

# Differentiating Instruction for Gifted Learners



## Differentiation is...

*"... a teacher's response to a learner's needs."* (Tomlinson)

*"... customizing instruction so every individual experiences continuous learning."* (Kingore)

## Guiding Principles of Differentiation:

- Respectful work for all learners.
- A,B,C & 1, 2, 3: Teachers can differentiate content, process, & product, according to a student's readiness, interest, & learning style.
- Assessment & instruction are inseparable.
- Assessment before, during, & after instruction is critical for making appropriate modifications for gifted learners.
- Focus on the essentials.
- Modification of content, process, and products.
  - o Content = what is taught and how students access information.
  - o Process = how a student makes sense of or comes to understand the information, ideas, and skills that are that the center of the lesson.
  - o Product = assessment or demonstration of what students have come to understand & know.
- Replacement tasks should be respectful works that serve a purpose (not busy work).

## Recognizing the Needs of Gifted Learners:

Gifted learners are often characterized by...

- ... their ability to process information quickly.
- ... their ability to make connections within and among disciplines.
- ... the pace at which they learn.
- ... the depth of their understanding.
- ... the variety of interests that they hold.

Gifted learners need differentiated content, process, product, & affectives.

*What it takes to teach gifted learners well... begins with the premise that each child should come to school to stretch and grow daily. It includes the expectation that the measure of progress and growth is competition with oneself rather than competition against others. It resides in the notion that educators understand key concepts, principles and skills of subject domains, and present those in ways that cause highly able students to wonder and grasp, and extend their reach. And it envisions schooling as an escalator on which students continually progress, rather than a series of stairs, with landings on which advanced learners consistently wait.*

- National Association of Gifted Children

## Assessment & Mastery:

*“When all kids have the same answers, I have no clue what they really know.” Kingore*

Keep in mind: Mastery does not equal perfection.

### Ideas for Assessing Readiness:

Individuals: pretests for volunteers, most difficult questions/items first, exit tickets

Whole Group: individual response boards, Four Corners, Topic Talk, Name Cards/sticks

Pretests: Don't reinvent the wheel – end of chapter/skill tests work. Set a goal for mastery to qualify for Compacting (usually 80-85%) to be verified with admin. Plan for grading issues.

## How to teachers make it all work?

- ~ Start small - but start somewhere! Differentiation for small blocks of time. Use anchor activities.
- ~ Grow slowly – but grow! Try creating one differentiated lesson per unit, one project per semester, etc.
- ~ Give structured choices more often.
- ~ Step back and reflect.
- ~ Talk w/ students regularly to get input.
- ~ Give thoughtful directions.
- ~ Work together with colleagues.
- ~ Bring principals and parents on board.
- ~ Continue to empower students (don't do things for them that they can do for themselves)



## Student Management:

Remember, student choice is a powerful motivator.

“The Three Magic Rules”:

(Winebrenner, 2001)

1. Don't bother anyone else while you're working.
2. Don't call attention to yourself or the fact that you're doing something different – it's no big deal.
3. Work on activities you've chosen or been assigned.

*“Effective teaching is responsive teaching.”*

- Tomlinson

When I differentiate instruction for Gifted learners, what should I be doing?



## **Pace – Delivery – Product – Process (Depth & Breadth)**

### **Change the Pace:**

pre-testing    Curriculum Compacting    tiered activities    most difficult first  
alternate assignments    learning contracts    Independent Study    Learning Centers

### **Change the Delivery/Content:**

mini-lessons    different resources    Curriculum Compacting    Independent Study  
open-ended questions    teacher conferences    reading journals    previewing resources

### **Change the Product:**

choice boards    Tic Tack Toe menus    RAFT (role, audience, format, topic)  
game show menu    student choice options    game creation  
technology-based products: websites, Wikis podcasts, movie making

### **Change the Process - Add Depth:**

tiered activities    open-ended activities    higher-level questions  
curriculum ladders    student experts    increase complexity    decrease structure

### **Change the Process - Add Breadth:**

Tic Tack Toe menus    interdisciplinary units    orbital studies    simulations  
“your own idea” options    choice boards    RAFT assignments    interest centers  
case studies    role plays

## **Gifted Differentiation: Definitions**

Anchor Activities – Provide student with relevant, meaningful activities that can be completed independently. Level to meet different student needs. Used as a management tool for early finishers and small group instruction.

Activity Menus – Integrate student choice, different levels of thinking, & multiple intelligence. Menu might focus on a concept/topic or can cross subject areas. Example: Tick Tack Toe

Flexible Grouping – Gifted students are not necessarily gifted in everything. Flexible grouping allows for students to move in and out of groups based on need, ability, interest, etc.

Peer Teaching – Use sparingly. Guiding principles: “Every student deserves the opportunity to work with intellectual peers on appropriately challenging tasks. Gifted students are not always the best teachers” “Peer teaching is most appropriate for students who have just gotten a concept – not for a student who has already mastered it.”

Cubing – Allows you to guide student thinking in multiple directions and to differentiate process and product for students of varying abilities. Don't have time? Consider using think dots – correlate activities and questions with the number of dots on each side of a regular die.

Curriculum Compacting – Great way of finding time for enrichment and extension. Guided by demonstration of mastery. Allows students to substitute projects and activities that more appropriately meet their learning needs. Pre-asses to find out what the student already knows and what they still need to learn. Document to show mastery. Teach remaining skills in whole/small group or independently. Provide a replacement activity: extension activity, learning centers, independent projects, subject acceleration, mentorships. Compacting is especially useful for skill-based areas (math, spelling, grammar, reading strategies, etc.). Grades should come from pre-assessment (grade level work). Use a learning contract to provide structure.  
~ Learning contracts usually feature: 1. A list of content covered in a unit with indicators identifying concepts not mastered during pretest. 2. Student joins class for direct instruction during those lessons. 3. Extension options (include student ideas) 4. Working Conditions. 5. Signatures at bottom.

Independent Study – Use connections to real world problems, student interaction, & depth of content. Topic may be related to class subject or interest-based. Use a pre-made form to guide project development. Involve media specialist in resource selection. Note: Be aware of work habits: time management, organizational skills, research, etc. Not all Gifted kids are good independent workers.

Multilevel or Tiered Activities/Lessons – open-ended activities – allow students to naturally work at various ability levels. Tiered activities have two or more levels of difficulty/complexity in regard to content, process, and/or product. Levels assigned based on data from pretesting. Students must have understanding that not everyone needs the same thing. Each tier must have motivating and challenging activities that are appropriate for student needs. Samples: paper chain, story map, timeline, “Top 10 List”, “I am” character traits, experiments, etc.

Learning Centers – Centers may be permanent or temporary (country of the month, author study, art technique, reading topic. Share with other teachers throughout the year (saves time and money). Making centers work – task card w/ brief, clear directions. Center logs, assignment/choice boards.

Accelerated Learning – case by case. Prior approval. Attend class w/ next grade level. Most effective strategy for gifted learners.

## Readiness-Based Adjustments

Abstract – Complex – Transformational – Multi-facets – Great Leaps  
Open – Independence – Slow & Deep

Readiness-based adjustments can be created by teachers offering students a range of learning tasks developed along one or more of the following continua:

**Concrete to abstract.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that involve more abstract materials, representations, ideas, or applications than less advanced peers.

**Simple to complex.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that are more complex in resources, research, issues, problems, skills, or goals than less advanced peers.

**Basic to transformational.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that require greater transformation or manipulation of information, ideas, materials, or applications than less advanced peers.

**Fewer facets to multi-facets.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that have more facets or parts in their directions, connections within or across subjects, or planning and execution than less advanced peers.

**Smaller leaps to greater leaps.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that require greater mental leaps in insight, application, or transfer than less advanced peers.

**More structured to more open.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from tasks that are more open in regard to solutions, decisions, and approaches than less advanced peers.

**Less independence to greater independence.** Learners advanced in a subject often benefit from greater independence in planning, designing, and self-monitoring than less advanced peers.

**Quicker to slower.** Learners advanced in a subject will sometimes benefit from rapid movement through prescribed materials and tasks. At other times, they may require a greater amount of time with a given study than less advanced peers so that they may explore the topic in greater depth and/or breadth.



## References

### **Further Reading:**

The Dos and Don'ts of Instruction: *What It Means To Teach Gifted Learners Well*

<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=659>

Meeting the Needs of Gifted Students: Differentiating Math and Science Instruction

[http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm\\_send/755](http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/755)

Reading Instruction for the Primary Gifted Learner

<http://www.bertiekingore.com/readinginstruction.htm>

### **Available for Check-Out from Miss Kelly:**

Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom -- Susan Winebrenner

Teaching Young Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom -- Sumtny, Walker, Meckstroth

### **References:**

Differentiating Instruction for Gifted Learners

<http://www.slideshare.net/drummosh/differentiating-instruction-for-gifted-learners>

Doing Differentiation

<http://www.slideshare.net/Renegarmath/doing-differentiation>

Differentiation for High Ability Learners

<http://www.slideshare.net/acoleman/differentiation-for-high-ability-learners-presentation>

Differentiating Instruction For Advanced Learners In the Mixed-Ability Middle School Classroom

[http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/diff\\_instruction.html](http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/diff_instruction.html)

Prufrock Press Podcast: Gifted Differentiation (22 minutes)

<http://resources.prufrock.com/GiftedEducationBlog/tabid/56/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/392/Default.aspx>