

A Practical Look at Differentiation

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As the position of the principal becomes more demanding, it is important not to lose focus that the hat of 'instructional leader' is the most important one. Given my journey as an educator, coach, and administrator, I wanted to focus on increasing my capacity in exactly that area. Differentiation is a commonly used concept/'buzz word.' Through action research, I wanted to take a practical look at this to not only learn about it, but also be able to present it to my staff to improve instruction.

Statement of Your Wondering:

- What are 'best practice' examples of differentiation in the classroom?
- Will I be able to identify examples of differentiation in a classroom?
- How can I use this information to increase my capacity as a leader?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wonderings.....

Provided an opportunity to read two professional publications on the topic to help me better understand what it looks like and what it doesn't

Combining the book readings with observations gave me a chance to not only see it in my own district, but also in other districts

'Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom' by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Marcia B. Imbeau

'Differentiation in Middle and High School' by Kristina J. Doubet and Jessica A. Hockett

Observations and More

Jac-Cen-Del Junior/Senior High School

South Ripley Junior/Senior High School

Batesville High School

Our classrooms at GCHS

Attended a PD offering through ECESC on the topic

Recorded findings from observations and book readings

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

Two crucial fundamentals

----Relationships

- Builds into a culture of differentiation in many ways
- Establishes starting points, learning styles, and norms
- Builds trust needed on an individual and group basis

----Defining what's fair

- Fair will not mean everyone gets the same thing - it does mean everyone getting what he or she needs to take his or her appropriate next step
- Fair also means that all students will receive learning tasks that cause them to 'feel the burn' as they lift appropriately challenging academic weights

----Classroom routines are crucial

- Process for assigning student groups
- Pre-assessments
- Clearly expected routines and flow

----Pre-assessments

- They are a starting point, not a sorting tool
- Develop them to help determine misconceptions
- Routine practice will bolster purpose and usefulness

----Hooks into learning

- Present a challenge/puzzle just out of reach
- Make it meaningful - connect it to the world around them
- Present a concept as a novelty or unique

----Practical examples

- Plickers/clickers - Unique QR codes for answers
- Systematic process for calling on students and wait time
- www.mybirthdayfacts.com - gives unique facts that are associated with everyone's birthday
- Exit slips - Keeps teacher informed and then can be compared to pre-assessment
- Proper Feedback - Corrective, Evaluative, Descriptive, and Directive

----Two concluding thoughts

- Differentiation can take many forms and does not need to be threatening. It is about being in tune with each student academically and personally and fitting that within one's style.
- Master teachers do it with little to no effort because of the culture that has been developed. Inexperienced teachers need to find one and mimic.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

- I took another teacher leader along with me on the visits
- Together, we hope to influence our future practices
- This inquiry has provided intrigue as I hope to continue to bolster my instructional leader capabilities, specifically in this topic
- When discussing the art of teaching with our staff, I hope to be equipped with knowledge/concepts that can perfect their delivery.

References: