



Getting Ready for Differentiated Instruction

Learning Objectives

The first step in the compacting process is choosing curricular content and learning objectives. You will need to refer to the formal curriculum guides issued by the school district or state, and/or the informal guides provided by textbook publishers.

After locating the objectives, you must focus on those that are appropriate for your students. It is not uncommon to find discrepancies between the objectives noted in the curriculum guides and those actually tested by the district. Other objectives may be redundant or overly ambitious. To narrow down the field of alternatives, what criteria would you use to determine the extent to which these learning objectives represent new learning for your students?

Pretesting

Pretesting is used to measure the skills and talents of students before instruction begins. It should provide precise information on which learning objectives students have already met and those they have not yet attained. This ensures that any students who are excused from specific curriculum are only missing curricular instruction they will not need. The teacher may choose to pretest students who have been identified as gifted and talented, or the entire class. In the latter scenario, all students have the opportunity to display specific strengths. Would you use objective-referenced tests or performance-based assessments for pretesting? Explain your choice.

Identifying Students

Teachers must discern students' specific strengths in order to determine their mastery levels. One way to do this is by observing students who consistently complete tasks quickly and accurately, seem bored by the work, or indicate that their assigned tasks are too easy. What other data can be used to identify specific strengths that qualify students for pretesting or curriculum compacting?

Offering Alternatives

Alternatives such as acceleration or enrichment can be provided through special pull-out or classroom programs. Replacement activities can include providing an accelerated curriculum based on advanced concepts, offering more challenging content (e.g., alternative texts), and providing opportunities for self-directed learning. List at least three other replacement activities you can provide in the classroom as alternatives for high ability students.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Time, space, and lack of resources can be barriers to providing enrichment. School policy, and support from other teachers also play a role. Reflect on the additional replacement activities you have chosen and determine if they can be achieved despite any practical barriers you may face.