Our Purpose

Several years ago, an anxious young mother went for an interview with the school psychologist. Her seven-year-old son was finding school hard and was behind grade level in learning to read. He had been referred for a psycho-educational evaluation and his mother had been called in advance of the evaluation to give information on the family background. At the end of the interview, the psychologist asked if the mother had any further questions.

“Only one,” she said, “What do I tell my son about why he’s coming to see you?”

“Tell him that we’re going to find out how to tailor things at school to fit him better, so that school can be a more interesting and meaningful experience,” the psychologist replied.

Making school fit better for all students so that it can be an interesting and meaningful experience is the purpose of differentiation. Whether students exhibit gifted behaviors, or have attention deficit or are learning English as a new language, we want to make sure that we find ways to engage each one in the learning process. We do this by making the curriculum accessible so that each student feels invited to learn and knows s/he can succeed.
**Why Differentiate?**

Sometimes, we have been asked by participants in our workshops whether differentiating instruction isn’t doing a disservice to students. “Of course it makes learning more interesting and fun for kids, but when they get to the real world, the truth is that they will have to sit through boring meetings and do work they don’t like. Are we raising expectations that will make them fail later on in life?”

Thankfully, we don’t get those questions very often. We would hope that the purpose of education would be much, much more than training the next generation for a life of boredom. We feel very strongly that the purpose of education has to do with inculcating a love of learning; helping students to identify and develop their interests into talents; learning how to think critically about the problems of the world; and developing a sense of efficacy and interdependence as they enter adulthood.

Differentiating instruction helps us to facilitate this growth in students. When we find ways to vary our instruction and adapt it according the needs of different individuals or groups of children in our classes, we are much more likely to engage all students in learning and maximize growth.

A recent report from the United Kingdom (DfES, 2006) suggests the need for personalizing learning as a way to ensure that all children are able to progress, achieve and participate. Personalizing learning is a highly structured and responsive approach to teaching and learning that takes into account and pays close attention to the learner’s knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes (p. 6). In this report, the 2020 Review Group suggests that work needs to be varied and pitched at the child’s zone of proximal development and supported by assessment for learning. There is clearly a growing perception internationally, of the need to differentiate instruction.
How Do We Manage When All Students Are So Different?

Teachers are often overwhelmed at the thought of differentiating instruction when the children in their classes exhibit such different learner characteristics. Differentiation can be daunting, especially when we come to think of the diversity in culture, languages, educational background and experiences that our international school students come to us with. When we put those together with differences in readiness levels, differences in style and learner preferences, differentiating instruction for any class full of students is at least challenging, if not intimidating.

Having said that, differentiating instruction is not the same as the individual instruction of the 1960s and '70s; it doesn’t mean having to think of 24 different lesson plans for 24 different students in our classes! In Ochan’s Grade 8 Humanities class at the International School of Kuala Lumpur, the teaching team made a promise to the students as well as to their parents at the beginning of each school year. We said, “To the best of our ability, we will craft lessons that will appeal to your particular learning style or strength at least once in every four-day rotation (our Middle School was on a four-day schedule at the time). We would also ask that you stay with us during those assignments that you may not find immediately interesting, and we promise you that by the end of the year, those areas that you don’t currently consider to be strength areas, will also improve. And who knows, some things that you thought were boring may become more interesting or even fascinating!”

What we tried to do in the Grade 8 class was to provide instruction in a variety of ways and design assignments that would tap into different learner strengths – so that each student would feel invited to learn. For example, we endeavored to provide a balance between visual, tactual, kinesthetic and auditory assignments. We also used a
variety of grouping strategies so that students would have experience working individually, in pairs, in small groups, and with the whole the class. By varying our instruction and our assignments, we hoped to meet the needs of different learners in our classes.

In other words, while students do have individual learning characteristics, they also exhibit clusters of learner characteristics that may be shared by other children in the class. We can apply what we know about teaching to a particular style preference to groups of children who exhibit the same style. For example, what we know about working with one kinesthetic learner – the need to move about during learning tasks – can be applied to other kinesthetic learners.

Teachers ask us about differentiating for special populations. “What about the ESL kids in my class? Do I have to do anything else special for them, if I’m already differentiating instruction?” “How about the ADHD student? How do I handle him and teach the rest of the class?”

The motivation behind each of these questions is the same. Teachers want to know how they can ensure success for each child. We suggest that as teachers become more experienced at differentiating instruction, the answers become clearer. Many of the approaches and strategies of differentiation are reflective of good teaching practice for all students, and rely on a deep knowledge of our students as learners. The underlying principle for differentiating instruction for special populations – English Language Learners (ELLs), Learning Disabled/Special Needs, the Highly Capable, children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, and children with Attention Deficit (and Hyperactivity) Disorder – begins with exactly the same key. We need to develop a firm knowledge of our students as learners – who they are, what
backgrounds (and baggage) they bring to class, what preferences they have for learning, and what their interests are.

We further suggest that our colleagues are our own best resources for differentiating instruction, and that collaboration between professionals – the fourth key – can make the process less overwhelming. Collaboration between specialists (special needs or ESL teachers, teachers with expert knowledge in working with the Highly Capable) and mainstream teachers; between teachers in the same discipline or on the same team; across disciplines, or even across grade levels can provide rich opportunities for professional growth and improved student learning. Although we have framed it as a suggestion, we have found that when teachers get “stuck” – in working with a student, in trying to think of new ways to present instruction, in rehearsing for a parent meeting – there is no better way than to have the benefit of working closely with a colleague.

We know that the decision to admit – or not admit – a child with special needs is one of the most difficult decisions a school can make, and is influenced by a number of variables. Much depends on staffing levels, professional preparation and training of teachers, class size, community resources, parental expectations and available medical support. Much also depends on the attitudes of the school leadership (Kusuma-Powell, 2002). As such, a school that is unable to serve one type of special need student today may find itself in the future able to take in a broader range of students. This is often based on a collective vision and the development of a will to serve.

In this chapter, we address suggestions for working with those specific, special populations most likely to be represented in international schools. Although there are still some international schools that have no program for children with special needs,
the range of special populations in our schools is broader today than in 2000, when we
published *Count me in!* This represents an ongoing shift in demographics and parental
determination to travel with their children.

We write this chapter with the knowledge that in our international schools,
“pure types” rarely exist; we are likely to find students with overlapping conditions,
or children who are “twice exceptional”: children who are gifted and learning
disabled, ELLs with ADD\(^1\), or ADD students who also exhibit some autistic
tendencies.

We also recognize that the suggestions contained in this chapter are not the
“be all and end all” of suggestions for working with special populations, but may
serve as a point of reference for working with some of the typical issues that arise in
our international classrooms. Having said that, we hope the suggestions will open up
avenues for teachers as they try to meet the needs of all learners.

**Differentiating for Special Needs Students**

Students with special needs in our international schools may or may not come
to us with diagnoses of learning disabilities or dyslexia, but may exhibit real
difficulties with learning. Although the learning issues for each student will be
unique, there are several characteristics demonstrated by learners which may indicate
a learning disability. These may include difficulties in one or more of the following
areas, and are not due to hearing/vision problems, environmental or educational
deprivations:

- Organization – personal, spatial, time
- Short/long term memory
- Attention

\(^1\) We are using the terms ADD and ADHD interchangeably in this chapter.
Teachers often notice a difference between the child's academic performance and ability; that is, the teacher senses that the student is capable of a better standard of performance than s/he is currently achieving, and may be puzzled by the discrepancy. Our friend and colleague, Nancy Robinson3 offers this sage advice: “When a student ‘just seems lazy’ – be suspicious. Very few are born lazy. On the top of your list should be a suspicion of hidden learning disabilities but also suspect depression, Attention Deficit Disorder without the hyperactivity, even poor vision or hearing that has gone undetected.”

Nancy also offers us a sound ‘problem solving approach to teaching learning disabled students’ who have difficulties in reading:

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2 Sally Shaywitz (2003) offers a good discussion on the structural and functional differences in the neurological make-up of learning disabled and non-disabled children. Her studies, using magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs) point to a neurological basis for dyslexia.

3 Dr. Nancy Robinson is the former director of the Halbert and Nancy Robinson Center for Young Scholars at the University of Washington. We are grateful to her for her many contributions to this chapter and book.
A Problem-Solving Approach to Teaching Learning-Disabled Students

- There is no single best way to help learning disabled students because there is no single syndrome of reading disability.

- The best thing you can do is to observe and listen carefully to how students speak, how they read aloud (and whether they do better reading silently than aloud), and try to figure out what will be helpful. Are there times they are successful? Use your own sleuthing skills. Be specific and objective.

- Start by looking at very basic skills such as ability to analyze words into components, get alphabetic-sound linkage right. Sometimes it seems so simple that it’s hard to believe that the otherwise smart student can’t make the connection. Seems impossible, but it’s true.

- In the regular classroom, it is always helpful to try to get around the disability in teaching anything but reading
  - Lighten the reading load – shorten selections, use same words every time for assignments, etc.
  - Use technology wherever it will work (new programs will read material aloud including material from the internet, anticipate spelling, etc.) ([www.donjohnson.com](http://www.donjohnson.com) is a good place to start). Some programs will enable teacher to scan the test in – to read the test to student and record the student’s oral response so the teacher can grade it later.
  - Use many different media – get books from reading services (see [www.rfbd.org](http://www.rfbd.org)) or have parent tape text, let parent read longer homework selections to students, use videos, etc. For true dyslexics, keep complexity of material high; for those with language-learning disabilities, try to simplify or at least repeat material and let parent/buddy interpret if needed.

- Your best approach is often through the student’s own interests and material that is challenging, keeping their engagement and motivation high.

- Be a believer. Some problems students have seem so simple – like linking letters and sounds – that it is almost impossible to believe that they continue to have these problems, day after day, year after year. They can be exasperating – even more for the student than for the teacher/parent. Keep your cool!

A good reference for working with special needs students can be found in Eide and Eide (2006). Their book, *The mislabeled child: How understanding your child’s*
unique learning style can open the door to success, explains many kinds of difficulties and offers practical strategies to address them.⁴

Differentiated instruction is an excellent approach to meet special needs students where they are and take them where they need to be in the educational continuum. Other suggestions for working with children with learning disabilities or special needs include the following:

1. **Relationships are everything.** Children with learning disabilities often have poor experiences of school and consequently have difficulty developing trust in new settings and with new people. Spend time to make sure you know the student behind the mask. It is likely that teachers will make little progress with these students until a relationship is established. If students are behaving poorly, try to find reasons for the poor behavior. If a learning situation is not working for a child, s/he will usually let us know.

2. **Focus on student strengths instead of deficits.** Because many of us entered the teaching profession to be of service to others, we often make the mistake of focusing on a child’s difficulties, problems and deficits, and how to fix them, rather than focusing on his/her strengths. However, we are rarely able to help a child improve by focusing on deficits. Instead, when we are able to identify a strength and build on it, we can often use the strength to improve a weakness. For example, if a child who is experiencing difficulty in learning to read is a kinesthetic learner who needs to move around, capitalize on this style

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⁴ See also the following internet resources for more suggestions, advocacy and support:
- [www.texasreading.org](http://www.texasreading.org) (a number of resources that can be downloaded)
- [www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/Cierra.pdf](http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/Cierra.pdf) (good source for teaching beginning reading and/or checking basic skills)
- [www.ldanatl.org](http://www.ldanatl.org) (National Learning Disabilities Association of America) offers a variety of resources.
- [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org) A parent resource with numerous articles about specific disabilities, good links.
- [www.interdys.org](http://www.interdys.org) (International Dyslexia Association)
- [www.nlda.org](http://www.nlda.org) (Nonverbal Learning Disabilities Association)
preference by using large cardboard cut-outs of letters that need to be placed on the ground like a giant jigsaw.

3. **Develop strong home-school relationships.** Many students with special needs have difficulty organizing themselves. They forget their homework, they forget to write it down, and they lose personal belongings. Having a good relationship with the child’s parents is often helpful in getting the child organized. Keep the parent’s e-mail address or phone number handy.

4. **Ensure that feedback is timely.** Prompt feedback helps students see the relationship between cause and effect. Sometimes students with special needs require a lot of reassurance from teachers that they are on the right track. Students with learning disabilities also may easily forget the learning objective that was meant to be the focus of the assignment, unless feedback is given in a timely manner.

5. **Teach collaboration skills explicitly.** So often, students with special needs have difficulty in social settings. They don’t learn from social cues and often have to learn explicitly how to cooperate within a small group setting. Teaching collaboration skills explicitly (turn taking, sharing ideas, coming prepared, etc.) gives students tools to work cohesively as a team member.

6. **Use multiple modes of presentation.** We need to give students with special needs multiple forms of input in order to ensure their comprehension. We really should not expect students to “get it” on the first round of instruction and should include a recursive pattern in our planning so that we swing back to a concept using a different mode of presentation each time.
Differentiating for Students with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD or ADHD)\(^5\)

Working with ADD students may provide us our most frustrating – and rewarding – experiences as teachers. Because their attention can sometimes be so erratic, it is difficult to superimpose a pattern of behavior on these children. Their distractibility and poor attention, however, often result in late assignments, lost personal belongings and poor organizational skills. Although descriptions of children with ADD have occurred in medical literature for over a hundred years, our own profession’s understanding of the condition as a neurobiological disorder is much more recent.

\(\text{Brown (2007) compares having ADD to having a symphony orchestra in the brain in which an effective conductor is missing. Despite having individual parts that work well, there is no “master coordinator” to pull all the efforts together. ADHD affects the brain’s cognitive management system (executive functions) and affects one’s ability to:}\)

- Organize and get started on tasks.
- Attend to details and avoid excessive distractibility.
- Regulate alertness and processing speed.
- Sustain and, when necessary, shift focus.
- Use short-term working memory and access recall.
- Sustain motivation to work.
- Manage emotions appropriately.

\(\text{Brown, 2007, p. 22}\)

To date, three different subtypes of ADD have been identified (NIMH, 2006):

- **Predominantly inattentive**: students with this subtype are inattentive, but do not show significant signs of hyperactivity or impulsivity. Signs of inattention may include difficulty screening out irrelevant sights or sounds, poor attention to detail, poor organization, e.g. losing personal belongings or inability to

\(^5\) We are using the terms ADD and ADHD interchangeably in this section.
follow directions, or skipping from one activity to another with poor rates of work completion. We sometimes think of these children as “day dreamers” because they seem to be lost in their own world.

- **Predominantly hyperactive-impulsive**: these children do not show significant signs of inattention, but are hyperactive and impulsive. These children seem to have excessive energy and are in constant motion, dashing around the classroom, tapping pencils or fidgeting in their seats. They may also have great difficulty restraining their behavior, have difficulty thinking before acting, blurting out inappropriate comments in the classroom, or have difficulty waiting their turn.

- **Combined type**: these children show signs of inattention as well as hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Not every student who has difficulty paying attention or who shows signs of impulsivity or hyperactivity necessarily has ADD. A diagnosis of ADD is based on the severity and duration of symptoms, and the extent to which they interfere with everyday life (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994). However, because ADD has to do with neurological impairments that effect executive functioning, and because executive functioning does not usually mature in humans until late adolescence, the disorder itself may not be easily diagnosed until an individual is in his/her late teens.
Brown (2007) has identified six components of executive functioning. These components help us to function in our daily lives, often without our own conscious awareness:

- **Activation**: organizing, prioritizing, and activating for work.
- **Focus**: focusing, sustaining and shifting attention to tasks
- **Effort**: regulating alertness and sustaining effort and processing speed
- **Emotion**: managing frustration and modulating emotions
- **Memory**: using working memory and accessing recall
- **Action**: monitoring and self-regulating action

There is no single best treatment for ADHD. Although some children may have adverse reactions to specific medications, in many cases, the use of fine-tuned, stimulant medication is often helpful in providing the child with a window of opportunity for learning. *Medication on its own, however, does not solve the issue of learning.* Interventions for ADHD children are best handled in partnership between home, school and medical practitioner.

Some suggestions that may be useful in working with children with ADHD include the following:

1. **Recognize that ADHD is not a lack of willpower.** It is a neurobiological condition that interrupts the development of self-management skills and it often continues into adulthood. ADHD is not simply another word for “behavior or attitude problems.” It is important for teachers to understand this point, so that our own frustration levels don’t get in the way of educating and supporting these children. Hallowell (1994) suggests that historically, it was probably the excited, excessively energetic child who was drew many of the

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6 See also [www.chadd.org](http://www.chadd.org) (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder) – for information and resources.
punishments at school. Most children want to do well, and don’t want to attract the ire of adults in their environments.

2. **Provide organizers and organizing support:** Because they are so easily distracted, and because their attention can be so erratic, anything we can do to help organize the ADD child will serve him well. This may mean separate, colored folders for homework, or different binders for each curricular area. It may also mean packing the child’s backpack the night before school, so that everything is ready and in place for the morning. Home – school relationships are very important to develop and maintain. Communication between the two serves to provide consistency in our expectations for the child.

3. **Be consistent in behavior and expectations, and maintain rules that can be understood and followed.** When individuals go in and out of attention, life can be very difficult for them to predict. Consistency in adult behavior and expectations will help to keep students grounded and not cause daily school routine to be such a guessing game.

4. **Look for the ‘lost’ student.** Become aware of the quiet child who seems lost – this may be your quiet ADD student (quite often female), who will otherwise disappear into the background of the class. Because these children look like they are attending and focusing on their work, and because they are so quiet, their inattention and lack of understanding may slip our detection for some time.

**Differentiating for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**

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7 Autism and Asperger’s syndrome were formerly seen on a continuum as part of the same disorder. Although they share some similar characteristics, Asperger’s syndrome has been listed as a separate diagnosis since 1994 in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR).* In this section, we have focused on those symptoms that are similar between the two disorders.
We are seeing increasing numbers of children with autistic characteristics or with diagnosed Asperger’s syndrome traveling with their parents overseas and seeking admission to international schools. As such, we felt it important to include a section on differentiating for autistic children.

Autism is defined as a developmental disability that significantly affects a person’s ability to communicate and use nonverbal cues, e.g. facial expression or tone of voice (IDEA, US Department of Education, 2006). This impacts any social interaction they may have. Autistic children also have difficulty with language development, academic learning, play, and motor development. They are very sensitive to sensory input; many are hyper-sensitive to sound, contributing to difficulties in developing receptive language, while others are hyper-sensitive to visual input (e.g. flickering lights).

Autistic children are easily overwhelmed by new and unpredictable situations as they find it difficult to apply knowledge gained from earlier experiences to new settings. They also have difficulty learning through imitation, and are often engaged in repetitive actions and verbal repertoire. There is some current research in neuroscience that suggests autistic children may have a breakdown in their mirror neuron systems, the neurons which allow us to learn through imitative behavior (Altschuler, Pineda & Ramachandran, 2000).

The following are very general descriptions of autistic children and it is misleading to think of them as typical. We recognize that each child comes to us with his/her own unique combination and degree of learning issues.
Temple Grandin (2007), a university professor and industrial designer with autism, offers the following suggestions for working with children with ASD. At the elementary school:

- **Give the student time to respond.** When speaking to students with autism, teachers will notice that they take a long time to process auditory information and then produce responses to them.

- **Avoid long strings of verbal directions.** Because of difficulties with auditory processing, children with ASD will get lost in long instructions.

- **Respect sensory sensitivities.** Be aware that the child’s heightened sensitivities make him/her easily overwhelmed by regular school experiences such as loud or excited classroom discussion or even the ringing of the school bell. Teachers may need to help ASD children develop coping skills.

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The National Education Association in the United States has recently published a list of key indicators. All autistic children share the same early characteristics (NEA, 2006):

- Lack of direct eye-contact. Autistic children use peripheral, rather than central vision, which causes them to appear to look at an object with eyes averted.
- Lack of joint attention (i.e., attention to the same item or topic as another person)
- Lack of reciprocal conversation (i.e., ability to engage in verbal turn taking)
- Atypical sensory/motor processing

In addition, people with ASD exhibit core deficits of varying degrees and combinations in the following areas:

- Difficulty with identifying important global concepts and elements of tasks
- Difficulty processing auditory information—understanding, retaining, and retrieving;
- Difficulty generalizing skills—skills must be taught in context;
- Difficulty with sequencing information or steps in a task;
- Difficulty transitioning between different activities;
- Difficulty with time concepts and time management;
- Atypical and/or uneven academic, social, or emotional development (e.g., high functioning in some academic areas, low functioning in others).

*National Education Association, The Puzzle of Autism, (p. 3)*
Avoid vague language. Autistic children think concretely, and instructions such as, “It’s time for P.E.” will need further elaboration (i.e. that work needs to be put away and the class tidied up, that children need to line up and walk to their PE class).

For middle and high school students with autism:

- Develop the student’s strengths. Help students to learn how they learn best, whether it is through visual, auditory, kinesthetic or tactual means, and then help them make the link between the strength area and learning new material.

- Develop social skills through shared interests. Special classes or activities clubs such as chess, computer programming, or book circles can be positive and safe environments for students to learn social skills.

- Find – or be – a mentor. Autistic children need advocates who will help them to broaden their range of interests or deepen an existing one. They are often fixated on repetitive activities, and helping them to turn these fixations into useful activities will also help autistic children to be successful in life.

- Make a gradual transition from school to employment. Although this is not always easy in international school settings, there are some schools such as the International School of Brussels and Western Academy in Beijing, already leading the way with work – school programs (p. 30 – 31).

Differentiating for Highly Capable Children

Interestingly, the idea of differentiating instruction was originally developed for use with gifted and talented or highly capable children, students who required greater challenge than the curriculum on offer. Strategies recorded elsewhere in this
book (e.g. curriculum compacting) were created specifically for use with gifted children.

There are a number of definitions of giftedness or gifted behavior. One theory that has been influential in shaping policies and programs for gifted children in the United States as well as in the United Kingdom\(^8\), Western Australia\(^9\) and New Zealand\(^10\), is Renzulli’s (1998) ‘Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness’. In this model, Renzulli discusses the dynamic nature of gifted behavior as the interaction between well-above average intelligence, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity.

Well-above average intelligence is evidenced by high levels of abstract thinking, verbal and numerical reasoning, rapid information processing and an ability to apply learning to novel situations and make connections to real life situations. Renzulli also includes the application of these skills to specific areas of knowledge or human performance; making appropriate use of knowledge; and the ability to sort relevant from irrelevant information.

Task Commitment can be thought of as the capacity for high levels of focused attention, enthusiasm, interest and involvement in a particular area and the capacity to sustain that interest, persevere in the endeavor and work hard. Setting high standards for one’s work. We recognize this aspect of Renzulli’s definition is often difficult to fulfill, particularly in adolescence. Many gifted individuals will not exhibit task

\(^8\) http://www.nagebritain.org.uk/giftedness/conceptions.html#renzulli
\(^9\) http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/Gifttal/provision/provtris.htm
\(^10\) http://www.tki.org.nz/r/gifted/handbook/
commitment until they are in the right environment, and as a result, may present as serious under-achievers.

**Creativity** is demonstrated by originality of thought, flexibility in thinking, reaching out for new and different connections, being mentally playful; and a willingness to take risks.

Individuals who are gifted and talented are capable of developing the interaction between these three areas, and applying them to potentially valuable areas of human performance. Renzulli (1998) warns us against limiting identification of this special population to the top 2 – 3% of students who show “school smarts” alone, or receive the highest marks on standardized or IQ tests; historically, he writes, it is the *producers* of knowledge, those who have found new connections in thinking, who have been considered to be truly gifted, rather than those who were only *consumers* of knowledge. As educators we need to be oriented towards developing gifted behaviors in certain students at certain times and in certain circumstances.

Giftedness can also be thought of in more general terms as being advancement in some areas of development that we value, whether in academic or some other domain (Robinson, 2007, personal communication). We need to be *hopeful* as well as *flexible* in our perception of giftedness and acknowledge that the demonstration of gifted behaviors doesn’t need to be established on the first day of school and may include students who are not successful academic learners. None of these are neat or tidy definitions!

In working with gifted children an optimal match approach (Robinson & Robinson, 1982) may work best; that is, to strive towards an appropriate fit between readiness and opportunity (Robinson & Robinson, 1982). For highly capable learners, this may involve:
• Acceleration, either within the classroom or between class levels (there are many accelerative options, including escaping the Tyranny of the Birthdate through early school entry).

• A combination of compacting (pre-assessing so you don’t waste time “teaching” what the child has already mastered or could master with a simple demonstration) and, with the time saved, deepening and extending the curriculum through substitute assignments, independent work and projects with other highly capable students (Robinson, 2007, personal communication).

Be aware that gifted learners may end up taking a great part of the load in a cooperative learning situation – because they often care more about the end product. In such instances it becomes very important to teach explicitly the norms of collaboration and the expectations for group work – and then closely monitor the group process.

In *Teaching gifted students in the regular classroom*, Susan Winebrenner (2000) provides us with an indispensable reference for teaching gifted students in the regular classroom.

Other suggestions for working with this population follow.

1. **Beware that gifted students may be at risk.** Because certain areas of academic work come so effortlessly to them, they don’t develop the problem-solving heuristics or the resilience to face sudden new challenges. Many of them think so quickly that they often can’t explain how they arrived at their answer. School work may come so easily to them that it won’t be until they are much older that they face failure and, as a result, suddenly break down with self-doubt. They may not have developed the approaches to problem-solving that their contemporaries have. Gifted students are often looking for greater stability, loyalty and intimacy than their age mates are prepared to give them, and as a result are also at-risk emotionally.
2. **Don’t be misled by academic achievement** (or the lack of it). Many gifted students may be underachieving. Prolonged experiences with boredom in the classroom may have produced negative attitudes to school.

3. **Help students to learn about themselves**: Help them learn about their strengths, interests and preferences. Who are their heroes? What are their hobbies and leisure time interests? Being flexible in our teaching approaches, and providing students with choice may help them identify and develop special interests.

4. **Look for prior knowledge** – Gifted students sometimes learn less than others because they already know more to begin with. Listen to the questions they ask, the inferences and connections these students make, and provide opportunities for them to grow. Continue to probe, using mediational questions that will allow them to think deeply. Teach students to self-assess, so that they learn how to judge their own work. Beware that curricular standards don’t dictate “minimum” competencies for gifted students.

5. **Watch out for gifted girls!** Many cultures produce unspoken pressures for girls to be obedient, submissive, attractive and downplay intelligence.

6. **Don’t over-use gifted students as tutors.** Gifted students can be very helpful in explaining concepts to classmates in age-appropriate language. However, it is important not to over-use them as assistant teachers.

7. **Provide opportunities for these children to work with their intellectual peers, even adults.** These opportunities may include grade acceleration, after-school interest groups and clubs, or special projects.

**Differentiating for English Language Learners (ELLs)**
Sometimes when we design programs, it is convenient for us to think of ELLs as a single, specific population. However, when we come face-to-face with them in our classrooms, we know the only similarity they share is in not speaking the language of instruction. Even with same-country backgrounds, ELL students are not a monolithic group. They are as varied and diverse as any group of international schools students, and thus, differentiating for ELLs is not an issue of choice.

New ELLs in any international school face the daunting task of adjusting and adapting to a new community (and finding a sense of belonging there) at the same time as they must balance language learning with content learning in a new language (Nordemeyer, 2007, in press). When working with ELLs, it is important not simply to use words easily understood by the students. Krashen (1988) and others have written on the importance of Comprehensible Input, that is, setting receptive language targets just beyond what students can easily understand. Comprehensible Input, in low stress situations, helps ELLs acquire informal language, particularly important for beginning level ELLs. However, by itself, Comprehensible Input is insufficient to help students develop academic English. It is for this reason that class teachers need to become knowledgeable about language development – trends, expectations and plateaus – for students in the grade level they teach. Scarcella (1990) indicates the need for direct language instruction, followed by supportive instructional feedback to develop academic language.

Some suggestions for working with ELLs are as follows:

1. **Develop a broad understanding of the socio-cultural contexts of your students** – perhaps a brief history of their countries, their values and traditions, and attitudes towards education. Students and parents always
appreciate it when teachers have taken the time to get to know something about their national identities.

2. **Become familiar with the types of errors made by specific language groups.** Quite often, teachers will find that typical linguistic errors are made due to interference from native languages. For example, in Bahasa Indonesia, there is only one pronoun used to refer to the third person (he, she), and it is gender-neutral. Consequently, when students from this language group speak English, they will often make mistakes in gender references. Adjectives in Bahasa Indonesia are also placed after the noun, so students from this language group often have difficulty with correct English syntax; instead of saying: “a big car,” they may say, “a car big”.

3. **Become knowledgeable also about the English language as well as most effective ways to teach it.**

4. **Become knowledgeable about expectations for language development of students at the grade level you are teaching.** This includes knowledge of how language is transferred and how to recognize it when it has reached a plateau – and how to move it forward again.

5. **Use multiple sources of input:** gestures and other nonverbal communication, dramatization, pantomime, visuals, and technology. All over the world, a common response to not being understood is to repeat what we’ve just said, only in a louder voice! All of us, ELLs, as well as other students, benefit from multiple sources of input. When we select other sources of input to support our spoken message, chances of it being understood are greater.

6. **Check frequently for comprehension!**
Jon Nordemeyer (2007) has prepared suggestions for mainstream teachers to integrate language and content learning:

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<th>Five ways for mainstream teachers to integrate language and content learning</th>
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| 1. **Use graphic organizers.** Give students a visual (e.g. timeline, diagram) which relates information and helps to organize new concepts. Graphic organizers also provide a “visual grammar” by allowing common language patterns to be connected to key concepts (e.g. smallpox vaccine was developed in 1796, the Red Cross was founded in 1864).
| 2. **Teach vocabulary.** Provide students with thematic lists of difficult words before a new unit, and return to these words throughout the unit. Pay attention to how common words (i.e. *table*) may be used differently in an academic context. Teach students to use prefixes, suffixes and roots to understand and remember new words since approximately 60% of English words have Latin or Greek origins. Practice with fun activities like bingo, pictionary, or crossword puzzles.
| 3. **Use dialogue journals.** Have students write back and forth with other students, with their family or with the teacher. They can describe what they have done in class, articulate what they have learned and share any questions that remain.
| 4. **Teach discipline-specific genres.** Identify and explain different text types (e.g. lab report, newspaper article) by modeling patterns of organization, text structures and transition words. Provide writing frames or sentence starters to scaffold students’ writing in the genre.
| 5. **Reverse the lesson.** Instead of introducing a new idea through a reading and then following it with application activities, reverse the sequence. Start with a lab, video, demonstration or other hands-on activity, then use the text to reinforce both content and key academic language.

Nordemeyer echoes the need for collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers so that instruction is seamless and supportive of ELLs learning. This means that collaboration needs to intentional, and take place in the planning, instruction and reflection stages of the teaching cycle – and that time in school needs to be given for teaming. Having said that, as skills in collaboration don’t come naturally to most of us, each member of a teaching partnership needs training in collaborative practice. This will enable full participation from all members in the process of teaming.