Differentiation Strategies

Below are brief descriptions of differentiation and differentiation strategies. Suggested URL's are included to find further information about some of the suggested strategies.

Strategies that are starred (*) require some initial planning, but once developed, are used with a minimum of preparation.

Alternative Assessments
Alternative assessment is taking place all the time; effective teachers use it as a diagnostic tool. It takes a variety of forms: homework, discussions, journals, portfolios, quizzes, one-on-one conferences, and products/ performances. Teachers can use that data to modify instruction, assessment, or products.
http://www.cse.ucla.edu/resources/justforteachers_set.htm
http://www.cse.ucla.edu/CRESST/Sample/AAIP.PDF

Anchoring Activities
This may be a list of activities that a student can do to at any time when they have completed present assignments or it can be assigned for a short period at the beginning of each class as students organize themselves and prepare for work. These activities may relate to specific needs or enrichment opportunities, including problems to solve or journals to write. They could also be part of a long-term project that a student is working on. These activities may provide the teacher with time to provide specific help and small group instruction to students requiring additional help to get started. Students can work at different paces but always have productive work they can do. Some time ago these activities may have been called seat-work, and should not be confused with busy-work. *These activities must be worthy of a student's time and appropriate to their learning needs.*
http://www.saskschools.ca/~bestpractice/anchor/index.html
http://www.rockwood.k12.mo.us/departments/curriculum/diff/anchor_files/frame.htm

Authentic Assessments
Authentic assessment requires students to demonstrate skills and competencies that realistically represent problems and situations most likely to be found in real life. Students are required to produce ideas, to integrate knowledge, and to complete tasks that have real-world applications.
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/stw/sw1lk8.htm
 http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/

Choices of Books (*)
Classrooms need a variety of books, reflecting the diversity in ability, learning style, and interest of the students. A practical ways to provide this is to team up with two or three other teachers when ordering books and share the various levels so that all levels are represented in each of the classrooms.

Choices of Research Questions, Homework Options (*)
This makes sense from a motivational perspective, but it goes far beyond. Students choice of topic is not only important for task complexity and readiness, but for talent development, as well. Students will continue to work hard and well at those tasks chosen by them. Discussing over time the pleasure gained by choosing and working on a task of choice is key to the student's persistent development of those skills and talents.

"Choice Boards" are excellent tools for structuring these options. Questions, assignments, or tasks can be placed in rows or color groupings (in pockets or on index cards) and can be grouped within a particular interest, ability, or readiness level, still providing choice for the student within that row or color.

Community Mentorships
The community is a wonderful resource for providing opportunities for differentiation for students. Ideas, resources, or guidance for students interested in any number of areas are available to schools taking the initiative to seek them out. Students can talk about ideas with experts, interview, develop projects or products, or even apprentice as a way of learning.

Compacting of Curriculum Based on Pre-Assessment
Compacting is the process of adjusting instruction to account for prior student mastery of learning objectives. Compacting involves a three-step process: (1) assess the student to determine his/her level of knowledge on the material to be studied and determine what he/she still needs to master; (2) create plans for what the student needs to know, and excuse the student from studying what he/she already knows; and (3) create plans for freed-up time to be spent in enriched or accelerated study.
http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/pdf/Curriculum_Compacting.pdf
http://www.carolyncoil.com/ezine21.htm

Cooperative Learning Structures
These are effective in kindergarten through college. As refined by John Slavin of Johns Hopkins University Center for Academically Talented Youth, the critical attributes of cooperative learning distinguishing it from group work are: assigned tasks, group learning, and individual assessment. This results in a project or problem to be solved, during which all members of a multi-ability team work at specific tasks to complete, their job being to make sure all members of the team understand the concept. Following the group portion, students are tested individually on the work. The teams are compiled to represent a microcosm of the larger class, relating to gender, race, ability, and interest. Many have taken the original concept of Slavin's model and simplified and marketed it.
http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/intech/cooperativelearning.htm
http://www-acad.sheridanc.on.ca/scls/coop/cooplrn.htm

Differentiation (*)
Students continue to come to us with diverse needs and abilities. Differentiation provides ways for teachers to design instructional opportunities that meet the needs of all students in their

classes. Differentiated instruction gives students multiple ways to get to a desired learning goal. Differentiation isn't giving less of the same assignment; it means thinking of culture, learning style, abilities and interest in designing other ways of learning and exploring a topic, learning the same concept. This is done through modification of content or the process/product.
http://www.carolyncoil.com/ezine11.htm
http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.3adeebc6736780dddeb3ffdb62108a0c/
http://www.ascd.org/ed_topics/cu2000win_willis.html
http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/strategy/strategy042.shtml
www.eduscapes.com (then search for topic)
http://www.migrant.org/esl/survival_packet/ESL_Tips_and_Techniques.htm

Flexible Grouping (*)
Students work as part of many different groups depending on the task and/or content. Sometimes students are placed in groups based on readiness, other times they are placed based on interest and/or learning profile. Groups can either be assigned by the teacher or chosen by the students. Students can be assigned purposefully to a group or assigned randomly. This strategy allows students to work with a wide variety of peers and keeps them from being labeled as advanced or struggling.

4-Mat
This is a complex model of instruction that incorporates brain research, learning styles, and actually mirrors the way the brain functions. Instruction moves through a process of engagement/involvement with the task, information, practice, and finally sharing and real-world application.
http://www.aboutlearning.com/what_is_4mat.htm

Games (*)
A wide variety of games can be used to practice mastery of information and skills. These can be teacher-made, student designed, or purchased.

Graduated Rubrics
When describing what application of skills or understanding of a concept looks like, a rubric is helpful in describing benchmarks along a continuum. A rubric can serve not only as a way to assess progress along the continuum but it can help instruct by describing the next level of learning.
http://www.aea267.k12.ia.us/cia/framework/rubrics/when.html
http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php
http://www.teachervision.fen.com/page/4521.html?detoured=1

Graphic Organizers (*)
A visual method of organizing information to aid in comprehension and to foster understanding (e.g., mapping, outlining, webbing). Graphic organizers help students relate information learned in meaningful and accurate relationships. The organizers serve as a framework to structure the information the teacher is providing, and not only help make sense of it but can increase retention of the concepts taught, as well. The most effective organizers are simple visual representations of the function of the concept.

Guided Reading
The teacher guides small groups of students in reading carefully chosen, instructional level texts in order to build independence, fluency, and comprehension strategies. The teacher regularly observes and assesses students' changing needs and adjusts groups accordingly.

Independent Studies
When students study independently, they have the potential to develop talent and interest. It is essential that teachers in all grade levels encourage and teach students to learn more about topics that interest them. Organizational skills, developing questions to research, setting goals, and sharing information are skills that need to be taught in order to structure that independence and support them in their study.

Individualized Spelling Lists (*)
Teachers can modify the lists or they can modify how the spelling is assessed. Words can be taken from current reading material.

Interest Groups/Centers/ Stations
Interest centers (usually used with younger students) and interest groups (usually used with older students) are set up so that learning experiences are directed toward a specific learner interest. These are areas of the room where materials, resources, and possibly examples are available for practice, research, or extension. These should be related to the enduring objectives, and can be designed by the teacher and/or students. They can be remedial in nature, as well as areas for independent study or enrichment.

Jigsaw (see also Cooperative Learning)
Balanced teams (ability, interest, and gender) research a given question or questions based on a problem to solve, concept to define, or article to summarize. In each group, students become "experts" on the topic, ultimately reporting back to the rest of the class on their findings. (Students are assessed, however, not on their work with the team but individually.)

Learning Centers
Centers can be an excellent method for teaching students effectively. Working with children in a small group setting allows for more direct teaching and enhanced student response. Centers provide a less intimidating environment for the students and give the teacher the opportunity to focus on specific areas of study. Although centers take a lot of organization and preparation on your part, in the end the work can really pay off.
http://www.eduplace.com/rdg/res/classroom.html
http://www.teachervision.fen.com/teaching-methods/curriculum-planning/4755.html?detoured=1

Learning Contracts
Learning contracts begin with an agreement between the teacher and the student. The teacher specifies the necessary skills expected to be learned by the student and the required components of the assignment, while the student identifies methods for completing the tasks. This strategy (1)

allows students to work at an appropriate pace; (2) can target learning styles; and (3) helps students work independently, learn planning skills, and eliminate unnecessary skill practice.
http://www-distance.syr.edu/contract.html

Lectures and Graphic Organizers
Graphic organizers help students relate information learned in meaningful and accurate relationships. The organizers serve as a framework to structure the information the teacher is providing, and not only help make sense of it but can increase retention of the concepts taught, as well. The most effective organizers are simple visual representations of the function of the concept.
http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr1grorg.htm

A good reference to use is *Inspiration* software, which is available in the district. You can use this to design a visual representation of a concept or, even more effectively, have your students design the visual representation of their new understanding via the organizer.

Literature Circles
Choice plays a role again in this format, where small, temporary groups are formed based on book choice. Students meet regularly, and discussion topics are designed by students. Teacher plays the guide on the side as facilitator, who evaluates student conversations; students also self-evaluate. Readers share with classmates at the end, and new groups form once again, based on books chosen.
http://www.literaturecircles.com/article1.htm
http://www.litcircles.org/Extension/weaving.html

Multiple Intelligences Options
Based on Howard Gardner's differentiation between and relationships among intelligence preferences and strengths, teachers can build on his research by building upon varied intelligence profiles. One strategy he recommends incorporates topics explored via "entry points" which involves students using their particular "intelligence" to explore, discover, and share information.
http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr054.shtml

Multiple Levels of Questions (*)
Questioning hierarchies are useful tools in designing instruction and assessment in differentiated classrooms. Multi-level questioning permits students to explore and think about a concept at the appropriate level of complexity.
http://members.shaw.ca/priscillatheroux/thinkingskills.html#questions

Multiple Texts as Resources (*)
Teachers can collect other versions of textbooks (text samples, textbooks in and out of adoption, or other genre relating to the subject, such as poetry, stories) and keep these in an accessible and inviting area for use by students.

Open-ended Activities (*)

These can be learning activities, which are selected or designed by students. These activities offer a range of learning styles, intelligences, genre, and interest areas. For example, students can be required to design the way in which they will demonstrate their understanding of the objective and the accompanying skills and knowledge of a major concept in the curriculum.

Performance Assessment (see Authentic or Alternate Assessment)
> http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/assment/as8lk30.htm
> http://www.educ.state.ak.us/tls/frameworks/mathsci/ms5_2as1.htm

Portfolio Assessment
A portfolio is a collection of work gathered over time that reflects processes, products, achievement, and progress. It is valuable to the teacher, the student, and to the student's family/guardian.
http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/earlycld/ea5l143.htm
http://www.phschool.com/professional_development/assessment/portfolio_based_assess.html

Problem-Based Learning/ Simulations
Students research and move through a comprehensive study of a significant, contextualized, real world situations individually or with a learning partner or small group comprised of students with similar interests, abilities, readiness levels. Mixed ability levels can undertake such a task, in which case the process would be modified accordingly.
http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.a4befa0de1b8d1fddeb3ffdb62108a0c/
http://www.cotf.edu/ete/teacher/teacherout.html
http://www.intel.com/education/designprojects/

Reading Buddies (*)
This strategy is particularly useful for younger students and/or students with reading difficulties. Children get additional practice and experience reading away from the teacher as they develop fluency and comprehension. It is important that students read with a specific purpose in mind and then have an opportunity to discuss what was read. It is not always necessary for reading buddies to always be at the same reading level. Many teachers use this strategy across the grades.

Schools Attuned Strategies
Schools Attuned is a comprehensive professional development and service program that offers educators new methods for recognizing, understanding, and managing students with differences in learning. When implemented within schools, this program enriches the way in which all students are educated.
http://www.schoolsattuned.org/

Tape Recorded Materials
These can be used as enrichment in learning/interest centers, as additional support for students (reading as they listen), or as an alternate way for students to gather information.

Think, Pair, Share (*see also Cooperative Learning)

Pairs of students work together. Individual students first take time to think about the question/problem and then explain their thinking to their partners. During sharing, guiding questions or frameworks for responding can be completed, or theories advanced by the students. Finally, each pair presents thinking to another pair or to the large group.

Tiered Activities, Labs, Products
Teachers want all the students to understand the same enduring objectives, and to plan for this they can design tiered or leveled activities. Students come away with the same essential concept, but may arrive via a route differing in complexity, abstractness, and open-endedness. There are core elements of the learning project, which are common to all students, but the demonstration of the enduring objectives differ.
http://www.bsu.edu/gate/Instruction/criticalquestions.htm

Varied Journal Responses (*)
Students who are given opportunities to respond in ways that are a close match to their readiness level and the complexity of the thinking involved will be more highly motivated to response and persist in the thinking and writing required. Topics can be designed in advance and the teacher can hand them out or once again, students can be given the opportunity to select that response of their choice

Varied Supplementary Materials (*)
Teachers may keep a variety of textbooks, computer programs, and materials available for use in interest centers, reference areas, or for work in small groups. Concepts explained visually, musically, or in narrative form may help students understand in a way more aligned with their strengths and learning style.
http://www.thinkquest.org/library/

Writer's Workshop
This approach to teaching writing is effective in Kindergarten and, with some changes in terminology, in the secondary school, as well. It incorporates writing process, replicating the process that real world writer's use when they create and revise their own writing. The differentiation is evident in student choice of writing topic, genre, and decisions made regarding revision. Students work independently, with a partner, with the teacher in brief conferences, and in small groups, as well as sharing their work with the class at various points in the process.
http://www.springfield.k12.il.us/resources/languagearts/readingwriting/writerworkshop.htm