

Strategies From Real Teachers for Real Classrooms

# Differentiation That Really Works

Years 6–12

English

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# CHAPTER 1

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## 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 the 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 in the United States. 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 focus on Years

6–12 English and can be used as written or modified to meet the needs of your own English classroom. We have provided templates that can be used to develop your own materials using the strategies included here.

## **How Is This Book Different From Every Other Book on Differentiated Strategies?**

This book is different because real teachers designed the lessons. Practising professionals (everyday classroom teachers in the trenches) tested them in their own heterogeneous classrooms. These professionals differentiate on a regular basis. We have included comments for each lesson from the teacher who developed it, describing how to use the strategy and how their students responded to the activity. In addition, on many lessons, we have included comments from other teachers who reacted to it.

## **How to Use This Book**

The following steps should be kept in mind as you make your way through the book:

1. Choose the strategy you want to implement.
2. Look at the sample lessons.
3. Don't be afraid to modify a lesson to fit your year level and the needs of your own students.
4. Use the template to design your own lesson.
5. Use it in your classroom and enjoy!

## **CIRCLE MAP Model**

### **What Is Differentiation?**

Although its early focus denoted modifying curricula to meet the needs of the gifted and talented (Passow, 1982; Ward, 1980), differentiation has since taken centre stage as a means of meeting the needs of academically diverse students in the heterogeneous classroom through modifying the curriculum and learning experiences of these students (Tomlinson, 1999, 2001, 2003). Differentiation is not a collection of strategies; it is not simply offering students choices; it is not group work. Although these options may be found in a differentiated classroom, differentiation involves finding multiple

# CHAPTER 3

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## 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 make a winning noughts-and-crosses board: 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, in Zach Carter’s advanced English class, students are busily working on a choice board he has designed as part of his unit on *Great Expectations*. In each of the nine blocks, he has placed an interesting activity to reinforce or enrich the concepts he has chosen. Zach has been careful to include activities that will appeal to various strengths and learning profiles. He has developed some activities that encourage written responses and some

# CHAPTER 5

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## GRAPHIC ORGANISERS

### Overview

Graphic organisers are visual tools used by teachers to assist students in analysing, interpreting and making sense of the content. Graphic organisers come in many forms, depending on the use. Examples include Venn diagrams, compare/contrast charts, double bubble diagrams and flow charts. Graphic organisers can be used as advanced organisers, sense-making activities or as formative or summative assessments.

### How and When to Use Graphic Organisers

Graphic organisers are often used as advanced organisers at the beginning of a lesson or activity to assist students in understanding the content. They also may be used for practice with activities that require students to make sense of the content. The teacher might choose to use graphic organisers to gather formative or summative data. To accommodate the needs of all learners, some organisers may be blank, while others may be partially completed, depending on the readiness level of the students.

### Directions for Making Graphic Organisers

Graphic organisers are simple to design. However, there is no set template. The form and function of the graphic organiser will depend on the topic being taught, as well as the thinking skills students will be using. Inspiration®



is one type of software that can be used to create graphic organisers (<http://www.inspiration.com>).

## How This Strategy Fits in the CIRCLE MAP

When used for assessment purposes, graphic organisers fit in the “differentiated assessment” component of the CIRCLE MAP. However, when used as an advanced organiser or sense-making activity, they fit in the “differentiated instructional strategies” component.

## Examples

The examples we have chosen include specific graphic organisers, as well as those that can be readily adapted to many topics. These organisers 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 using the organisers.

For example, in Dr Bennett’s Year 8 English class, the students are reviewing cause and effect in three stories they have read. He has designed a graphic organiser to assist the students in identifying these elements. The graphic organiser has two boxes in each of four rows. In each case, an arrow points from the box on the left (Cause) to the box on the right (Effect). Dr Bennett provides the names of the three stories from which students may choose for the activity. Students complete the graphic organiser while he walks around the room to get a good idea of which students seem to have mastered the concept and who might still need some reteaching. Once the students have completed the graphic organisers, he has them move into groups based on the story they used to complete the activity to share their results.

## Template

Due to the nature of graphic organisers, there is no universal template.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

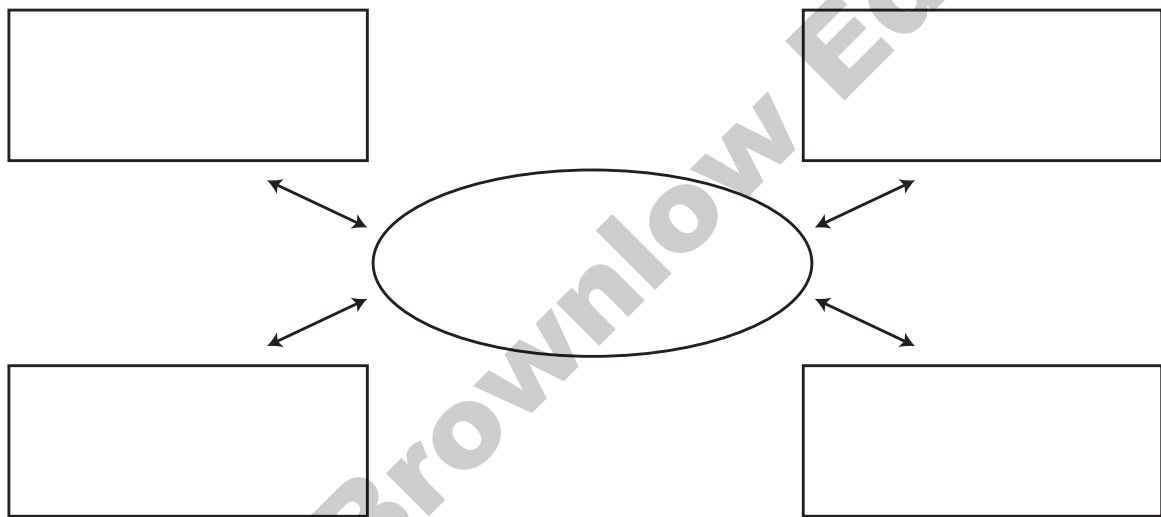
**English Year 10**

This activity focuses on “Time Enough at Last”, an episode from Season 1 of *The Twilight Zone* (1959–1964).



Directions: In your own experience, what kind of things do you value most? What would you miss if those things were lost or taken from you? Complete the map below in which you list some of these things.

In the centre circle, you should list your topic (“What I Would Miss” or “What I Need”). In each box, list something you would miss. Be sure to use complete sentences.



In one complete paragraph (approximately five sentences), discuss your “favourite things”. Why are they important?

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