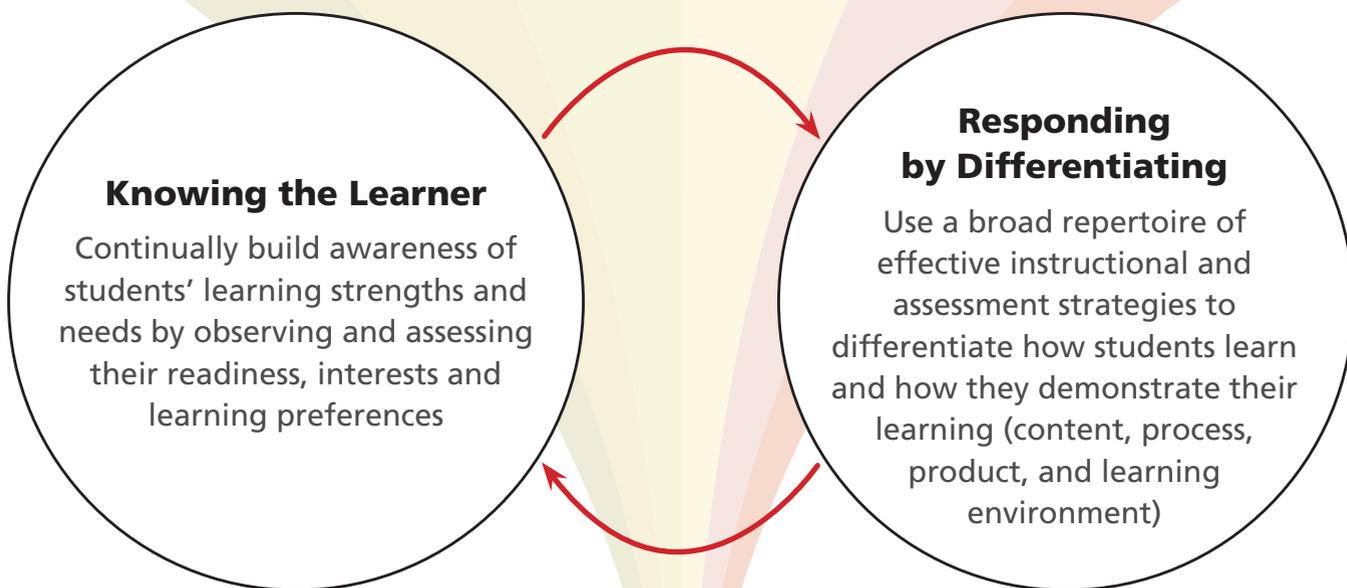# Principles of Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a cyclical process of finding out about the learner and responding by differentiating.

Knowing the Learner

Continually build awareness of students' learning strengths and needs by observing and assessing their readiness, interests and learning preferences

Responding by Differentiating

Use a broad repertoire of effective instructional and assessment strategies to differentiate how students learn and how they demonstrate their learning (content, process, product, and learning environment)

When we know the learner's strengths and needs (readiness, interests and learner preferences), we can respond by differentiating:	
What students learn about and where they begin learning (e.g., topic, entry point)	**CONTENT**
The ways we help students learn—through instruction and assessment (e.g., researching a topic at a learning centre, participating in a jigsaw, identifying similarities and differences)	**PROCESS**
The ways students demonstrate their learning—through assessment and evaluation (e.g., creating a product from a choice board, oral or written presentation)	**PRODUCT**
Conditions for learning (e.g., quiet or busy, alone or with others)	**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Responding by Differentiating involves:
Using appropriate, evidence-based strategies for instruction, assessment and evaluation;
Using structures or ways of organizing that facilitate student learning; and
Providing choice, respectful tasks, a shared responsibility for learning and flexible learning groups (key features of differentiated instruction).

Key Features of Differentiated Instruction

1. Flexible Learning Groups

Sample Indicators:

❏ Groupings are based on prior assessment of student learning, interests and/or learning preferences

❏ Groupings are sometimes determined by the students, sometimes by the teacher and sometimes randomly

❏ Students are comfortable working in groups and follow collaborative group norms

❏ Students are grouped and regrouped, frequently and flexibly, based on their:
- Readiness to learn a concept
- Interest in a concept
- Learning preferences in working with or thinking about a concept

2. Choice

Sample Indicators:

❏ Choices provided are based on prior assessment of student learning, interests and/or learning preferences

❏ Students are taught how to make choices (e.g., assignment, learning centre task, resources) based on their readiness, interests, and learning preferences

❏ Students have opportunities to make choices (e.g., assignments, learning centre tasks, resources) based on their readiness, interests, and learning preferences

❏ Students have opportunities to select preferred conditions for learning (e.g., individually, in a quiet location away from others, in an active area of the room, as part of a group)

❏ All choices address the same curriculum expectations (Some tasks, designed for students on an IEP, may address modified curriculum expectations)

❏ All choices are designed to take approximately the same amount of time

❏ The amount of choice being offered is reasonable, not overwhelming

3. Respectful Tasks

Sample Indicators:

❏ All choices/tasks are interesting and engaging

❏ All choices/tasks require the students to work at the edge of their current readiness

❏ All choices/tasks are based on the same learning goal

❏ All choices/tasks can be assessed using the same success criteria, which have been identified, shared with, and understood by students

❏ Students having difficulty with a concept are engaged in learning opportunities that are just as interesting and appealling as those of other students

4. Shared Responsibility for Learning

Sample Indicators:

❏ Students have opportunities to think/talk about/identify the ways they learn best

❏ Students have opportunities to think/talk about/identify their interests

❏ Students can articulate the learning goal

❏ Students co-construct the criteria for assessment with the teacher

❏ Students are taught how to self-assess

❏ Students are provided with opportunities to self-assess

❏ Students advocate for conditions that support their learning

❏ Students seek feedback and respond to suggestions