

Los Angeles Unified School District

Gifted / Talented

Programs

Student Integration Services

Brief Overview: What is Differentiation?



“Differentiation is not a strategy to be used from time to time, not an approach or a pedagogical bag of tricks. It’s a way of thinking about teaching and learning.”

Tomlinson, 2000

DIFFERENTIATION

The teacher creates differentiation by first recognizing the student's level of skill, knowledge, or interest, and then by encouraging, planning for, and facilitating the student's progress during in-depth study of a topic, ideas, etc.

Sometimes it's easier to define what differentiation is not:

- Differentiation is not intended to be a reward or punishment for being gifted; it is the right of all students to have an appropriate curriculum responsive to needs, interests, and abilities.
- Differentiation is not intended to deliberately segregate students from each other.
- Differentiation is not intended to be curricular experiences that are merely flamboyant or labeled as “fun” or entertaining without educational value.
- Differentiation does not consist of disjointed activities; it involves a comprehensive curriculum.

Sometimes it's easier to define what differentiation is not:

- Differentiation is not INDIVIDUALISM. It isn't a different lesson plan for each student each day.
- Differentiation is not giving all students the same work most of the time.
- Differentiation is not students spending significant amounts of time teaching material they have mastered to others' who have not mastered it.
- Giving more of the same work to advanced/gifted learners who have already mastered the concept.
- Differentiation is not ALL THE TIME. Often it is preferable for students to work as a whole class.

Susan Allan

What do the Gifted Need in the Classroom?

Gifted students learn the same standards, themes, units, and/or concepts as the rest of the class.

They simply require regular opportunities to become engaged with learning activities that require more depth and complexity.

Teachers who differentiate have the following understanding:

Carol Ann Tomlinson

THAT KIDS IN YOUR CLASS DIFFER FROM EACH OTHER

The need for systematically assessing of where the students are

That kids must have at least two different choices on how to do things and that the teacher must have at least two different ways to teach this skill...

Grading to show growth, show kids where they are

Differentiation is a Two-Step Process:

FIRST: Analyze the degree of challenge and variety in your current instructional plans...

THEN: Modify, adapt, or design new approaches to instruction in response to students' needs, interests, and learning preferences.

The differentiated curriculum facilitates gifted students in their ability to meet and exceed state core curriculum and standards.

TO MEET

Label and define the characters, setting, plot, problems, of endings that distinguish each genre studied.

This example represents the expected end to be achieved by all students.

TO EXCEED

Trace and describe the origin of the pattern distinguishing each genre studied and define the societal trends, author perspectives, and literary rules affecting each genre studied.

This example presents the expected end to be achieved by gifted students:

- *Higher level thinking: critical thinking*
- *Depth and complexity of content*

Differentiation of Instruction is a teacher's response to learner's needs guided by general principles of differentiation, such as:

Teachers can differentiate

CONTENT

What are students learning about?

PROCESS

What level of thinking is required?

PROCESS

How will the results of learning be represented?

according to

READINESS

INTERESTS

**LEARNING
PROFILE**

CONTENT+PROCESS+PRODUCT=THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Example of a learning activity described in one sentence: Compare and contrast a scene in a novel with the movie version of the same scene by presenting your ideas in a storyboard of words and pictures.

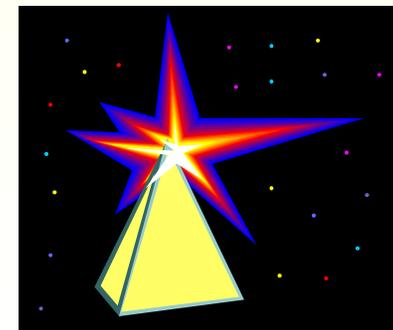
Content = written and film versions of a scene from a novel

Process = compare and contrast
(analysis level of challenge)

Product = storyboard of words and pictures (verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial product)

...through a range of instructional and management strategies and practices such as:

- Modifying Content, Process, Product
- Embedding Depth and Complexity
- Flexible Grouping
- Tiered Assignments
- Independent Projects
- Interest Centers
- Learning Centers
- Varying Questions
- Compacting



You may be differentiating already!

Start where
you are.

Good differentiation does not require throwing out all your planning from the past two, five, ten, or fifteen years.

Many teachers have been using differentiation strategies without even knowing it.

Good differentiation means examining how well you're **providing variety** and **challenge** in learning, identifying who among your students is best served by your current plans, and **modifying those plans** as needed so more students can be successful learners.

Resources

- California Association for the Gifted (2002). *Meeting the Standards, A Guide to Developing Services for Gifted Students*. Whittier, CA: CAG
- Heacox, D. (2002). *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Coil, C. (2004). *Activities and Assessments for the Differentiated Classroom*. Pieces of Learning Publishers.

