

Strategies From Real Teachers for Real Classrooms

Differentiation That Really Works

Years F-2

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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 are teaching 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 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 we do not lose our 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’ lenses 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: they had to (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 do not make an exhaustive list of differentiation strategies, but they are the ones that we see being used most often 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 bags of tricks if they want to provide choice and challenge for all learners in their classrooms. However, quality differentiation 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 was that many teachers were using strategies to differentiate instruction, but they lacked the management to facilitate multiple groups working on different activities. Others had interesting lessons and activities, but when some students finished early, chaos ensued. 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 were 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: Regardless of their levels of experience and the effectiveness of their differentiation, everyone's issue was time. We have had the privilege of coming 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 had already created and tested in their own classrooms. The lessons in this

CHAPTER 2

EXIT CARDS

Overview

An exit card is a tool used by teachers to gather data about student learning. Generally, exit cards are used to gather formative data that a teacher can then use to plan the next step. The exit card is provided to students at the end of a lesson and the teacher collects the cards as students either exit the classroom or exit one activity before going on to the next in the same classroom. Exit cards may also be known by other names, such as “ticket to leave” or “door pass”. Exit cards generally have only a few questions for students to answer. Sometimes the card may ask students to respond to an overall idea that was discussed in class; at other times, students may have two or three maths problems to work on that are similar to problems demonstrated in class.

How and When to Use Exit Cards

Exit cards are used at the end of a class, an activity or a lesson. The teacher collects the completed exit cards and sorts the cards into piles based on the students’ responses. There may be a group of students who clearly understand the ideas presented in the lesson and another group of students who clearly have gaps in their knowledge. There may be other students who fall between the two groups. The information from the exit cards allows the teacher to plan the next steps of instruction to address the different learning needs of the students.

Directions for Making Exit Cards

Exit cards are simple to design. For example, an exit card can be a piece of paper that the student uses to write down answers to a set of questions dictated by the teacher. Students may use their own paper or the teacher may hand out paper from the classroom recycle box. Index cards and sticky notes are also simple and easy to use as exit cards, although somewhat more expensive. Some teachers may wish to customise their exit cards for a specific lesson or activity.

How This Strategy Fits in the CIRCLE MAP

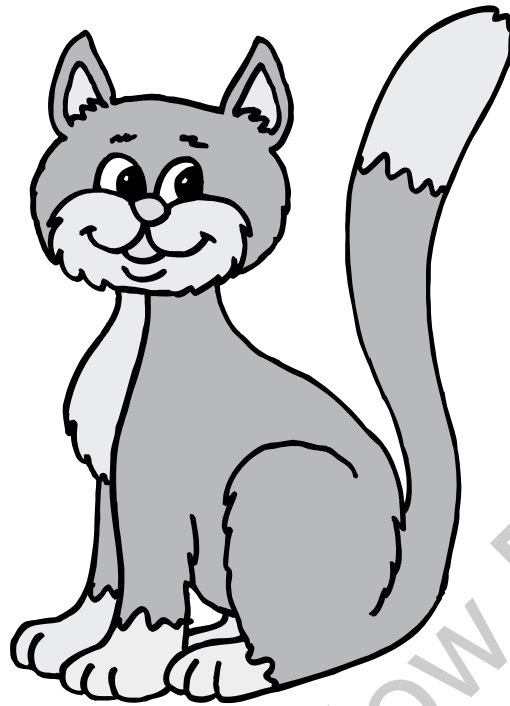
Exit cards are an important data-gathering tool for formative assessment in the differentiated classroom. As such, they are essential to the “differentiated assessment” component of the CIRCLE MAP.

Examples

The examples we have chosen include exit cards that can be readily adapted to many topics. These cards were created by real teachers who have used them in their own classrooms. Where possible, we have included comments from both the teachers and their colleagues, with the intention that the comments may provide additional insight into using the exit card for another topic.

For example, Brooke Brown is a Foundation teacher who has decided to implement exit cards in her class this year. She creates a card to help her determine who can recognise the letter “K”. She wants to be sure that all her students are able to understand her directions and can respond appropriately. She designs a simple card with four letters in outline form: A, F, K and R. She gives all of the children cards and directs them to colour the letter K. Students write their names or initials on the cards. Students work with file folders around their papers to eliminate their ability to see what other students are doing. As Ms Brown collects the cards, she can easily determine who can recognise the letter K by noting which letter is coloured. This will allow her to determine the entry point for each child in the next lesson.

Name: _____ Date: _____



Short Vowel Exit Card

1. Write the word that tells me what the picture above is.
2. Which letter in that word makes the short vowel sound?
3. Write at least two more words that have the same short vowel sound.

Created by Alicia Mathis

Real Teacher Comments

I was a little worried about using exit cards with my Foundation students at first. I started on my first one and realised how easy and useful it would be. I passed out sheets of decorated paper that I have been saving for no reason at all (maybe to collect dust). I read the exit cards to the students. I was surprised at how well they responded to the task without telling each other the answer. When looking at the results, they were easy to sort according to who knew what information. I based my first sort on the word. I was able to get three piles easily. Almost everyone got the vowel, so I knew that with a couple of individual conferences, I could move on. Finally, the additional words gave me a good idea of who knew the vowel sound or not.

Using the exit cards was a much easier alternative than asking the same questions 21 times. I will definitely incorporate them into the classroom more often.

– Alicia Mathis (Teacher)

What a great tool for conferencing with parents. They are quick and very easy to understand. They show parents exactly if their child knows the information or not.

– Christina (Colleague)

Name: _____ Date: _____



Exit Card

Write one thing you learned today in humanities and social sciences.

Write one question you still have about goods and services.

Draw a picture of a community worker who provides a service.

How would you explain the difference between a good and a service to another student?



Created by Maura Mundell

Real Teacher Comments

I presented my exit card on goods and services to my Year 2 class. We have been working on a unit about community helpers and goods and services for a couple of weeks. After looking at the exit cards, the students really seem to know the difference between goods and services! The last box where I asked them to explain the difference gave a few students a hard time, but then I had them answer orally and they could explain it. I may just have to work on getting those thoughts on paper.

– Maura Mundell (Teacher)

I like that you cover different strategies in your exit card. You start very broad, asking the students what they learned in humanities and social sciences and then you specifically talk about goods and services. You have them writing both statements and questions. The second row of questions (bottom two boxes) are great because they require the students to apply their knowledge in order to compare and contrast as well as draw a community worker. Great job!

– Erin (Colleague)

I like the variety to your card – the students get to draw as well as write. I agree with the written explanation parts being difficult.

– Sharon (Colleague)

I like that you had the students draw a picture; that's very good for the visual learners or for the students who still struggle with writing. I think I might use that in a future exit card as well.

– Kimberly (Colleague)