

Differentiated Curriculum

Quality not Quantity

“Sooner or later, we must realize there is no station, no one place to arrive once and for all. The true ‘Joy of Life’ is in the trip.” By: Robert J. Hastings

If we want students to grow we have to give them material that is a little too hard (Challenging) and then support them along their journey. The trick is to keep the scales balanced between effort and success. People don't mind working if success is at the end. When challenges and skills are in balance the activities become their own reward.

How can the classroom teacher adapt instruction to provide a more challenging experience for students?

- ✓ According to his/her developmental level, involve the students in planning, working at, and evaluating tasks.
- ✓ Encourage personal growth and self-realization through the development of positive values and attitudes.
- ✓ Use teaching/learning strategies which emphasize a higher-level thinking ability.
- ✓ Provide tasks that include open-ended learning activities, small group work, and discussion.
- ✓ Develop learning-process skills that enhance problem-finding and solving abilities through independent projects.
- ✓ Maintain a learning environment that provides opportunity, materials, and a climate suitable for developing creativity.
- ✓ Utilize materials, media, and resources in order to stimulate in-depth learning.

Developing Differentiated Learning Experiences

There are two main areas of concern for the classroom teacher in meeting the needs of a gifted child:

1. Assessing individual needs and preparing an individual program plan.
2. Providing differentiated learning experiences based on unique traits, needs and abilities of the students. The teacher needs to deal with effective ways to provide differentiated learning experiences in both the cognitive and affective areas. Plan for individual needs by considering these factors:
 - Level of maturity
 - Prior experiences
 - Interests, abilities and behavioral traits
 - Preferred learning modality
 - Level of skills development

Differentiated learning occurs when the following conditions are tailored to meet these needs on a personalized basis.

- degree of student involvement in planning and evaluation
- content, structure and format of learning experiences
- level and type of resources and materials
- affective needs, support services and guidance
- out of class experiences

There are many strategies for accomplishing differentiation. Here are a few to get you started.

Tiered Assignments

All students work toward the same goal, but activities are geared toward each student's level of understanding.

Telescope	Covering the same amount of materials or activities in less time, thereby allowing more time for enrichment activities or projects that better suit the interests, needs, and readiness levels of gifted students.
Enrichment	Activities that add or go beyond the existing curriculum. Activities may occur in the classroom or in a separate setting.
Flexible Grouping	An instructional strategy where students are grouped together to receive appropriately challenging instruction. True flexible grouping permits students to move in and out of various grouping patterns, depending on the course content. Grouping can be determined by ability, size, and/or interests.
Curriculum Compacting	After showing a level of proficiency in the basic curriculum, a student can then be allowed to exchange instructional time for other learning experiences.

Start small. Select a content area and review a particular unit or lesson plan you have used successfully, considering these points:

- How are the levels of cognitive complexity utilized in activities? (Use Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide)
- How could materials, resources and experiences be made challenging?
- In what ways can the student be involved in planning and evaluating tasks?
- How can questions be structured to promote creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking abilities?
- What additional opportunities could be provided by independent study on special interest topics?
- How can opportunities for learning be extended beyond the classroom?
- To what extent can activities be developed that encourage students to apply skills and interrelated ideas?

- Do the learning experiences enable the child to interact positively with others?
- Will the child gain in self-concept and be more able to cope in an independent manner as a result of these learning experiences?
- Do the activities encourage the child to develop and act upon his/her own positive values and beliefs?

Whenever possible make the learning relevant. Students question why they have to study the material provided. Be prepared for this question and when possible include activities that allow students to discover the real-life application through their activities and exploration.