



## Brief Descriptions of Differentiation Strategies

### Content

**Abstractness:** The content focuses on abstract concepts, themes, generalizations and theories, not concrete facts. It addresses ideas that have a wide range of applicability.

**Complexity:** Complex content focuses on the interconnections among concepts, principles, generalizations and theories. It is usually interdisciplinary.

**Extra-curricular topics:** The content includes ideas and content areas not taught in the regular curriculum in any grade. It may include the student's interests.

**Lives & living:** The content involves the study of creative, productive people (living or dead), their motivations, social characteristics, challenges and career paths.

**Organization for learning value:** The content of an entire unit is addresses a broad, interdisciplinary theme (like "systems" or "patterns") rather than small, sequential bits of information.

**Real life topics:** The content addresses issues, controversies, problems or provocative questions inspired by students' interests, experiences, questions and concerns. Students may need help focusing, analyzing and/or defining their topic or questions.

**Self-selected content:** The student chooses the content. Some will need help choosing and reducing their interests to topics that are manageable.

### Process

**Complex thinking:** Emphasize learning processes (verbs) that stress the use, rather than acquisition of information (higher level thinking, critical thinking, creative thinking, etc.).

**Expert methods of inquiry:** Learning with and about methods used by experts in a discipline.

**Group Interaction:** Students collaborate with peers who have similar abilities and share their passions in order to enhance their social and leadership skills, learn perspective-taking and become more empathetic.

**Individual Pursuits:** Individual projects on which students work relatively independently but with the support of a teacher or mentor available as needed.

**Inquiry-based:** Inductive reasoning processes are used to discover patterns, underlying principles and generalizations. Students take greater responsibility for their learning than in deductive learning experiences.

**Open-endedness:** Activities involve open-ended questions, activities, projects and methods. These have no predetermined correct outcome. They are provocative, stimulating students to think broadly.

**Pacing:** Students learn at a pace commensurate with their ability to go quickly through or deeply into content. Examples include pretesting, "compacting", or "telescoping" curriculum, or other forms of acceleration.

**Reasoning & reflection:** Students explain their conclusions and the reasoning that led to them as well as the metacognitive aspects of their thinking. They are encouraged to evaluate both the process and products of their own and others' thinking.

**Self-selected process:** Students choose the ways they will learn whenever possible. Some may need assistance identifying their preferences or following through on their choices.

**Variety:** A range of methods of thinking and feeling involved in learning by using different types of problems, resources and technologies.

### Product

**Authentic audiences:** Results of the learning activity should be shared with real and appropriate audiences to the greatest extent possible. This may involve the scientific community, the city council, a government agency, art critic, etc.

**Feedback & assessment:** Products should be assessed using real, predetermined procedures and criteria, and, as often as possible, by a member or members of the real audience for the product. Students should also be encouraged or required to self-evaluate their products using the same criteria.

**Self-selected product:** The student chooses an appropriate format for the product that reflects what was learned. Students' interests, strengths, and prior experiences may influence these choices. Teachers may need to provide assistance in the selection and development of the product.

**Transformations:** The results of the learning process should represent a "conversion of known information into new entities—changes in meaning, significance, use, interpretation, mood, sensory qualities, or shape" (Guliford, 1967).

**Variety:** Students learn about and use different types of production techniques and media throughout the school year or term. They should also learn how to select an appropriate format for the audience and content.