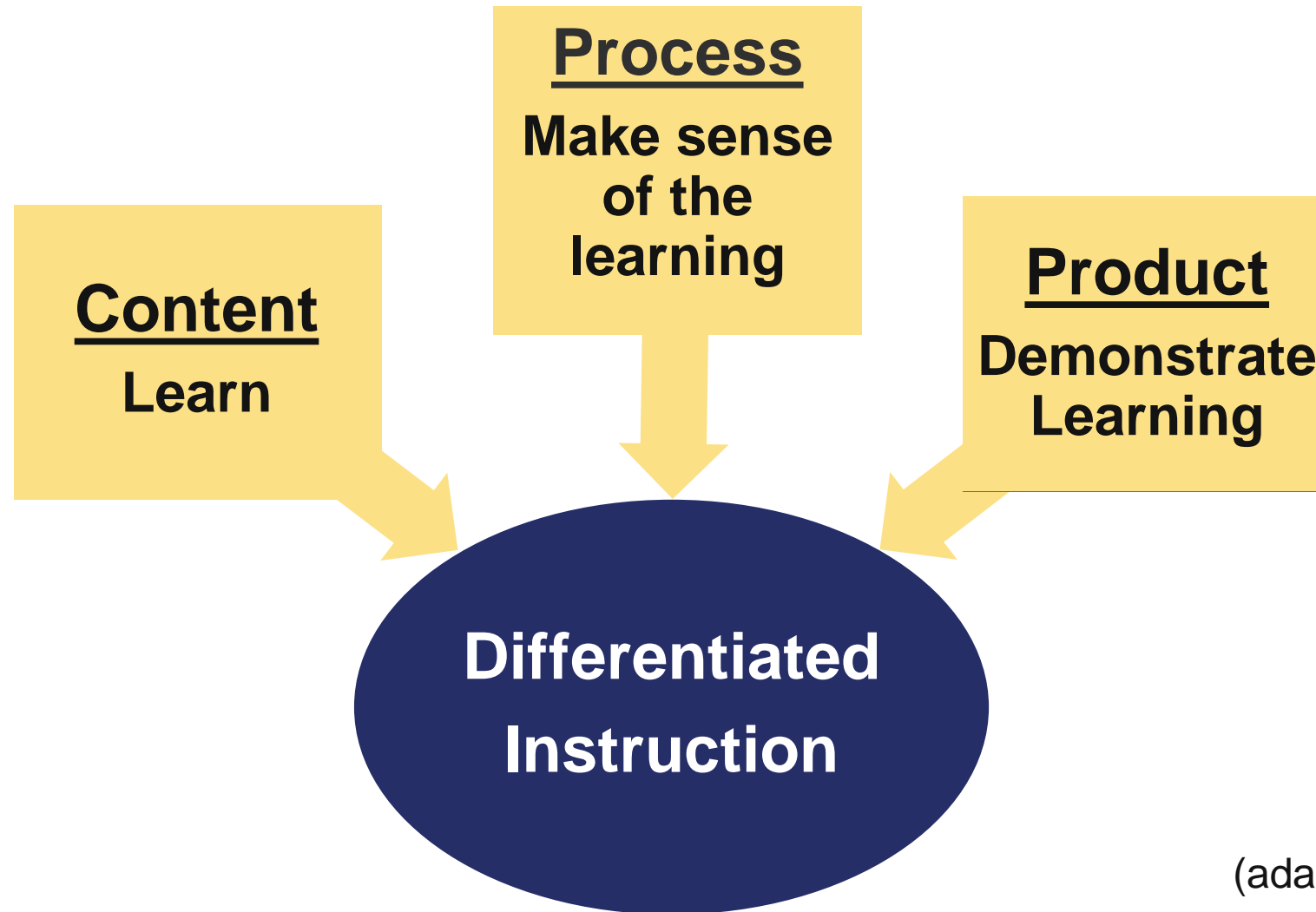
## Learning style preferences



# Knowing the learner: Learner readiness



# Differentiating instruction



(adapted from Tomlinson)

# Learner profile card activity (classroom example)



Rate each 1–4: (1 = do not enjoy;  
4 = love this/very good at it)

- \_\_\_ Reading
- \_\_\_ Writing
- \_\_\_ Math
- \_\_\_ Social Studies
- \_\_\_ Science

Circle how you learn best:

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| Reading | Hearing |
| Seeing  | Doing   |
| Acting  | Asking  |

Circle how you like to work:

- |             |                |
|-------------|----------------|
| Alone       | With a partner |
| Small group | Whole group    |

List 3 interests you have outside of school:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

What is something you would like me to know about you?



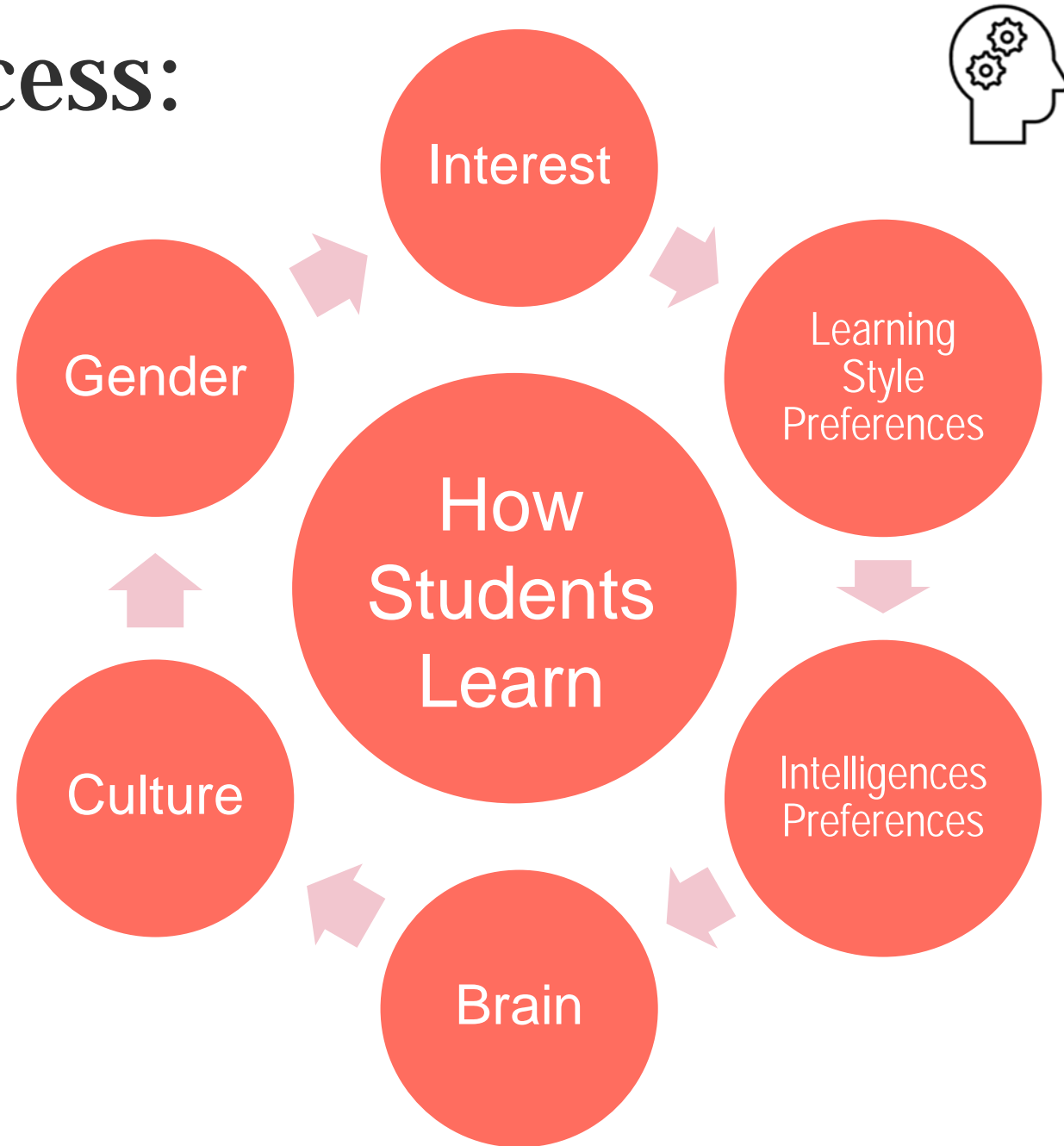
# Differentiating process: Cooperative learning structures

**To be effective, the structures must include the following:**

- Positive interdependence
- Individual and group accountability
- Interpersonal and small group skills
- Face-to-face interaction
- Group processing

# Differentiating process: Using graphic organizers

Graphic organizers provide a visual representation that allows learners to see patterns, connect information, and determine how information is related.



# Differentiating product: Choice boards



Add two formative assessments to your lesson.	Include cooperative learning structures in your lesson. Make sure to include the steps for completing the structure.	Write a student-friendly learning target for your lesson.
Include a strategy for scaffolding in your lesson.	FREE CHOICE – In your lesson plan, include a differentiated instructional strategy of your choice.	Develop a cubing activity for your lesson.
Create a choice board or a contract for learners to demonstrate what they have learned.	Incorporate technology into your lesson.	Create a graphic organizer to use in your lesson.

- Allow learner choice
- Allow learners to take ownership of their learning



# Strategy debriefing

- Learner profile cards
- Cooperative learning structures
- Graphic organizers
- Choice boards



# Final thoughts

Based on a 2005 study, teachers were provided training on differentiated instruction. After 3 years, “the vast majority of these teachers never moved beyond traditional direct lectures and seat work for students.”

(Spark, 2015)



# Learning targets review



- **Define** differentiated instruction
- **Explore** differences between a differentiated classroom and a traditional learning environment
- **Gain** a deeper understanding of key components of differentiated instruction
- **Increase** level of awareness of specific differentiated instructional strategies through modeling and strategy debriefing

# Final activity: Choose your exit slip



Why differentiate?

- Bumper sticker
- Tweet
- Figurative language

# Thank you.

Learn more at [cognia.org](https://cognia.org)



# How Cognia Helps You

Want more information?

Contact your Global Services  
Director, Dr. Jennifer Horvath,  
[jennifer.horvath@cognia.org](mailto:jennifer.horvath@cognia.org)

Contact me,  
Rachael Havey,  
[rachael.havey@cognia.org](mailto:rachael.havey@cognia.org)

