



Kansas Effective Practices Instructional Toolkit

Implementing Research and Resources Into Action
Research Lesson 5: Differentiated Instruction

Differentiation Guidelines and Principles

Definition

“Differentiation” is one name for the process of modifying learning experiences to “match” the needs and nature of the learners. As applied to the education of G/T students, differentiation is a method for realigning curricula to assist the G/T students to convert their potential into performance. The following dimensions of curriculum can be modified:

- Content or subject matter
- Processes or thinking skills
- Products or results of learning

Guidelines for Differentiation

Content

- Includes the modification rate of learning, including the level at which students are allowed to begin their study and the point at which they are allowed to leave an area of study.
- Provides opportunities for student-selected areas of study within and across the disciplines.
- Includes (a) the modification of the complexity in the area of study so that it includes issues, problems, and themes; and (b) a thematic approach to learning.

Process

- Includes the learning and use of abstract thinking skills, including creative thinking, critical thinking and problem solving. This would include questioning strategies that focus on analysis, synthesis and evaluation; and predicting, hypothesizing, collecting and verifying data and forming supportable conclusions.
- Includes the application of abstract thinking skills to complex content, resulting in the production of sophisticated products.
- Integrates basic skills and abstract thinking skills.

Product

- Includes the learning and use of multiple and sophisticated forms of communication.
- Provides the opportunity to present information to diverse and appropriate audiences. Students should have the opportunity to develop sophisticated products and/or performances that are targeted to a specific audience.
- Includes the opportunity for students to participate in assessing learning activities and the resulting product.

Principles of Differentiation

The following list of “principles of differentiation” can assist educators in modifying and developing curricula for high ability students.

- Present content that is related to broad-based issues, themes or problems
- Integrate multiple disciplines into the area of study
- Present comprehensive, related and mutually reinforcing experiences within an area of study
- Allow for the in-depth learning of a self-selected topic within the area of study
- Develop independent or self-directed study skills
- Develop productive, complex, abstract and/or higher-level thinking skills
- Focus on open-ended tasks
- Develop research skills and methods
- Integrate basic skills and higher level thinking skills into the curriculum

- Encourage the development of products that challenge existing ideas and produce “new” ideas
- Encourage the development of products that use new techniques, materials and forms
- Encourage the development of self-understanding, i.e., recognizing and using one’s abilities, becoming self-directed, appreciating likenesses and differences between one’s self and others
- Evaluate student outcomes by using appropriate and specific criteria through self-appraisal, criterion referenced and/or standardized instruments

Source: National/State Leadership Training Institute on the Gifted and the Talented Curriculum Committee (1979). James J. Gallagher, Sandra N. Kaplan, A. Harry Passow, Joseph S. Renzulli, Irving S. Sato, Dorothy A. Sisk, and Janice Wickless

