

Differentiated Programming: What It Is and What It Isn't

"The fact that students differ may be inconvenient, but it is unescapable. Adapting to that diversity is the inevitable price of productivity, high standards, and fairness to kids."

--TheodoreSizer

Differentiated Programming is a big term for what is really a simple educational concept--providing instruction that meets the differing needs of all students. For the gifted student, it means the opportunity to advance as far as possible. For the slower learner, it means more support and attention to mastering one skill before moving on to another. Between these two ends of the educational spectrum are thousands of other students with varying abilities, learning styles, interests and needs, all of which must be met. That is what Differentiated Programming attempts to do.

Differentiated Programming Is--

- Providing multiple assignments within each unit, tailored for students of different levels of achievement.
- Allowing students to choose, with the teacher's guidance, ways to learn and how to demonstrate what they have learned.
- Permitting students to opt out of material they already know and progress at their own pace through new material.
- Structuring class assignments so they require high levels of critical thinking but permit a range of responses.
- Having high expectations for all students.
- Creating learning centers with activities geared to different learning styles, levels of thinking, levels of interest, and levels of achievement.
- Providing students with opportunities to explore topics in which they have strong interest and find personal meaning.

Differentiated Programming Is Not--

- Assigning more work at the same level to high-achieving students.
- Requiring students to teach material they have mastered to others who have not mastered it.
- Giving all students the same work most of the time.
- Grouping students into cooperative learning groups that do not provide for individual accountability or do not focus on work that is new to all students.
- Focusing on student weaknesses and ignoring student strengths.
- Using only the differences in student responses to the same class assignment to provide differentiation.