

Strategies that Support Differentiating

Stations/Learning Centers

Stations refer to spots where students work on different tasks simultaneous in a classroom and then rotate through them to learn content/skills related to a topic. Students might skip stations if they know the material or some stations might have tasks designed for advanced students only. Learning Centers are stations where students explore a topic but they stand alone. Students don't need to rotate through several Centers to master the content/skills related to the topic. Centers may have many choices of activities for students to choose from based on their ability, interest and learning profile.

Orbital Studies

Orbital studies are short term (3-6 weeks) independent investigations that relate to a particular part of the course curriculum. Student choice is a key element of the studies. The student chooses the topic, designs a work plan, defines the final product and negotiates a grading rubric with the teacher. Students are usually required to present results to class. Orbital Studies can be individual or group investigations and hence, provide much flexibility.

Complex Instruction

Small group instruction designed to meet the academic, cultural and linguistic levels of all students in the group. Characterized by open ended interesting instructional activities, that require contributions from all group members to successfully complete. Instruction includes hands-on work, reading and writing, materials in several languages if needed and multimedia work to accommodate all learning profiles.

Entry Points

Students explore a topic in five ways based on Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory. **Narrative** entry points utilize a story about the topic; **Logical-Quantitative** entry points use numbers or deductive/scientific approaches to a subject; **Foundational** entry points examine the philosophy and vocabulary related to the topic; **Aesthetic** entry points focus on sensory features of the topic and **Experiential** entry points use a hands on approach to the topic.

Tiered Activities

Instructional activities that focus on the essential conceptual understanding and skill development related to a topic but provide a challenge to students of all ability levels through tiers. Each instructional tier provides different levels of complexity, abstractness and open-endedness.

Compacting

Teachers assess what students know before teaching a topic. Students do not have to work on what they already know. Students use extra time to work on an area of interest related to the topic that enhances their knowledge and skills.

Problem Based Learning

Students are given an unclear, complex problem to solve. They need to define the problem, research background information and resources, pose a solution, communicate the solution and evaluate its effectiveness.

Group Investigation

Class is divided into groups by student interest. Each group selects a topic to investigate related to a topic being covered in class. Students plan and carry out the investigation and present results to class. Evaluation may have both individual and group components.

Independent Study

Students select topic, set goals and criteria for work, negotiate evaluation plan with teachers and present results to appropriate audience. Independent study provides total flexibility based on students readiness, interest and learning profile.

Portfolios

Students generate a collection of their work that reflects their academic growth over time. Great for evaluation but also allow students to make many choices. Hence, a student's portfolio can really represent not only growth but also interest and learning profile.

Tomlinson, C. (1999). The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners. Alexandria, VA: ASCD Publications.