

Differentiation is not . . .

- ❖ More problems, questions, or assignment
- ❖ Expecting students to get it on their own
- ❖ Recreational reading
- ❖ Independent reading without curriculum connections
- ❖ Free time to draw or practice your talent
- ❖ Cooperative learning groups where the gifted student gets to be the leader
- ❖ Activities that all students will be able to do
- ❖ Interest centers unless linked to core content and at a complex level.

What is the role of parents in supporting differentiated classrooms?

Parents can play essential roles in encouraging appropriate differentiation by

- ❖ Asking teachers to specify ways in which differentiated instruction will be provided
- ❖ Understanding that teachers can not (and should not) differentiate all assignments and materials every day
- ❖ Encouraging students to let teachers know when assignments are a good fit and when they are not
- ❖ Encouraging students to compete against themselves rather than compare themselves to peers
- ❖ Volunteering in the classroom
- ❖ Helping secure a range of classroom materials.

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DIFFERENTIATION

In most general education classrooms there is a wide range of learner needs, interests, and abilities. Students differ in readiness levels and their approaches to learning. In differentiated instruction, teachers provide multiple avenues to learning so that the classroom is a good fit for varied learners—including those who are advanced.



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Differentiation Defined

Kentucky's regulation for gifted education, 704 KAR 3:285, *Programs for the gifted and talented*, defines differentiation as "a method through which educators shall establish a specific, well-thought-out match between learner characteristics in terms of abilities, interests, and needs, and curriculum opportunities in terms of enrichment and acceleration options which maximize learning experiences."

Differentiated service experiences are defined as "educational experiences which extend, replace or supplement learning beyond the standard curriculum."

Why differentiate instruction?

When learning tasks are consistently too hard, students become anxious and frustrated. When tasks are consistently too easy, boredom results. Both boredom and anxiety inhibit a student's motivation to learn, and—eventually—harm achievement as well. Differentiated instruction helps teachers avoid student anxiety and boredom that can be evident in one-size-fits-all curriculum.

What is appropriately differentiated curriculum for gifted learners?

The term *differentiation* implies action or change. Teachers actively modify lessons to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of all students. Careful consideration of assessment data, student interest, and student learning profiles provides the information necessary to adapt the curriculum elements of content, process and product.

- ❖ *Content* refers to concepts, principles, and skills teachers want students to learn.
- ❖ *Process* refers to the activities that help students successfully grasp the ideas and skills being taught
- ❖ *Product* refers to the culminating projects that allow the students to demonstrate and extend what they have learned.

Differentiated curriculum enables gifted learners to stretch beyond their "comfort zones." This is achieved through materials, activities, and/or projects that are

- ❖ abstract
- ❖ complex
- ❖ open-ended and/or
- ❖ multi-faceted.

Gifted learners thrive from instruction at various rates that challenges students to explore more deeply, develop more independence, and solve complex problems that require greater mental leaps. Giving gifted students more work of a similar nature (for example, ten math problems instead of five) is not appropriate differentiation.

How can a teacher differentiate instruction for gifted learners?

There are instructional strategies teachers can utilize to appropriately challenge and interest gifted learners. Among them are

- ❖ Exploring laterally...Providing parallel topical studies to core curriculum areas that extend and enrich comprehension of the core curriculum
- ❖ Constructing connections... Providing an integrated or interdisciplinary study of the core curriculum by

making within, between, and across discipline relationships

- ❖ Pursuing to intensity...Providing independent research project learning opportunities that supplement the student's giftedness and core curriculum
- ❖ Using advanced text materials
- ❖ Assigning activities at different levels of complexity
- ❖ Encouraging students to help set criteria for quality
- ❖ Providing expert-level goals for student products
- ❖ Encouraging and supporting independent study
- ❖ Pre-testing students and exempting them from practicing skills they already have mastered
- ❖ Varying homework by student need
- ❖ Encouraging student choice of topics for investigation
- ❖ Varying working groups, including opportunities for work with other advanced students and opportunities to work alone.

Differentiation is . . .

- ❖ Adjustment of the core content
- ❖ Acknowledgment of individual needs
- ❖ Articulated, high level goals reflecting continuous progress
- ❖ Assessment to determine student growth and new needs
- ❖ Adjustment of curriculum by complexity, breadth, and rate
- ❖ Educational experiences which extend, replace, or supplement standard curriculum.