

Can Differentiated Instructional Strategies be Facilitated Successfully in One Hour Block Class Periods.

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

In attempting to implement a Response to Intervention Plan, we required our teachers to group students tiered according to their NWEA scores. The teachers did a great job at this, but struggled with scheduling time in the class to work with each group. They also were not familiar with instructional strategies that would help accomplish differentiated instruction within an hour time frame.

I focused on math and English classes only, grades 7, 8 and 10. I focused on these grade levels and academics disciplines because of mandatory state assessments. I wanted to see if we could improve instruction by covering more standards using Socratic seating arrangements and methods, utilize learning stations that addressed tiered abilities and use Kagan Instructional Strategies. The research took place during the 2016-17 school year.

Statement of Your Wondering:

My wondering question is what are the possibilities of providing adequate differentiated instruction within an hour time frame that would address various achievement levels.

Therefore, the purpose of my action plan was to increase my knowledge of differentiated instructional strategies and sharing that information with a small group of teachers to implement in their classes. This is to determine if we can improve mastery levels of content from pertinent standards.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insight into my wondering question, I visited the six classes to determine what level of differentiated instruction was occurring. To my dismay only 2 out of the six classes had even used the NWEA and the previous year scores to group 's ISTEP students according to achievement levels. One generic lesson and instructional plan was facilitated to all students regardless of mastery levels.

I met with the group of teachers and asked them to bring their assessment data. The second step was to make sure the teachers grouped the students. I also discovered that at least 2 of the teachers needed training in how to read the formative assessment scores and group students accordingly. This gave me insight as an administrator to instructional road block. I assumed that all teachers were using data and that all teachers knew how to read it. I learned differently.

The teachers were directed to arrange the seats in a Socratic format where students at the various station can discuss assignments with each other. They used this instructional strategy twice a week. I sat in on most of the class period. Over the course of one year, I was able to observe the teachers use of various tiered instructional strategies. I immediately could determine which teachers were prepared by the learning stations and the students progression through these stations.

The high school showed the least promise because they did not consistently use testing data to guide instruction. Some of the teachers would create the environment, but not have enough instructional materials prepared for all groups. The biggest problem they expressed was the limited time period.

From this observation, I knew that training and resources were needed for the teachers. We had Study Island, Achieve3000 and Math180, but teachers did not know how to use them as supplemental resources for each tier. A full two days of training to connect the teachers to the resources and help them align the resources with the standards and instructional calendar. This lead me to understand how important laser focused professional development is in implementing and maintaining a rigorous curriculum that also addresses various student skill levels.

Over the course of time, I noticed a trend in two of the classes; Math 8 and English 7. They started using the Socratic seating arrangement and learning station more frequently to address major standard. The high school math class rarely used the method and did we and was not incorporating the resources into the curriculum calendar. Although each teacher was trained on developing short cycle assessments, the high school teachers did this despairingly. On the other hand the middle school teachers gave mini test after each standard was taught.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

After 8 weeks, we noticed that students were showing gains according to short cycle assessment outcomes. Students also stayed more engaged the entire class period. NWEA scores showed remarkable improvement especially in middle school English. Math NWEA scores showed minimal improvements. High school schools remained the same and sometimes lower. In 24 weeks, the middle school students became more focused on learning and began performing better on the short cycle assessments.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

I learned that with proper planning and adequate knowledge of various instructional strategies, teacher's can not only get better control of classroom management, they can diversify instruction according to the learning needs of the students. Before this I started this action research, I was in the dark about the teachers training deficits. I also did not get in the classroom enough. The overall results indicated that the classes that integrated these practices more often saw an increase on the NWEA scores. The high score was the least successful. They did not use the methods unless I was coming to observe. I learned that the method used collaboratively will require longer class periods. We are moving to blocks scheduling for the middle school and our Freshman Academy. Along with the Assistant Principals, I plan to implement differentiated instruction for grades 7-12.

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