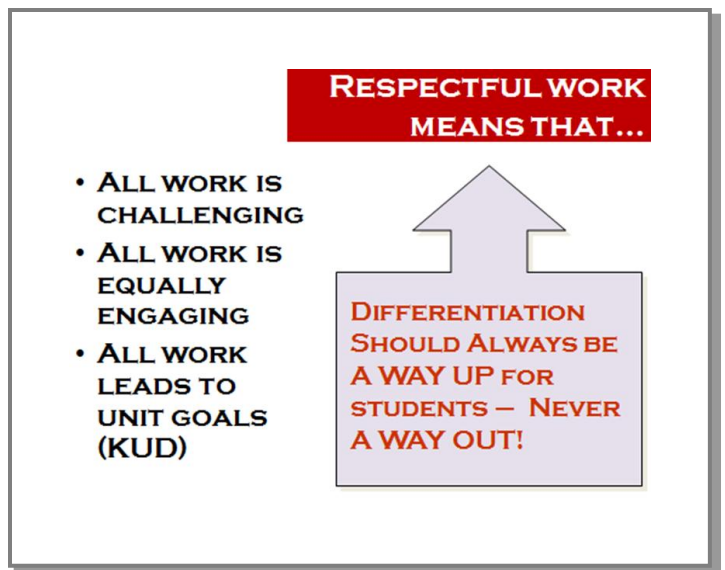


## Respectful Differentiation

When teachers make the decision to differentiate content, process, product, or affect for interest, learning profile, and/or readiness, they must ensure that all versions of the differentiated task feel equally respectful to students. Specifically, respectful work in a differentiated classroom means that

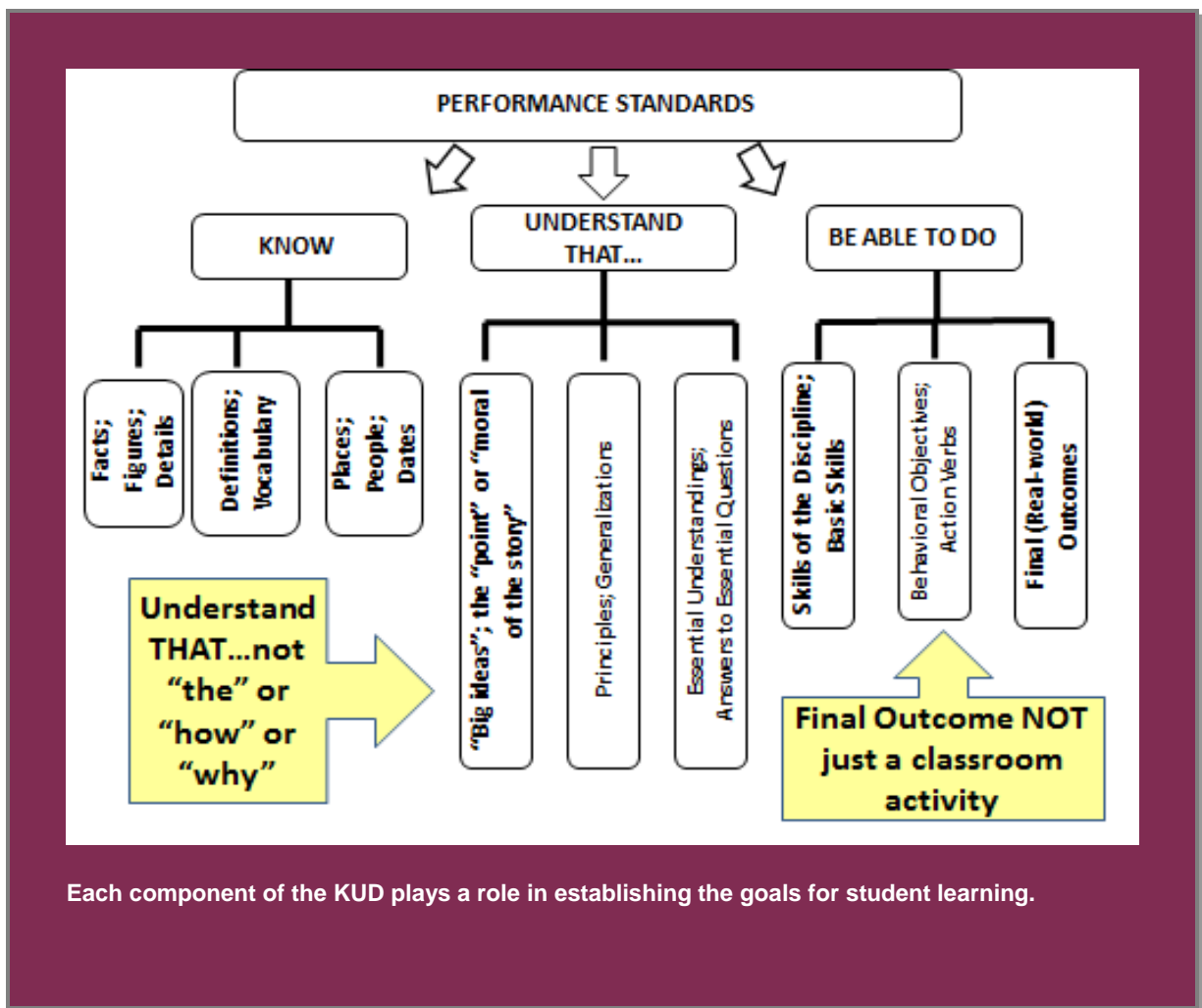
- All students work with **high-quality curriculum** that leads them to important and clear unit goals (KUDs), and ensures that students meet or exceed applicable standards or benchmarks.
- All versions of the tasks must be **appropriately challenging**, so that all students have the opportunity to truly grow.
- All versions of the tasks are **equally engaging**. Differentiation should be set up in such a way that students don't really care about what someone else is doing, because what they are doing seems just as attractive and important as anyone else's work.



### High-Quality Curriculum

All students deserve to interact with and be challenged by the highest-quality curriculum. Such curriculum is supportive of students' journeys to meet or exceed designated standards or benchmarks. It helps them continually increase their knowledge, understanding, and skill in the disciplines. In other words, high-quality curriculum helps all students grow.

Teachers in a differentiated classroom believe that high-quality differentiation begins with high-quality curriculum. This means that before teachers even begin to think about differentiation, they make sure they are crystal clear about what students should know, understand, and be able to do (KUDs) as a result of the learning activities. By identifying the KUDs, teachers ensure that their lessons incorporate standards and benchmarks, which typically focus on the knowledge and skills related to a discipline, but also push students toward a deeper understanding of the big ideas of the disciplines.



Not only do the KUDs help the teacher plot the learning journey for all students, but they also play a key role in ensuring that when there is more than one way for students to engage with the content, process and/or product everyone is headed for the same destination. In designing high-quality curriculum, teachers are mindful of the varied interests, learning profiles and readiness levels they are likely to encounter and create tasks that capitalize on that knowledge.

### Differentiating for Interest

Is it possible for teachers to make everything in the curriculum highly personal, engaging, relevant, and “fun” for each and every student? Of course not. After all, how can students even know that they are interested in something if they have never been exposed to it? Therefore, teachers in an effectively differentiated classroom balance opportunities for students to work with their current interests with **opportunities to expand their interests.**

### Differentiating for Learning Profile

Students who are allowed to work in comfortable ways, when appropriate, tend to be more efficient in their learning. Fighting the challenge of content along with the challenge of how to take it in, process it, and show their learning via products can interfere or detract from learning.

Of course, if teachers always let students work in their preferred modalities, students would be handicapped in the long run. As in the real

world, sometimes everyone in the differentiated classroom needs to do the same thing

*“Teach me my most difficult concepts in my preferred style. Let me explore my easiest concepts in a different style. Just don't teach me all the time in your preferred style and think I'm not capable of learning.”*

*~ Virleen M. Carlson, Center for Learning and Teaching, Cornell University  
(Strickland, 2007)*

in the same way at the same time. If a teacher's goal is to teach students how to write an essay, it is probably not appropriate to give them the choice of writing or painting a picture. Nevertheless, when it is possible to offer learning-profile options, students need a chance to work in ways that are most comfortable for them but also should sometimes be encouraged to try new ways to expand their preferences. Teachers in a differentiated classroom try to balance such opportunities.

### **Differentiating for Readiness**

Differentiation does not ignore the fact that most of us are tied to grade-level standards. However, it is clear to teachers in a differentiated classroom that students cannot grow if they are asked to do things that are way beyond—or way below—their current level of readiness.

Differentiation for readiness, then, helps balance the ratio between how much effort a student has to put into something and the amount of success they are likely to get out of it. Readiness differentiation does not guarantee success for all students all the time, but it makes it much more likely that with hard work and appropriate support, most students can be successful most of the time.

It's not a crisis if once in a while work is too hard or too easy for a student. It is a steady diet of too easy or too hard that is damaging in the long run.

### **Dos and Don'ts of Designing Respectful Differentiation**

While designing differentiated tasks, remember the recommendations that are listed in the following table.

DON'T	DO
Give some students more work and others less work.	Give students different work that matches their readiness, interest, and/or learning profile. Try to balance the amount of time the task will take students, given that they work hard.
Dictate what some students do and allow others to make choices.	Provide choice to all students whenever possible—human beings respond well to choice.
Make some versions of an activity fun and engaging, while other versions are dull and boring.	Put yourself in the shoes of the students to whom you will assign varied work and try to design each version so that it is high-interest, engaging, and appropriately challenging for them.
“Dumb down” some versions of a task, especially for struggling learners.	Make sure that all versions of the task lead to the same KUDs. Be especially careful that all versions of the work require students to work with the big ideas or the understandings of the unit. Every student should do work that is appropriately challenging.
Withhold scaffolding from on-grade level or advanced students.	Provide appropriate scaffolding for all students, regardless of their readiness level. In other words, if you are asking advanced students to stretch, they will need support in the same way that struggling learners need support to work on tasks that are a bit too difficult for them.
Expect advanced students to always work and learn on their own.	Understand that not all advanced students can learn on their own—and not all advanced students enjoy doing so. This is more an aspect of learning profile than readiness.
Differentiate only by asking advanced students to be mini-teachers or tutors for those who struggle.	Remember that not all advanced students enjoy or are good at teaching others. Teaching well involves many skills in addition to content knowledge. Be sure that advanced students get opportunities to truly stretch their competencies in a discipline.  In addition, all students should have the opportunity to help and support others, when appropriate. This is not

DON'T	DO
<p>Assume you know everything there is to know about a student's interests, learning profile, and readiness.</p>	<p>Engage in an ongoing dialogue with students about their perceived needs. Use your best judgment, but supplement the information you have with information that only the student (and his parents) can offer.</p> <p>If some students have a concern about the task they are assigned, listen to them and consider their points.</p>
<p>Automatically put English language learners or special education students in the struggling group or automatically put identified gifted students in the advanced group.</p>	<p>Remember that strong interest in a topic or a high degree of match between teaching and learning profile can propel a student who normally struggles to a higher level of readiness.</p> <p>Conversely, lack of interest or profile match can mean that a gifted student belongs in a lower-readiness group for a specific learning experience.</p>

*Adapted from Strickland, 2007*