

# Differentiating Curriculum for Gifted Learners

Curriculum for gifted learners requires adaptations from the typical grade level content to address their cognitive and affective characteristics. Curricular adaptations should occur regardless of the grouping model and the type of giftedness. A teacher who differentiates effectively is balancing differentiation across the dimensions of content, instruction, and product. Figure 1 (below) provides a differentiation features template for educators. The efficacy of curriculum models employed in gifted education rest on the defining aspects of these features (VanTassel-Baska & Brown, 2007). In the differentiation features framework, there are four research-based ways to differentiate content. Under each feature are aspects that define the feature further. The differentiation features framework can be used to ensure that curriculum content is sufficiently differentiated and responsive to the needs of gifted learners.

The feature of acceleration in terms of curriculum could be employed in a variety of ways. For example, using a pre-assessment to determine the level of previous acquired content (in order not to repeat) is one way to differentiate the content. Another accelerative approach is speeding up the process for learning, if students demonstrate a readiness for the content area, or teaching the unit of study in a shorter amount of time (e.g., covering a 6 week unit in 4 weeks), thus compacting it. For secondary gifted students, using above grade level content (e.g., Advanced Placement) or sophisticated primary source documents accelerates the content knowledge.

The feature of complexity is when teachers add layers of challenge to a task. It can involve adding more variables to study, such as when a student is creating a book report or a presentation and the teacher adds complexity (more variables to include) to the assignment. Another way to add complexity is to engage students in challenging tasks that require higher levels of Revised Blooms Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) simultaneously; thus students are synthesizing, evaluating and creating within a task demand.

The feature of depth involves focusing on a particular task, topic, or concept that requires study to fully understand it at a “deeper” level resulting in product creation. If stu-

dents are asked to consider multiple perspectives about a historical event and then create a product including those perspectives, that’s adding depth. Framing a unit of study around a conceptual question, such as *Is war necessary?* adds depth to student understanding.

Creativity as a differentiation feature should always be a component of differentiating curriculum. It allows students to work within the bounds of a structure or a given set of criteria but, with open ended access, opportunities and pathways. Projects derived from subject areas should try to reflect real-world connection to careers associated with them (VanTassel-Baska & Baska, 2019).

Uses for the differentiation framework are many. Educators can use it to analyze lesson plans and current approaches to determine target areas to differentiate. It can be used as a planning framework, when planning out a unit of study to ensure that aspects of it are differentiated appropriately for gifted learners. It can be used as a communication device with parents and administrators and finally it can be used overall as a strategic way to differentiate “up” content standards. **THP**

## References

Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of Bloom’s taxonomy: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, 41 (4), 212-218.  
 VanTassel-Baska, J. & Brown, E. (2007). Towards best practice: An analysis of the efficacy of curriculum models in gifted education. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 51 (4), 342-358.  
 VanTassel-Baska, J. & Baska, A. (2019). *Curriculum planning & instructional design for gifted learners (3rd ed.)*. Prufrock Press.

**Figure 1.** Differentiation Features

Features	Acceleration	Complexity	Depth	Creativity
Defining aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Fewer tasks assigned to master standard</li> <li>✓ Assessed earlier or prior to teaching</li> <li>✓ Clustered by higher order thinking skills</li> <li>✓ Advanced resources employed</li> <li>✓ Sophisticated content used</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Used multiple higher level skills</li> <li>✓ Added more variables to study</li> <li>✓ Required multiple resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Studied a concept in multiple applications</li> <li>✓ Conducted original research</li> <li>✓ Developed a product</li> <li>✓ Cross-disciplinary applications made</li> <li>✓ Reasoning made explicit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Designed/constructed a model based on principles or criteria</li> <li>✓ Provided alternatives for tasks, products, &amp; assessments</li> <li>✓ Emphasized oral &amp; written communication to real world audience</li> </ul>