Key Principles of a Differentiated Classroom

**Differentiation** is a teaching concept in which the classroom teacher plans for the diverse needs of students. The teacher must consider such differences as the students':

- learning styles, skill levels, and rates
- language proficiency
- background experiences and knowledge
- motivation
- ability to attend
- social and emotional development
- levels of abstraction
- physical needs

Key Principles of a Differentiated Classroom

1. The teacher is clear about what matters in the content area.
2. The teacher understands, appreciates, and builds upon student differences.
3. Assessment and instruction are inseparable.
4. The teacher adjusts content, process, and product in response to student readiness, interests, and learning profiles.
5. All students participate in respectful work.
6. Students and teachers are collaborators in learning.
7. Goals are maximum growth and continued success.
8. Flexibility is the hallmark of a differentiated classroom.

In a differentiated program:

- differences are studied as a basis of planning.
- student differences shape curriculum.
- preassessment is typical.
- multiple learning materials are available.
- multiple options for students are offered.
- students make sense of information.
- emphasis on concepts and connections is made.
- there is variable pacing.
- students aid in setting goals and standards.
- varied grading criteria are used.
- excellence as an individual effort is honored.

A differentiated program is not:

- "individualized instruction”*
- "chaotic”*
- "another way of providing homogeneous grouping”*
- "tailoring the same suit of clothes”*
- more tasks and assignments but different ways of providing learning experiences

From How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms by Carol Ann Tomlinson
Effective Teaching Strategies for Differentiation in a Mixed -Ability Classroom

Appropriate instructional strategies for gifted learners include all of the strategies that are appropriate for other learners as well, but it is what the teacher does with the strategies that makes them challenging for gifted students. Many strategies can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the different needs of students in the class. By making use of materials and resources more advanced than those commonly found at grade level, teachers will be better able to differentiate instruction to the advanced student’s level of interest and readiness.

When teachers differentiate instruction so that it is challenging for the gifted, they sometimes can change what is taught, how students make sense of ideas, and how the students show what they have learned.

Most instructional strategies have some value in working with the gifted, but those that allow for more open-ended and productive learning are probably most beneficial.

**Allowing for multiple right answers:** open-ended assignments that focus on the process of solving the problem and/or critical thinking

**Attention to social issues, real world experiences, and community projects:** performance assessment tasks, role-plays, simulations, etc. based on authentic situations of interest to students

**Chunking:** breaking assignments/activities into smaller, more manageable parts and providing more structured directions for each part.

**Compacting:** a process that involves preassessing students, giving them credit for what they already know and allowing them to move ahead in the curriculum.

**Emphasis on Thinking skills:** giving students the opportunity to think aloud, discuss their thinking with their peers, and reflect on their thinking in journals.

**Developing student responsibility:** students help develop the evaluation rubrics, write project proposals, and complete self and group evaluations.

**Flexible grouping:** matching students to skill work by virtue of readiness, not with the assumption that all need the same task, computation skill, writing assignment, etc. Movement among groups is common, based on readiness on a given skill and growth in that skill.

**Flexible pacing:** allows for differences in the students' ability to master the curricula.

**Goal setting and planning:** involving students in their individual goal setting and the planning of learning activities, one to one with the teacher.

**Group investigation:** students working in cooperative mixed-ability groups on open-ended tasks or in like-ability groups working on appropriately challenging tasks. Usually the focus is on the process and thinking skills.
**Hands-on projects/activities:** use of manipulatives.

**High-level questions:** questions that draw on advanced levels of information, requiring leaps of understanding and challenging thinking.

**Independent study:** providing students with the opportunity to work independently to investigate topics of interest to them.

**Interdisciplinary/integrated curricula around a theme:** thematic units which make connections across multiple curricular areas.

**Interest centers:** stations of academic activities based on students' interests which are completed independently and at their own pace.

**Learning contracts:** a proposal prior to beginning a project or unit in which the resources, steps toward completion, and evaluation criteria are agreed upon with the teacher.

**Long term projects:** an enrichment opportunity in which students investigate concepts, issues, topics or individuals.

**Mentorships/Apprenticeships:** Students work with a resource teacher, media specialist, parent volunteer, or community member to develop and carry out all or part of a project or task. This is also a useful way to help students develop skills of production in a field and to develop career awareness.

**Preassessment:** a way to determine what students know about a topic before it is taught. It should be used regularly in all curricular areas. Teachers can use the information gained in preassessment to make instructional decisions about student strengths and needs. Preassessment will help the teacher determine flexible grouping patterns as well as which students are ready for advance instruction. Here are a few examples of preassessment strategies:

- Teacher prepared pretests
- Graphic organizers
- Writing prompts/samples
- Questioning
- Guess Box
- Picture Interpretation
- Prediction
- Teacher observation/checklists
- Student demonstrations and discussions
- Initiating activities
- Informational surveys/Questionnaires/Inventories
- Student interviews
- Student products and work samples
- Self-evaluations
- Portfolio analysis
- Game activities
- Show of hands to determine understanding: Every Pupil Response
- Drawing related to topic or content
- Standardized test information
- ISM data
- Anticipation journals

**Shared Inquiry:** a distinctive method of learning in which participants search for answers to fundamental questions raised by a text.

**Student choice:** providing students opportunities to choose the content, process or product that is of most interest (and most appropriate)

**Student generated criteria for tasks/products:** a guide for students as they create rubrics

**Tasks and products designed for multiple intelligences/learning styles:** designed to allow all students to tap into their strengths and preferences to encourage maximum motivation and engagement.

**Tiered instruction:** using varied levels of activities to ensure that students explore ideas at a level that builds on their prior knowledge and prompts continued growth. Student groups use varied approaches to exploration of essential ideas.

**Use of computer programs:** a wide range of computer programs for remediation, additional practice, extension, acceleration.

**Use of multiple texts:** providing more than one textbook to accommodate for a range of reading levels in a class and a classroom library with a range of reading levels that covers several grades.

[http://www.nldontario.org/articles/DifferentiatedClassroom.html](http://www.nldontario.org/articles/DifferentiatedClassroom.html)