

How Can Gifted Students Needs be Met in Mixed-Ability Classrooms: Frequently Asked Questions

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In most regular classrooms there is a wide range of learner needs. Students differ in readiness levels, interests, and approaches to learning. Teachers can adapt classroom activities to meet these varied needs through differentiated instruction. 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.

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 the anxiety and boredom that can be evident in one-size-fits-all classrooms.

What is appropriately differentiated curriculum for gifted learners?

Curriculum for gifted learners should cause them to stretch a little beyond their "comfort zones." Typically that means materials, activities, and/or projects should be more

- ∑ abstract
- ∑ complex
- ∑ open-ended and/or
- ∑ multi-faceted

than would be appropriate for many students of the same age. Often, gifted learners also benefit from a

faster pace of learning, greater independence, and problems that are somewhat "fuzzy" so that greater mental leaps are required to solve them. 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 many ways teachers can modify instruction to be appropriately challenging and interesting for gifted learners. Among them are:

- ∑ using advanced text materials
- ∑ providing advanced novels on a class theme
- ∑ having advanced tasks at learning centres
- ∑ using advanced computer programs providing varied journal prompts
- ∑ 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 practising 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
- ∑ coaching for a student's personal best in thought, activities, and products.

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 comparing themselves to peers
- ∑ volunteering in the classroom helping secure a range of classroom materials.

For Further Information

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