
Section I

Creating a Professional Learning Community

Your Professional Learning Community

Welcome to an adventure! If you are a teacher interested in not only developing your classroom repertoire but also increasing your students' achievement and motivation, you are in for a treat. Differentiated instruction is a vehicle for delivering engaging and demanding curriculum that recognizes and responds to student variance in interests, learning profile, and readiness. Professional learning communities are a vehicle for connecting teacher practice and student outcomes, improving both. Before we launch into the logistics, the how-tos, and—to be honest—the work involved in professional learning communities, it's important to focus on this promise of adventure. This is why you are here. This is why you are joining a professional learning community. Welcome!

Definition/Description of Professional Learning Community

A Professional Learning Community (PLC), as we will use the term in this workbook, has the following attributes:

- A group of four to six teachers or administrators
- That meets regularly
- And works between meetings
- To accomplish shared goals.

In this case, the shared goals should be something like

- To increase teacher knowledge, understanding and skill in differentiated instruction.
- To increase student motivation and achievement as a result.

Let's look at the definition a piece at a time. First, why four to six participants? The number could be flexible, of course, but it needs to be large enough to bring a diversity of perspectives and experiences to the table and small enough to allow specific discussions of each member's work. If you can manage to have an even number of participants, colleagues can work in pairs between sessions, which has added benefits: it decreases the number of projects to be discussed at any one time and it increases the options available for working on the projects. For example, two teachers can try the same strategy in their classrooms, observe each other, and reflect on the strategy in the context of two different teachers and two groups of students.

Pre-assessment for Differentiated Instruction

1. Rate your proficiency in each of the categories listed. Use the following scale:

Expert – Totally comfortable with this

Practitioner – Fairly comfortable with this

Apprentice – A bit uneasy about this

Novice – Need lots of help with this

- _____ Defining differentiation
- _____ Providing a rationale for differentiation
- _____ Distinguishing between KNOW, UNDERSTAND, and DO (KUD)
- _____ Determining “big ideas” for a subject area
- _____ Identifying *individual* students’ interests
- _____ Identifying *individual* students’ learning preferences (styles, multiple intelligences, etc.)
- _____ Identifying *individual* students’ prior knowledge in a subject
- _____ Determining the difference between respectful and not-so-respectful differentiated activities
- _____ Setting up a positive learning environment
- _____ Challenging the “average” student
- _____ Challenging students who struggle in a subject area
- _____ Challenging students who are advanced in a subject area
- _____ Planning a variety of classroom groupings (for example, incorporating a balance of both homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings for interest, for learning profile, and for readiness)
- _____ Differentiating content
- _____ Differentiating activities in class
- _____ Differentiating homework
- _____ Differentiating for interest
- _____ Differentiating for learning profile
- _____ Differentiating for readiness

2. For each of the following, indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD).

- _____ I learn by reading, watching, and visualizing (visual learner)
- _____ I learn by listening, discussing, and debating (auditory learner)
- _____ I learn by doing, trying, and experimenting on my own (kinesthetic learner)
- _____ When learning something new, I prefer to get the whole picture before I examine the details (whole-to-part)
- _____ When learning something new, I prefer to work up to the whole picture by examining the details (part-to-whole)
- _____ When demonstrating new learning, I prefer to analyze, compare and contrast, and evaluate (analytic learner)

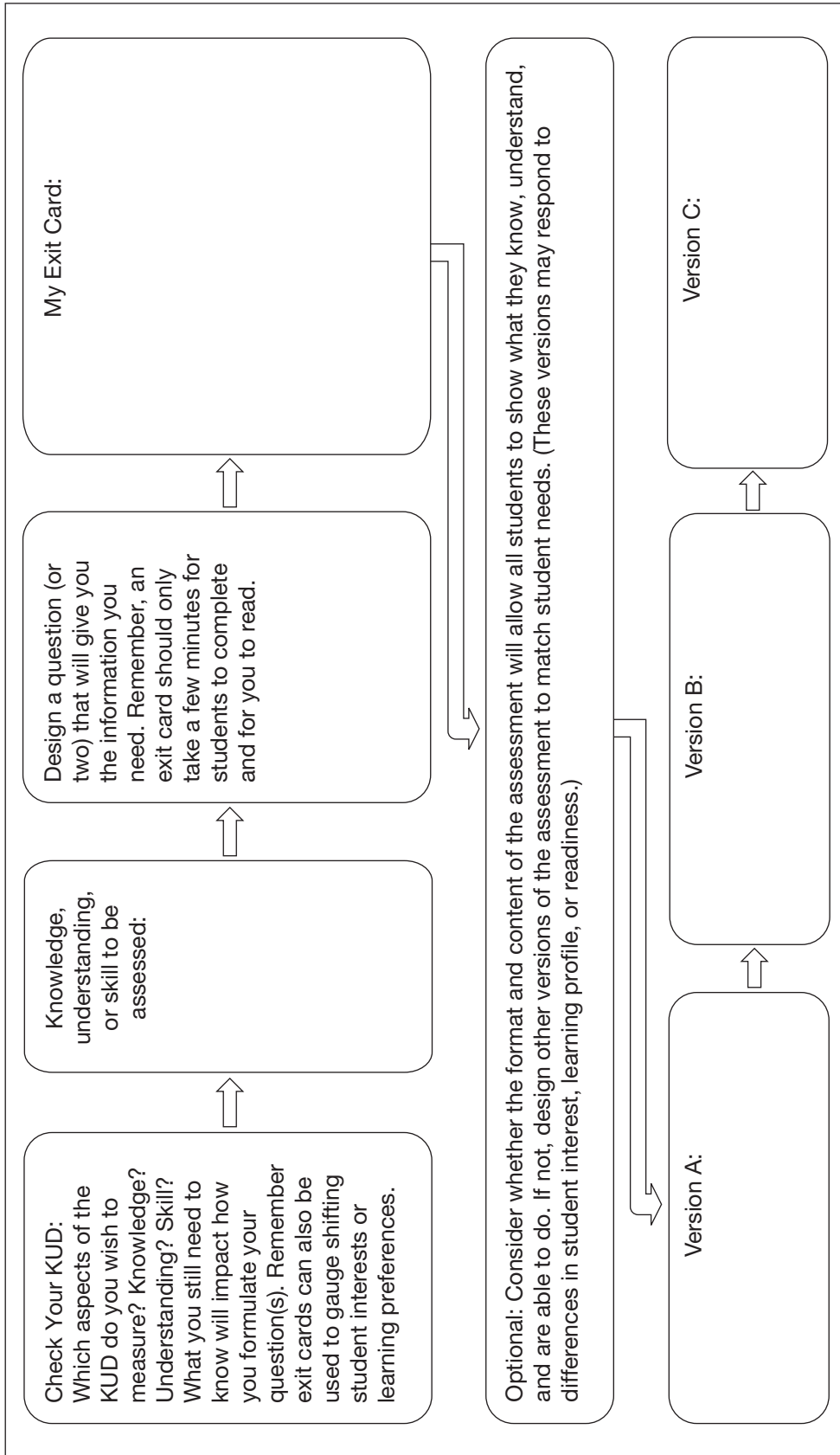
FIGURE 2
Making It Routine

The form is contained within a large rectangular border and is divided into three horizontal sections. Each section consists of a prompt on the left and a large, light-gray rounded rectangular box on the right for the response.

- Section 1:** The prompt is "Describe the routine and its role in the differentiated classroom".
- Section 2:** The prompt is "Describe how you will introduce the routine and how students will practice it".
- Section 3:** The prompt is "Take notes on the success of the introduction and ideas for follow-up".

FIGURE 6

Exit Card Planner



Session 8

Strategies for Differentiated Instruction

Researching the Topic (Before the Session)

This session may be repeated as many times as necessary. For each session, decide whether members will focus on one strategy or leave it open to individual members to decide.

Read or review information related to the strategy. Come to the session ready to discuss what you have learned and share any questions you still have about the strategy.

Core Reading

Download this free article from the “core readings” section of www.ascd.org/publications/books/109039.aspx: Differentiating Instruction: Finding Manageable Ways to Meet individual Needs by Scott Willis and Larry Mann in ASCD Express

Other Recommended Resources

General

- Instructional Strategies That Support Differentiation and More Instructional Strategies That Support Differentiation, chapters 7 and 8 in *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*
- A Few Instructional and Management Strategies for Differentiated, Mixed-Ability Classrooms, appendix in *How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms (2nd edition)*
- Differentiated activities in any unit in *Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum* (grades K–5, 5–9, or 9–12). See Instructional Strategies Used in each unit to help you identify examples of a specific strategy

Specific

- Using Flexible Grouping section in *Tools for High-Quality Differentiated Instruction: An ASCD Action Tool* (RAFT, Cubing, Learning Centers, Sternberg Intelligences, Compacting, Entry Points, Jigsaw)
- Sample differentiated lessons in toolbox of *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom: Strategies and Tools for Responsive Teaching* (Learning Menus, Think-Tac-Toe, RAFT, Tiering, Complex Instruction, Learning Contracts, ThinkDots, Multiple Entry Journals)