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Impact of Differentiation on Student Engagement

Shelby Thomas
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Student Engagement in a Differentiated Classroom

Shelby Thomas and Leah Nillas*
Educational Studies, Illinois Wesleyan University

Research Question

*How does **differentiated instruction** in the classroom impact **student engagement**?*

Literature Review

- Engaged students make a psychological investment in their work and persist in the work despite challenges. They are, therefore, better equipped to work collaboratively with others and transfer knowledge to creatively solve problems (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012). Students with higher levels of engagement are more likely to have higher achievement levels, as seen by assessment results (Corkin, Horn, & Pattison, 2017; Martin, 2009; Nayir, 2017).

- Differentiated Instruction is student-aware teaching in which teachers recognize and respond to student's needs by individualizing students' access to the content, process in which students learn, or the product of learning (Whitworth, Maeng, & Bell, 2013).

- Tomlinson (2008) claims differentiated instruction forms a trust with students that is built on the foundation of striving for excellence and that when people around students are pulling for them, they often feel empowered by their expectations and partnership, and persevere, despite challenges faced.

Methodology

- The participants were 22 second grade students in an inclusive classroom in a suburban school.
- Lessons were differentiated based on student readiness, ability, and learning style using Tomlinson's (2008) theory of differentiation as a framework.
- I wrote weekly field notes, detailed lesson plans, and anecdotal records to monitor changes in student engagement for each lesson. Each student completed a multiple intelligences learning profile, which I used to inform my instruction.

Differentiated Lessons Implemented

Topic	Objective	DI Strategies
Doubles Facts	Solve addition facts 1 addend apart	- Visual-Spatial (Picture Clues) - Auditory (Doubles Song)
Count On Facts	Solve addition facts with addends of 1, 2, or 3	- Bodily Kinesthetic (Fact Flip Game)
States of Matter	Identify elements of each state and give examples of objects in each state	- Visual-Spatial (manipulated diagram of states)
Sight Words	Read and spell words accurately and fluently	- Visual-spatial (manipulate tiles) - Auditory (verbal modeling)
Heating & Cooling	Identify objects that change state when heated or cooled	- Interpersonal (discussion with peers)

Figure 1. Provides examples of differentiation strategies used throughout the course of the study.

Results and Data Analysis

- Students showed signs of **authentic engagement** when instructional process was differentiated based on students' individual learning profiles. Examples of these lessons and the modifications made can be seen in Figure 1.
- Differentiating content to meet students' levels of readiness in particular areas caused students to move from **passive engagement, retreatism,** and **rebellion** in their learning towards **authentic engagement.**
- Students showed signs of **authentic engagement** and **persistence** in the face of difficulty when working in collaboration with peers on differentiated assignments, whereas peers who worked in isolation and on non-differentiated tasks were more likely to show signs of **ritual** and **passive engagement**.

Conclusion

- Teachers can utilize this research to inform their instruction to engage their unique population of students while meeting each student's specific needs.
- Research should continue in this area with more focus on student voice and student perspective on their own engagement.
- Teacher education programs should be knowledgeable of this research in order to provide future educators with a variety of tools to engage their future students.