

Differentiation In Focus

Most Difficult First

A Strategy for Modifying Assignments for Gifted Students

When giving your class an assignment, start by determining which items represent the most difficult examples of the entire task. These might appear sequentially, near the end of the assignment or you might select them from various sections of the assignment. Five examples are a reasonable number, but you may choose a few more or less, depending on your judgment. Write the assignment on the board, star the Most Difficult First examples, then offer this explanation to the class:

Class, the regular assignment should give just the right amount of practice for most of you to master the concept or skill. As a matter of fact, I expect most of you will need this much practice.

However, some of you may have learned this material before and don't need as much practice this time. This opportunity is for you. Instead of doing the regular assignment, you may choose to do just the five starred problems. They are the most difficult problems in the assignment. When you finish, come to me and I'll check your work. The first person who gets all five correct will become the checker for the rest of the period.

Once I announce who the checker is, anyone else who completes the five most difficult problems should stay at your desk, put your thumb up as a signal, and wait for the checker to get to you. If your paper meets the criteria, the checker will collect your paper to give to me.

You may use any remaining time for anything you choose, as long as you meet two conditions: Don't bother anyone else, and don't call any attention to yourself. Anyone who can't meet these conditions will not be eligible tomorrow for this opportunity.

During the practice time, I'll be helping students who are doing the regular assignment. If you think you will need help, you should start at the beginning of the assignment, since you obviously need more practice.

The reason this strategy works is very simple. Gifted students can learn even new concepts more quickly than their age peers, and they remember most of what they learn forever. So even if today's assignment represents new material to your grade level, your gifted students can master the concept with much less practice than the average students.

It is advisable to allow students to qualify even if they make one error. In this way you avoid causing anxiety for perfectionists, and demonstrate that it's okay to make mistakes. However, the checker's paper must have all problems correct.

Taken from: Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom by Susan Winebrenner

This newsletter is a joint effort by the district's gifted and talented resource teachers and coordinators to bring you information and ideas about current topics in differentiation.

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Differentiation does not mean additional work for the student; instead it means different work.

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