



Differentiation

An Inquiry: In what ways might a teacher differentiate for your child?

A school's primary responsibility is to ensure that students learn. In order to do that a *The Primary Years Program* school must see itself as a community where teachers must continually learn about the needs and capabilities of each student and meet those needs by keeping the students engaged in the content and the processes used to understand that content. The result of this is called differentiation and is based on the constructivist approach to learning.

It is acknowledged that learners have beliefs about how the world works based on their experiences and prior learning. Those beliefs, models or constructs are revisited and revised in the light of new experiences and further learning. As we strive to make meaning of our lives and the world around us we travel continually on the cyclic path of constructing, testing, and confirming or revising our personal models of how the world operates.

Consequently, when planning to teach it is important to ascertain students' prior knowledge, and provide experiences through the curriculum and through the environment that give them opportunities: to test and revise their models, to allow them to make connections between their previous and current perceptions, and to allow them the freedom to construct their own meaning. It also makes sense to make connections between learners' existing knowledge and their individual learning styles in the context of new experiences. As students' learning and their attempts to understand the world around them are essentially social acts of communication and collaboration, this work may take many forms, with students working sometimes on their own, with partners, or in larger groups using different methods and materials.

The program supports the student's struggle to gain understanding of the world and to learn to function comfortably within it, to move from not knowing to knowing, to identify what is real and what is not real, to acknowledge what is appropriate and what is not appropriate. To do this, the student must integrate a great deal of information, and apply this accumulation of knowledge in a cohesive and effective way. Although development usually occurs in recognizable and predictable directions, it is unique in each child, occurring at varying rates from child to child, and inconsistently for each child. Children are full of curiosity, and the PYP provides a framework that gives crucial support for them to be active inquirers and lifelong learners.