

Strategies From Real Teachers for Real Classrooms

Differentiation That Really Works

Years 3–5

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Why We Wrote This Book

Many years ago, we were classroom teachers ourselves and we spent time working with students, trying to understand their needs. We read some of the early work of A. Harry Passow and Sandy Kaplan coming out of the US National/State Leadership Training Institute of the 1970s and thus began our journey towards learning how to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all of the learners in our classroom. We both found early on in our teaching careers that giving all students the same assignment resulted in some students doing well while others were bored or frustrated. Thus, we learned how to differentiate as a means of surviving and allowing students to thrive. We learned that “more” and “faster” were not better for our gifted students, but that we needed qualitatively different work that centred on broad-based themes, issues and problems. We learned that, in order to achieve, all of our students required choice and challenge. Now that we have left the school classroom and teach at university level, we still have to differentiate to meet the needs of our undergraduate and graduate students.

Currently, we work together at the Centre for Gifted Studies and Talent Development on a number of projects related to differentiated instruction and meeting the needs of learners in the classroom. The centre is located in Burriss Laboratory School on the campus of Ball State University, US. The proximity of the centre to the Laboratory School provides us the opportunity to work with teachers and students on a regular basis so that we do not lose the important connection to what is actually happening in classrooms today. Working in the Laboratory School and in other schools throughout the United States, we have been able to use our practitioners’ and researchers’ lens to identify strategies that work well in the classroom.

The strategies that we have chosen to include in this book had to meet several criteria: (1) be easy to implement, (2) be easy to modify, (3) encourage student engagement, (4) have inherent opportunities for differentiation and (4) be appropriate for multiple year levels. The strategies we've selected are not an exhaustive list of differentiation strategies, but they are the ones that we see most often being used by real teachers who differentiate well. Although there is little empirical evidence to support the use of these strategies, the practice-based evidence is widespread (Coil, 2007; Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Kingore, 2004; Tomlinson, 2003; Winebrenner, 1992). We think these strategies are vital for teachers to have in their bag of tricks if they want to provide choice and challenge for all learners in their classroom. However, quality differentiating requires more than just a simple bag of tricks.

Working with teachers for more than 14 years nationally and internationally, we found some who were differentiating to a high degree and some who were just beginning to differentiate. We found some who did it well and some who struggled. Comparing and contrasting those teachers who differentiated well from their colleagues who struggled allowed us to zero in on classroom components that seemed to make the difference. What we found is that many teachers were using strategies to differentiate instruction but lacked the management to facilitate multiple groups working on different activities. Others had interesting lessons and activities but when some students finished early, chaos was present. Some teachers differentiated a lesson by providing several paths to reach the same goal, but all students were required to complete the same assessment. Those teachers who had the most successful classrooms not only used differentiated learning strategies but also made use of anchoring activities, classroom management and differentiated assessment. Realising that these four components are necessary led to the development of our model, *Creating an Integrated Response for Challenging Learners Equitably: A Model* by Adams and Pierce (CIRCLE MAP; Adams & Pierce, 2006). We have realised that when teachers have all four components clearly articulated and they implement them, the stage is set for successful differentiation.

We learned something else with our teachers: No matter the level of experience or the effectiveness of differentiation, everyone's issue was time. We have had the privilege to come in contact with teachers who differentiate in their classrooms on a daily basis. These classrooms are "pockets of excellence", where teachers embrace the differentiation mindset and look at everything they do through the differentiation lens. We felt other teachers could gain some time by using lessons that practising professionals have already created and tested in their own classrooms. The lessons in this book

CHAPTER 3

CHOICE BOARDS

Overview

A choice board, sometimes called a noughts-and-crosses board, is a tool to provide students with choice and challenge. It has nine squares in a three by three array. Directions are placed in each square. Students choose three squares to complete to win the noughts-and-crosses game: three in a row, three in a column or three diagonally. The directions may be for a product or for extended practice. Choices can provide enrichment, acceleration or additional practice, depending on how the choice board is designed. Generally, students are producing three products, which would provide formative or summative data for the teacher.

How and When to Use Choice Boards

Choice boards can be used at the beginning or end of a unit or anywhere in between. The length of time students have to complete their three choices varies with the teacher's purpose. Some choice boards are designed to be completed in a week (e.g., one that deals with weekly spelling words). Other times, a choice board may last for longer periods of time, depending on the complexity of the choices or the length of time the teacher chooses for activities to be completed. Choice boards may be tiered to accommodate varying learning needs when a wider range of choices and challenge is needed. The completed activities from the choice board can be used by the teacher to plan the next steps of instruction, to assess students' progress or level of understanding, or as a means of assigning marks.

Directions for Making Choice Boards

Choice boards are simple to design using the template provided here. The table function in a word processing program is another easy way to create choice boards. Each cell contains directions for or a description of an activity to be completed. Once the activities are appropriately sequenced to allow for variety no matter how the student chooses to make noughts-and-crosses, the choice board can then be printed and copied. We have found that putting the activities on sticky notes allows for experimentation with multiple arrangements until the “best” placement is found. Then we use a word processing program to produce the final form of the choice board for students. Choose the way that works best with your particular style of creating classroom materials. Keep in mind that some activities will require rubrics while others may be self-checking and students will need to know where to find answer keys.

How This Strategy Fits in the CIRCLE MAP

Choice boards fit in the “differentiated instructional strategies” component of the CIRCLE MAP. They provide a simple yet lively means to vary the process or product in a differentiated classroom.

Examples

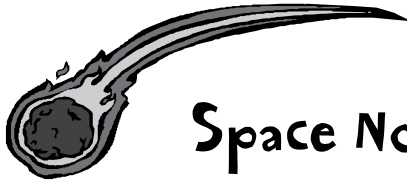
The examples we have chosen to include here address specific topics. These choice boards were created by real teachers who used them in their own classrooms. When possible, we have included the comments from the teachers and their colleagues with the intention that the comments may provide additional insight to creating your own choice board. We have tried to include a wide variety of topics to give you a number of ideas for making your own.

For example, Holly Chase created a choice board for spelling. She wanted to find some novel ways to stimulate her students’ interest in spelling words. She first developed nine activities that she thought her students would enjoy, making sure that she had offered choices in a variety of modalities. She placed these activities on sticky notes so she could arrange and rearrange her activities to get just the right placement for maximum variety. She didn’t

want students to be able to select all of their activities from one modality. Once she had an arrangement that met her needs, she typed the activities into her template, one activity per square, copied the choice boards so that each student could have one and distributed the choice boards to her students.

@Hawker Brownlow Education

Name: _____ Date: _____



Space Noughts-and-crosses

Directions: Please choose three activities. You must connect three in a row, column or diagonal.

<p>1.</p> <p>Create a song about space or the planets. You will need to perform the song in class or create a recording of yourself singing the song. Lyrics must be turned in to the teacher.</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>Create a constellation book that describes the different constellations in the sky. You must include drawings of at least 10 constellations and provide a brief explanation about each one.</p>	<p>3.</p> <p>Write a science fiction story about space and/or the planets. The story must be at least two pages long.</p>
<p>4.</p> <p>Write a letter to the Prime Minister of Australia that explains which planet should be explored to greater lengths and why it should be explored. Remember to use the correct formal letter writing format.</p>	<p>5.</p> <p>Create a persuasive advertisement about the best planet in the solar system, based on your opinion. Remember to support your ideas with evidence. Use a poster to display your advertisement.</p>	<p>6.</p> <p>Write a short play about life on one of the planets. Please include no more than three characters. The play must be performed in front of the class and the script must be provided for the teacher. Props are optional.</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>Design a model of the solar system. Label all parts of the solar system. The model must be created to scale.</p>	<p>8.</p> <p>Create a new planet for our solar system. Name the planet and create a model of it. Write a one-page paper describing the planet (e.g., size, location, gravity, colour, etc.) and compare it to Earth.</p>	<p>9.</p> <p>Make a book of poems about the planets. Please include illustrations with your poems.</p>

I chose activities _____, _____, _____.

Due date: _____



Created by Brenda Custer

Real Teacher Comments

Last year we did a space race unit. The students explored all of the planets, Sun, Moon and the stars. I had the students do a noughts-and-crosses board as their final project, but they only had to do one project. My students loved it and so did the parents. They really liked that the students were able to choose a project that they were interested in. I probably received the most compliments for this activity last year. It was a success. I modified the noughts-and-crosses board that I used this term so that three projects could be completed.

– Brenda Custer (Teacher)

I love your idea of offering the project of writing song lyrics and taping themselves singing. I actually had two students complete a similar project two years ago. It was done by two quiet girls and they wrote a rap about giants. It was hilarious!

– Kristen (Colleague)

I especially liked the option for students to create their own planet and describe it. When given an opportunity such as this, they really have to know what the significant features of a planet are, such as atmosphere, size, position in solar system, etc. In this particular option the children have to apply some previous knowledge and have the opportunity to be creative as well.

– Heather (Colleague)

I love the idea of having students create a song based on their knowledge and understanding of the material that they learned. This was something that I used as an option for my students. Only a few groups chose that option, but each group did an amazing job. They really enjoyed having that as an option to complete.

– Rachel (Colleague)