





# In teaching, one size does NOT fit all

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Teachers in Independent schools are adapting the way they present the Curriculum Standards and adjusting their teaching methods in order to meet the wide range of student needs, interests and capabilities within a class. This strategy is called differentiation and the goal is to provide all students with relevant learning experiences and suitably challenging work. Differentiation itself is based on three beliefs:

- Every student learns differently;
- Quality of the learning is more important than the amount that is learned;
- “One-size-fits-all” curriculum and instruction presumes that content is more important than students

In many independent school classrooms, teachers already cater to mixed abilities in classes. They offer resources and activities of various degrees of difficulty, with adjustable skill levels for students of differing abilities, including gifted students and students with learning difficulties. This is an improvement on the traditional “one size fits all” approach.

More experienced teachers often realize that different students prefer to work in different ways. A teacher must vary individual, paired, group and class tasks according to the goals of the lesson and give students a balance between them. They also know that all students learn better if the new learning fits in with their interests, experiences and future aspirations. By developing a profile for each student, teachers can better individualize their teaching to meet students’ needs and interests. Personalizing lessons can increase motivation and learning significantly. The most effective teachers are those who are both interesting and interested.

All students are unique and learn in different ways. They have unique combinations of ability, interests, prior learning, motivation and learning styles. For teachers, this means getting to know students and adapting the curriculum, resources, methods, activities, and assessments to meet the needs of ALL students. This is the essence of differentiated learning and instruction.

The famous educator, Howard Gardner, claims that individuals have a range of “multiple intelligences.” All people are intelligent in a combination of different ways – students can learn through words, logic, pictures, body, music, nature, other people or self-reflection. People learn best by using their dominant intelligences, but they can also develop their other intelligences. If teachers plan their resources, lesson delivery, student activities and assessment to include most of these intelligences, they can reach their students most effectively.

In each module or unit, they could offer a range of tasks in a menu format that allows students to choose according to their learning preferences. Students can demonstrate their mastery and be assessed through choosing tasks, activities and products that involve words, pictures, art, video, numbers, role playing, music, or poetry. These activities can be done alone, in pairs or in groups.

Project based learning (PBL) also offers great potential for differentiation as students research and present their knowledge in a variety of ways. PBL allows for effective use of ICT resources and integration between subjects. Individual students can also have learning contracts with their teachers as part of their assessment and portfolios. These can be weekly, monthly, per semester or year. They can agree on how to cover the content and curriculum standards in a truly student-centered way.

If at first teachers find differentiation too demanding and challenging, they could try a VAK (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) Attack strategy in each lesson. Include an element of Visual (seeing), Auditory (listening) and Kinesthetic (moving, shaping and doing) in the presentation, student activities and assessment stage of each lesson. In this way, almost all students will have the opportunity to learn in a way that suits them best.

Independent schoolteachers who have experimented with this approach have found that the satisfaction they have gained from seeing students effectively learn and progress at their own pace has made the effort and time in planning worthwhile.

# How can teachers use all the available educational resources to help their students in achieving their academic goals?



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Students have different capabilities and skills and respond to their educational experience in a variety of ways. Therefore, teachers have a major role in discovering and understanding those capabilities in order to best meet each student's needs.

While some students respond quickly to written words and drawings, others respond faster to debates and sounds. Still others need physical activities to facilitate their learning - like using their hands.

In a classroom full of students with differing abilities and ways of learning, it is the responsibility of the teacher to come up with methods that can meet the student's individual needs. This is called individualism. While there is one set of educational goals for all the students, the method of delivery is left to the teacher to select an individual and unique strategy for each student according to his/her individual level of skills and capabilities.

In achieving those educational goals, teachers are free to choose any class or out of class activities to enable the students to learn in the best way possible.

Teachers will be provided with all the communications technology needed to meet those student needs including, internet, compact disks, audiovisual equipment etc.

Previous experiences will also help the teachers in setting suitable plans for different students.

The ideal lesson plans contain examples of the support and the tasks the students need to achieve their goals. It also contains brilliant questions that help the teachers in making sure that their students, with all their differences, are able to participate in the discussions. In addition, it helps the teacher in evaluating their students, and for planning for the next phase of their projects.

Teachers can also make use of the comprehensive evaluation methods because it has direct impact on education. The evaluation data is also a useful source for the teachers to design flexible creative educational practices.

Applying the curriculum criteria is the best way to achieve the individualism in education and to use technology and other strategies to enable the students to become more creative.

Teaching differentiation  
helps meet the wide  
range of student needs

