Choosing a Method of Differentiation Matrix

Directions: Locate characteristics that describe your student or student groups, then see the last two columns for a component you might consider differentiating, as well as the rationale for it. This is not a comprehensive list, but simply a guide to help you think through the best rationale for choosing your method of differentiation. Use this resource in conjunction with the Differentiation Strategies tool to choose appropriate strategies.

	Student Characteristic	Component to Differentiate	Rationale
Student Prior Knowledge	Student does not have the pre-requisite knowledge required	Content	Students need to have the foundational knowledge necessary on which to build new knowledge.
	Student needs reteaching of prior grade level concepts	Content	Students need to have the foundational knowledge necessary on which to build new knowledge.
	Student has an abundance of prior knowledge	Content/ Product	Students may be ready to learn the next content standards that build on their current knowledge. Students could be required to complete a more complex product. For example, they might submit- 3 pieces of text evidence in their final report as opposed to 2 for everyone else.
	Student has not mastered a previous grade level strategy or procedure	Process	Students need to have the foundational knowledge necessary on which to build new knowledge.
Student Reading Level	Student reads below or above grade level	Content / Process	Student should be provided reading material at their instructional level if supported by the teacher, or their independent level if working on their own. Student may benefit from a recorded reading, or buddy reading.
	Student is an English Language Learner	Content / Process	Student should be provided content in their native language when possible, or a native language dictionary or translating tool. Teachers can provide tools such as outlines and sentence stems to guide ELLs through a lesson.
	Student struggles with content specific vocabulary	Content	Student would benefit from a glossary of key vocabulary terms they can keep at their desk and refer to as needed.

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Student Behavior	Student works best alone	Process	It is best to set the student up for success, and if they have behavioral issues that prevent them from partnering successfully, give them the opportunity to work independently.
	Student should not be paired with a particular student	Process	Teachers should plan groups strategically to avoid placing students together who have a known negative relationship.
	Student is on a behavior contract and needs frequent teacher monitoring	Process	When planning lesson, teachers should take into account their physical proximity to a student whose behavior contract required frequent interactions.
Special Needs	Student has dyslexia or dysgraphia	Content / Process	Based on a student's 504 plan or IEP, they may need written materials in a specific font or color, or be provided color overlays. They may also benefit from oral reading of materials.
	Student has ADD or ADHD, or other issues that cause them to struggle with pacing and organization	Process	Based on the student's 504 plan or IEP, students may benefit from preferential seating, a visual schedule, a timer to stay on track and prepared for transitions, among other things.
	Student has an IEP or 504 that requires modified assignment / test length	Product	It is a legal requirement to modify assignments or tests based on the IEP or 504 plan.
	Student has dysgraphia	Product	Students may need to produce a writing sample in a different method, like electronically, or be allowed abbreviations or print over other forms of writing.
	Student is hearing or vision impaired	Process	Students have a right to the best learning environment for their needs, and this may require a microphone projection system for hearing or preferential seating for a vision impairment. Like all other special needs, refer to the 504 or IEP for specifics.
	Student has autism	Process	Because there is such a wide spectrum of challenges related to autism, it would be impossible to rationalize all differentiation strategies here. Once again, refer to the individual student's 504 or IEP for legal requirements.

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Student Preferred Learning Style	Student has an obvious leaning towards a particular learning style	Process / Product	Because all students do not learn best the same way, teachers should always intentionally plan for a variety of activities and tasks that utilize multiple learning styles.
Lesson Purpose	21st century skills are the primary focus (collaboration, creativity, etc.) but the depth of content is not critical	Content	If the content is not critical, allow students more choice in the process and product, so they can successfully improve their 21st century skillset.
	Basic content knowledge is critical, but students can work towards that knowledge in a variety of ways	Process	Giving students some autonomy in how they learn the material builds confidence and allows learners to work in the way that works best for them.
	Thorough content knowledge is critical, but the knowledge can be demonstrated in a variety of ways	Product	Giving students some autonomy in how they present their knowledge also build confidence as well as increases a student's buy-in and interest level.

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