

Preface

Through our work and coaching in differentiation, we have had many opportunities to listen to teachers. We have observed and coached in hundreds of classrooms and talked with teachers about their work, and each time we have learned something new. We have listened to students' voices as they describe their learning in a differentiated setting. Both teacher and student voices have guided us in writing this book.

Teachers' voices have inspired us to build this book around nine complete differentiated lessons from prep to year five. Included among these lessons are examples from a librarian and a gifted/enrichment teacher as reminders that differentiation is an all-inclusive and schoolwide philosophy. Teachers from Conway School developed all the lessons, and all supplemental materials are their original work. In response to requests from teachers, these lessons are based on example standards; clearly spell out what students should know, understand and be able to do; include preassessments; employ strategies especially suited for effective differentiation; and provide all supplemental materials needed to teach the lesson.

To place our work in context, we begin with a history of our initiative at Conway that chronicles professional development and offers supporting data. We follow with a chapter on coaching to emphasise our belief that expert coaching is a key ingredient in advancing a clear understanding of differentiation. In conversations with teachers and administrators, a question often asked is "How could we implement differentiation without coaching?" To put our answer in perspective, think of the coaching we depend on in our daily lives. We rely on planners to advise us on finances, coaches to teach our children sport and experts to help us learn new technologies. Their guidance and support help us avoid detours and frustration. Teachers are our students' coaches in learning. Doesn't it follow that we should provide the same resources to our teachers as they learn new skills?

The chapters that follow focus on curriculum design, preassessment, management and lesson examples from primary and intermediate year levels. Sections of many of these chapters contain dialogue with teachers as they reflect on the creation of their differentiated lessons and share the "whys" of their lesson design. We believe in these core tenets: that assessment should be designed to diagnose, intervene and prescribe; that curricular goals should be clearly aligned with performance expectations; and that instruction should focus on closing achievement gaps for ethnic and socioeconomic minorities and students with disabilities or language challenges. As you will discover in the chapters ahead, differentiation not only enhances achievement of these goals, but in so doing empowers teachers and students, increasing the potential for both to be successful.

Students' voices have been a key influence on our writing as they tell us if we are on the right track regarding teaching and learning. When asked for examples of differentiation in the classroom, students have talked about preassessment:

My teacher gives a pretest so she will know what I know and what I and the rest of the class need to work on.

1

Making Differentiation Successful for Students and Teachers

For the past nine years, as principal and differentiation coach, we have guided a primary school to understand and implement principles of differentiation as a core schoolwide change initiative. Making differentiation the heart of professional practice has been our goal as we strive to help every student succeed. Our work has been rewarding, insightful, heartwarming, hopeful and amazing. It has also been challenging, arduous, exacting and, at times, difficult. As we look back, we can see how far we have come. The roles and relationships of teachers and students have changed, new learning communities have evolved, and there have been paradigm shifts in thinking about curriculum, assessment and instruction. We are eager to share details about the rewards of our journey and insights we have gained along the way. Rather than teach the fundamentals of differentiation, we hope to broaden and deepen existing knowledge and understanding about differentiation by sharing conversations with teachers who have been part of this journey. As professionals who have embraced differentiation and applied its core principles in their classrooms every day, their willingness to share their thinking about how they plan for diverse learning needs is a priceless contribution. We have organised the story of our journey thus far around their words in hopes of providing new perspectives, fresh ideas for application, novel interpretations and encouragement for others striving to gain expertise in differentiation. Our intent is not to offer recipes, formulas or templates. We hope the lessons we have learned, and continue to learn, may serve to nourish and sustain the kind of change required when a whole school makes the decision to teach responsively.

Lane: But taking a different perspective doesn't necessarily allow us to be more informed. If I'm placing myself in a different role, I'm expanding upon my reality to see other realities.

Kay: You're basically testing your own assumptions.

Donna: So how about this: "Taking a different perspective allows us to test our own assumptions and belief systems"? That's a really important thing for the kids to see.

**Lane
and**

Kay: Great work!

[See Figure 3.5 for Donna's Revised Understand.]

Like Linda, Donna also realises at this point in her professional development work that essential questions are a crucial missing piece in her design layout. Now that she has a crystal-clear vision of key knowledge and understandings in her sights, she generates a list of essential questions that will "signal the understanding-related goals and the inquiries they imply for the unit" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). As she scans key terms in the KNOW column and core ideas in the UNDERSTAND section, the questions flow (see Figure 3.5). Like Linda, she will share these questions with students—possibly a few at a time as they overarch each day's plan—and invite her year four and fives to expand the list. It is important to keep the wording of essential questions student friendly. She knows her gifted students will be comfortable with the wording and that the questions will serve as appropriate focal points and "appetisers" for inquiry and research.

Lane and Kay compliment Donna on the DO (see Figure 3.4), telling her she has done an excellent job of letting the verbs in the standards guide her to specify the exact performances students should demonstrate. She decides that "recognise diversity" should be broadened to "recognise and define" and wonders about being more specific on the last one. Lane gives her positive feedback and suggests she narrow this one to the exact skill.

Lane: On number six, all you need is "Respond in writing and through oral presentation", because that is the specific skill you are targeting.

Now Donna is thinking "skills" and sees some that need to be added to her original list.

Donna: I think I also need something in there about analysing and synthesising the information they gather from their research. And I think since we've included the impact of diversity on cultures, I need to add a DO on that. . . . How about "Demonstrate awareness of how cultural differences can profoundly impact people"?

Kay: That works. Don't you also want them to examine possible bias and how it takes form?

Donna: I don't just want them to examine it, though. I really want them to evaluate.

precious makes participation purposeful. Being persistent in reaching goals builds a sense of autonomy and belonging. It's so much easier for students to remember three rules than twenty or even six—and their logic and simplicity make them rules to be lived by rather than memorised.

Creating a management system for a differentiated learning community may be described as establishing “control-with-a-little-c” (Brimijoin, 2002). The teacher is not “In Control”, but instead *shares* control with students. In this context, it is important for teachers to see the correlation between respectful, interesting task assignments and engagement. Consider the following linear and causal sequence: Curriculum and instruction designed to meet individual needs creates purposeful and relevant learning experiences, which increase engagement, leading to a reduction in (and often the elimination of) management problems. Teacher and student surveys verify that effective differentiation and successful community building greatly reduce off-task behaviour (Tomlinson, Brimijoin & Narvaez, 2008).

An essential ingredient of an effective management system is to truly know the students. Insights into students' learning profiles, interests and behaviour traits can help teachers offer multiple avenues to success. This information is valuable for selecting and implementing proactive strategies to prevent meltdowns and for deciding on appropriate reactive strategies to extinguish bushfires fairly and expediently as they erupt.

What follows is a “glossary” of proactive and reactive management strategies that teachers at Conway and elsewhere have found effective in reducing management problems, while at the same time creating a community dedicated to building individual autonomy, respect and success.

PROACTIVE STRATEGIES

Routines and Procedures

The establishment of routines and procedures with the whole class requires dedicated attention and time during the beginning of a school year and continual reinforcement thereafter. In spite of “robbing” time from instruction, setting routines and procedures in place up front saves significant time in the long run—a wise investment with a high rate of return. It is impossible to expect things to flow smoothly for small-group differentiation if students are unsure of how to get into small groups. We often assume that students know processes when, in fact, they rely on us to provide models. By learning and rehearsing the following routines and procedures, students can internalise logical choices for constructive, productive action over time.

- *Transition Rehearsal*: Movement from seatwork to group work or from one activity to another should be rehearsed until it is safe, efficient and timely. Countdowns encourage speedy transitions, and minutes saved on transitions can be added to recess or independent activities. Students love to play “Beat the Clock”, challenging themselves to better their last transition time.
- *Nonverbal or Kinesthetic Cues*: Nonverbal signals offer an alternative way to get attention. They should be agreed upon, practised and memorised. Attention getters like clapping rhythms, instructions such as “If you hear me clap twice”, raising one hand to indicate quiet, and using colour coding to indicate task assignments and materials are all helpful proactive strategies.
- *Teambuilding*: In classrooms where students will be working together, it is important to define rules for group and buddy work. Individual roles for group work should be

(Continued)

YEAR LEVEL/SUBJECT: PREP/LITERACY**A RHYME IN TIME**Designed by Sarah Hall

TEACHER REFLECTION

This rhyming lesson worked well for the 18 unique students in my classroom. However, after completing the lesson, there were aspects of the lesson that I felt would make the lesson even more effective if changed a bit. After reflecting on the lesson both on my own and with the help of Kay Brimijoin, there were portions of both the introduction and body of the lesson that I decided to modify to make the lesson even better.

To introduce the lesson, I got my students interested and excited about what we were about to learn by showing them many differences we could see in the classroom. To do this, I used actual students, pictures and words to express the concept. This worked well with the class. However, after reflecting, I decided to remove the pictures from the process, because the students understood the concept well and three different examples were not necessary.

In the culminating performance portion of my lesson, I had four different activities based on four different levels of readiness. The most advanced group was asked to write "super silly sentences" about an object using three rhyming words. After completing the lesson, I realised that it would have been a good idea to have a page of pictures to help jump-start their ideas. This would help the students get started on their rhyming sentences and would help to eliminate much of the anxiety some of them might have about the silly sentences.

Finally, when coming up with my original UNDERSTAND in the lesson, I attempted to think of the big picture. However, what I failed to take into account was why this big picture is important to my students and how they can relate it to themselves. Therefore, I changed my UNDERSTAND from understanding that the world is made up of similarities and differences to understanding that the world is made up of patterns and that it is important to understand these patterns because they will help us become better readers, writers and communicators.

Length of Lesson: 60 minutes**Example Standards Addressed:**

Example Performance Standards: 1.5, 1.6: Discriminate between rhyming and nonrhyming word pairs; 2.1: Use developmental spelling to write.

DEFINING THE LEARNING GOALS

What students will:

KNOW

- Define rhyming and nonrhyming words.
- Alphabet and letters and sounds.
- Sound spelling.
- Patterns.