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Differentiation in the Elementary School Reading Program and Student Achievement

Sharon A. Tramonto
The College at Brockport, stramont1@netzero.com

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Differentiation in the Elementary School Reading Program

and

Student Achievement

by

Sharon Ann Tramonto

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Abstract

Differentiated instruction ensures that the instructional needs of all students are met. Students are given work that is at their level. Differentiation is not always easy to achieve. A typical classroom can have students with many different learning levels. Although difficult, It is imperative for teachers to differentiate instruction so students needs are met. Many educators believe that if they use a particular instructional method that differentiation is built in. Even when using a set format there is always a concern that differentiation is not taking place. Based on the literature related to differentiating instruction in reading; it shows that teachers are aware of students varying levels of ability; but there is a need to implement best practices and strategies for improved student achievement.

Chapter One: Introduction

Today's educators learned early on in their training about the importance of differentiating instruction. As educators we know that our students do not learn in the same way. It is also known that students do not always learn by the same teaching methods. "A typical classroom today is a jigsaw puzzle of learners. It is not unusual for a teacher to have in one class students from multiple cultures, bringing with them varied degrees of proficiency with English and an impressive array of learning exceptionalities (both identified and not identified), as well as a broad array of economic backgrounds" (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2008, p.18). One of the most important areas for differentiation to happen in the classroom is the reading program. When a student struggles in reading then most likely that student will struggle in science, social studies and math. The purpose for this study is to identify those practices that effectively differentiate reading instruction and increase student achievement.

Students in grades three, four, and five, in the state of New York, are required to take state assessments in reading and math. The scores from these assessments can be a precursor for a student not moving up to the next grade level. For students to meet state reading standards, instructional practices should meet the student's academic levels. Instructional differentiation is one of the ways teachers can help their students meet their reading goals.

It can be said that reading programs are already differentiated if you think about leveled books and the scripted instruction. The question is; are those scripted reading programs and materials really helping the struggling reader? We can also ask; are those

scripted reading programs helping the exceptional student? It is said that students need to feel successful in school and becoming a successful reader can provide that outcome. The final question is; are teachers doing everything they can for students to achieve success?

Differentiated Reading Instruction

There are many approaches to reading instruction. Many school districts use a guided reading approach where students are separated into reading groups according to their ability. This approach can also include centers where students rotate through various activities related to literacy such as word study, listening/comprehension, and writing response. This is only one approach to reading instruction and there are many more approaches that are used. Research shows that reading instruction and its practices are always changing, always trying to improve upon itself.

In the article, "*Teaching all Students to Read in Elementary School*," it states, "Appropriately differentiated instruction involves even deeper teaching skills than whole-classroom instruction, because it requires teachers to diagnose individual needs and make appropriate adjustments to their instructional focus and instructional routines" (Torgesen, Houston, Rissman & Kosanovich, 2007, p. 16). In the article, *Differentiated Learning* (2010) Huber states," differentiated instruction is defined as an approach to teaching and learning where students with varying learning abilities work within the same class. Huebner (2010) also states, "That the purpose of differentiated instruction is to maximize student growth and individual success by meeting students where they are (Huber, 2010, P. 79). Huber's statement is thought provoking because it suggests that

students are not in the category of one- fits- all. Does it also suggest that curriculum needs to fit the student?

Review of Literature

Early literacy development has become a key issue in education. The important question is; at what age is a child ready to learn how to read? "In the 1930s, the research of Arnold Gresell developed the belief among educators that children had to mature until they reached the point where they were ready to learn to read. Gesell and Frances IIg (1949), among their followers, believed that before children reached "reading readiness," it was pointless to provide instruction that could move them toward readiness to learn to read" (Robb, 2003, p.14).

In the 1930's and 1940's literacy experts believed that a child's maturation was key to when they were ready to learn how to read. Today research supports, "the belief that immersing children in literacy- rich environments stimulates curiosity and motivation to learn" (Robb, 2003, p.15).

When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in 2001, educators thought that the new instructional requirements placed on teachers and students would narrow the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged youth and their counterparts. Unfortunately this has not come to fruition. "In particular, achievement gaps among culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and economically diverse groups pose great concern to educators and policymakers (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008, p.1). The achievement gap on reading is extremely daunting and new ways of reaching students from diverse backgrounds is in the forefront.

There have been many books and articles that researchers have written in regards to reading differentiation. In a article entitled, "*How to differentiate instruction in mixed-ability classrooms* (Tomlinson, 2001) describes differentiation, "Differentiating instruction means "shaking up" what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn. In other words, a differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each student can learn effectively," (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 1).

The task that educators have is to indentify those reading programs that include the best practices for student success. In the article, *Differentiated Instruction in Reading: Easier than It Looks* (Knowles, 2009), "reading differentiation can be completed in three main areas. These areas include content, process, and product. Content refers to the information that the students need to learn, process refers to how the students will learn the material, and product refers to the manner in which the students demonstrated that they have learned the material," (Knowles, 2009, p.26).

The three components of instruction that can be modified based on a teacher's ongoing assessment are the content, the process, and the products. In a book entitled, *The Teacher's Guide to Success*, written by Ellen Kronowitz, she explains how instruction can be modified, "You can modify content by choosing the way you "input" it. You can simplify for those who are not yet ready and enrich the content for those who have mastered it. Some ways of varying the "input" include using: Some of the ways you can modify the process are by helping students make the learning experience relate to their

needs and interests and by focusing attention on multiple intelligences. You can make the material more meaningful (the process) when you include some of the strategies that were covered in this unit. These strategies include graphic organizers of all sorts, group investigation, classifying and sorting, cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, advance organizers, and analogies and metaphors. You can modify the product by designing product options for your students based on Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences or tiered assignments. Students can be given a list of options to show their mastery of the content and you can assess them based on predetermined criteria or rubrics" (Kronowitz,, 2001, P. 295).

One way to understand how your students differ from each other and what each brings to the classroom is through Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. "Gardner's work (1993, 2000) proposes that instead of a single, fixed intelligence, there are actually eight facets of intelligence. In other words, we are all smart, but in different ways. The exciting part of this theory is that teachers can organize learning to take into account the differing intelligences in the classroom" (Kronowitz, 2007, p.292-293).

In the article, *Standards-Based Differentiation: Identifying the Concept of Multiple Intelligence for use with Students with Disabilities* it speaks of open-ended exploration and why differentiation is important, "New teachers in the field, particularly those working with students with disabilities, should understand that students learn best in environments that allow freedom of choice, open-ended exploration, and validation of their experience(s) (e.g., curiosity, playfulness, imagination, creativity, wonder, wisdom, inventiveness, vitality, sensitivity, flexibility, humor, and joy). So often, instructors are

overloaded with high-stakes testing and assessments and feel pressured to get the information "out there", not really taking into account their learners. In the meantime, students, also, feel anxious. For this reason, differentiation is a must" (Beam, 2009, p.5)

Tomlinson & Imbeau (2008) suggest that "There are three approaches schools and teachers can take to deal with this common span of academic diversity. One is to place students in heterogeneous settings and do little to attend to student differences. The second is to track or group the students homogeneously by ability, what we perceive to be their potential as learners. The third is to create heterogeneous classrooms designed to attend to learner variance. The third option advocates differentiating instruction in heterogeneous classrooms" (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2008, p.18 -22).

Tomlinson and Imbeau's (2008) option one depicts, "heterogeneity without attention to its reality has been tried and found wanting over generations, even when student populations were far less varied than those in contemporary schools and those likely to be in schools of the future" (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2008, p.18 -22).

Tomlinson and Imbeau's (2008) also explain that, "some educators suggest that as long as teachers "teach well," a one-size-fits-all approach can succeed. That is likely not the case for the students who do not understand the language of the teacher and text, students who already know the content before the teacher "teaches it well," students who have significant gaps in prerequisite knowledge, and so on"(Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2008, p.18-22)

Tomlinson and Imbeau's (2008) option two *ability grouping and tracking* not only has a poor record in terms of student achievement, "but also too often creates classes

stratified by race and economic status in an era where there are evident benefits to bringing diverse individuals together. In addition, this approach frequently results in educators misjudging student capacity and teaching down to those students perceived to be less able. Again, this approach is counterproductive when the nation's clear mandate is to raise the level of challenge and proficiency for all students" (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2008, p.18-22)

.   Approach number three, (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2008) which we now refer to as differentiated instruction, is the comparative newcomer on the scene. Early research on differentiation is promising and, when implemented correctly, it is solidly rooted in sound educational theory and research. Most teachers report seeing the need for differentiation in their classes; nonetheless, translating that perception into practice is daunting. Human beings are not prone to embrace change (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2008, p.18 -22).

Best Practices

In an article *Closing the Achievement Gap with Curriculum Enrichment and Differentiation: One Schools Story,* it explains how reading instruction was differentiated and suggests strategies that work, "Reading instruction was differentiated by the use of flexible groups, texts on different reading levels, student-selected texts during independent reading, and guided reading groups according to the identified need for individual students. To enrich reading instruction, the school expanded classroom libraries to include books representing a range of genres, topics, and reading levels; brought in guest readers from the local community; found reading mentors for struggling readers; and invited children's authors to the school to share their work with students.

Students' reading achievement improved and their greater interest in books became apparent by increased circulation of books from the school library and the creation of lunchtime book clubs, organized by student themselves," (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008, p.19).

In an article entitled, *Conundrums in the differentiated literacy classroom,* it states, Differentiation instruction means that teachers create different levels of expectations for task completion, and emphasize the creation of environments where all learners can be successful. Differentiated Instruction addresses the "how to" question for teachers and calls upon educators to be responsive to learners. Examples of differentiating in language arts include:

(1) Using reading materials at varying levels.

(2) Using literacy centers with varied tasks designed to match students' readiness, interests and/or preferred modes of learning.

(3) Meeting in small groups to re-teach an idea or skill (Tomlinson, 2003).

At the heart of differentiating instruction in language arts is the need to provide learners with choices about what they read and in the design of their work products so that they are a better match for learners. This is particularly important for struggling students who can most benefit from additional supports, tailored activities, ands explicit and extended instructional reading time with the teacher. In DI all learners focus on the same essential understandings but are provided with multiple access routes to make sense of and demonstrate these understandings" (Tobin. 2008, p.1)

Tobin (2008) also explains that, "Differentiating does not mean that a teacher is taking into account the individual interests, profiles, and readiness of the thirty students five hours per day in every curricular and instructional decision. To suggest that would be ludicrous. Rather, differentiating means that a teacher is approaching the literacy curriculum and her students with a responsive disposition--an orientation to planning, decision-making, curriculum selection and instructional flow that is flexible and opportunistic" (Tobin. 2008, p.1).

Challenges for Differentiating Instruction

In an article entitled, *Traveling the Road to Differentiation in Staff Development,* it explains some of the challenges teachers have when trying to differentiate instruction. "Most current teachers have likely neither been students in nor seen effectively differentiated classrooms. While many teachers indicate that they believe differentiated or responsive teaching would benefit students, they also indicate they do not believe it is feasible for them to differentiate instruction. Research, as well as a commonsense look around schools, suggests that the "infeasibility" argument is winning in teachers' struggle of conscience" (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 8-12).

(1) Teachers seldom differentiate instruction, whether for students who are English language learners, students with learning problems, or students identified as gifted.

(2) Few teachers instruct in ways that are culturally and racially sensitive.

(3) When teachers do differentiate instruction, they often do so in ways that are

more tangential than substantive, and in ways that are more reactive than proactive or planned.

(4) Even teachers in special class settings who differentiate for students with an exceptionality that "matches" their specialty seldom differentiate for students with exceptionalities in other areas or with multiple exceptionalities.

(5) Few pre-service teacher programs seem to prepare beginning teachers to plan for effective instruction of academically diverse learners.

Teaching is a habit-bound profession. The demands of teaching necessitate that teachers develop virtually automatic classroom routines to be able to survive the early stages of becoming a teacher. Once those habits and routines are set, it is profoundly difficult for teachers to modify them significantly. Indications are that while many teachers see an increasing need to reach out differently to students whose differences are evident, they lack the skills to do so" (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 8-12).

Opportunities for Professional Development

"Not surprisingly, the barriers to differentiation vary from teacher to teacher. Some teachers, for example, are clear about essential outcomes and grasp the appropriate instructional strategies for differentiation -- but lack the management skills to implement what they know. Others manage a flexible classroom confidently but are ambiguous about essential learning outcomes. Many teachers lack confidence in more than one area.

Staff development leading to more responsive classrooms is, then, staff development in quest of profound changes in standard teaching practice. Such staff development would, itself, be profoundly different from standard practice. It would

necessarily move from "training via mass inoculation" to professional learning

opportunities proactively planned to be catalysts for persistent and personalized teacher

growth throughout a career. Such staff development is:

(1) Reflective: helping teachers develop the practice of reflecting on their students

as individual learners.

(2) informed: based on current best professional understandings from the range of

educational specialties of what constitutes effective teaching and learning for the

spectrum of learners.

(3) Diagnostic: ensuring that teachers develop the skill and will to study, chart,

and respond to students' learning needs.

(4) Connective: focused on clarifying the interdependence between curriculum,

assessment, and responsive instruction.

(5) Application-oriented: rooted directly in teachers' daily classroom practice and

planned to ensure teachers use quality curriculum, flexible approaches to

instruction and effective classroom management routines.

(6) Problem-focused: based on the assumption that there is not one right way to

teach, and that teaching is strengthened when professionals examine classroom

complexities and debate the merits of a range of approaches to teaching.

(7) Quality-concerned: ensuring fidelity to key principles of responsive teaching

and consistently aimed at understanding the impacts of particular approaches on

the cognitive and affective development of individual learners.

(8) Collaborative: ensuring that classroom teachers, specialists, and administrators engage in mutual problem solving that brings to bear the perspectives and expertise of multiple professionals in designing academically responsive classrooms.

(9) Supportive: designed to ensure that teachers have time, materials, resources, informed leadership and collegial support necessary to risk and succeed with change.

(10) Sustained: recognizing that teachers continually evolve as professionals and need intelligent support to continue to evolve throughout their careers.

(11) Differentiated: addressing the reality that teachers themselves differ in readiness, interest, and learning profile, will do so throughout their professional lives, and will maximize their individual capacities as teachers if they receive the right support at the right times.

Staff development that models for teachers the beliefs, attitudes, and practices that differentiation commends for their students provides powerful images of what the practice looks like and how it benefits individual human beings"(Tomlinson,2005, p.8)

"Staff development leaders will necessarily play a profound role in any movement to ensure that contemporary classrooms are appropriately responsive to contemporary students. The need for such classrooms is evident -- as is the gulf between the characteristics of much current classroom practice and academically responsive classroom practice. Staff development is the bridge between what is and what might be. (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 8-12).

Summary of Literature Review

Differentiating instruction in the classroom (especially in the reading program) is an enormous undertaking. The range of concepts theoretical (supporting the differentiated classroom) and practical (techniques used) are telling of the breath and scope it takes to provide individualized instruction. The research questions asked if scripted reading programs help the struggling reader and the exceptional reader. It also asked if teachers are doing everything they can to help students achieve success in the classroom and as readers.

Differentiation, as literature suggests, is an excellent way to individualize reading instruction. There are many strategies that teachers can tap into that can be modified and used in reading instruction. Teachers have to remember that differentiating reading instruction can help ensure that all children are learning at their own rate and skill level. Teachers also need to remember that the creation of a differentiated reading program is a complex process and requires support from parents, colleagues, and administrators.

The available research tells us that differentiation in the reading program and in the classroom in general is worthwhile.

Significance of the Literature Review

This review tries to address the need for differentiated instruction in the reading program. It addresses the three main areas that differentiated instruction can be utilized; through the instructional content, the instructional process, and the end product. It also addresses the importance of understanding how students differ from each other; through Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences teachers can use the practice to

differentiate between student's strengths and weaknesses. The knowledge gained through the use of Howard Gardner's theory can then be applied to create individualized instruction.

Best practice techniques and strategies used to bring differentiation into the classroom reading program were also disclosed. Some of the techniques that were addressed were flexible groups, texts on different reading levels, student-selected texts during independent reading, and guided reading groups according to the identified need for individual students.

Another important area that was highlighted is the importance of support through training on how to differentiate. Professional development, according to the literature, is key for success for teachers and students. Professional development is the responsibility of the teacher and it is also the responsibility of the school district they teach for. In New York State teachers are required to complete several professional development hours so they can keep their professional certification. Learning new techniques and strategies for helping students to be successful learners is an extremely important aspect of the teaching profession.

The implementation of the common core curriculum also warrants continued professional development. "The common core curriculum should be assessable to every teacher and school. The common core curriculum should also provide continuity and coherence for millions of students who frequently change schools. The task of building a good core curriculum will require intense effort by teams of educators and scholors, including the best minds and sensibilities available (Adams, 2010, p. 11)

Chapter Two: Implementation of Differentiation in the Reading Program

Teaching young students to read has been described as one of the most important responsibilities of primary grade teachers, and yet, a significant number of students struggle to develop proficient skills (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). To address the varied needs of students who are at risk of failure, teachers often provide small group, differentiated instruction. Providing more intense instruction with smaller groups of students has the intended outcome of establishing an accelerated learning trajectory, ultimately resulting in grade level performance of at-risk students. Unfortunately, recent data would suggest that efforts to differentiate instruction through small-group instruction alone are insufficient for making a substantial difference with at-risk readers (Torgesen, 2004, p.355).

There has been much debate regarding the grouping of students for reading instruction. Grouping students according to proficiency level has been controversial and studies have shown that ability grouping can have negative consequences. The widest achievement gap is seen in the higher and lower level groups. The lower level groups receive an inferior form of instruction characterized by more skills-based and decoding activities as well has less emphasis on meaning and critical thinking. (Poole, 2008, p.228).

Grouping practices in reading programs also shows difficulty with student interaction. "There always has been a problem with grouping practices in reading programs. The complexity of the interaction between readers, texts, and contexts in which the reading takes place often is ignored by educational decisions that suggest that

one program, set of materials, instructional technique, or grouping arrangement can address the needs of all students in a classroom. Common sense and personal experiences suggest that one size rarely fits all. A single instructional response to a group of diverse learners often means that the teaching technique will help some while it ignores others" (Ford, 2005, p1).

"In the past, the over use of homogenous small groups often meant that many readers never had access to the same quality of instruction that the others did. The grouping tactics themselves contributed to the establishment of a public sigma attached to the reading instruction. These negative feelings about reading and school actually ran interference with even the highest quality small-group instruction. In contrast, the overuse of whole group instruction often meant that many students were not reading text appropriate for their level. On one end, students were not reading at all due to their level of frustration with the material in front of them. The difficulty of teaching a diverse group of students the same material often meant that some students, many times those who needed help the most, were not engaged" (Ford, 2005, p.1).

In a study conducted by Deborah Poole (2008) entitled, *Interactional Differentiation in the Mixed-Ability Group*, she states, "Comprehension and meaning were clearly valued over decoding-orientated activities throughout the reading group activities examined in this study. This can be seen in the fact that interactional focus following the read-aloud turns was exclusively on content and never on explicitly improving the students' reading proficiency. The instructional activity in these groups seems to be based in the belief that reading development derives from reading aloud to

others, reading silently while others read, and engaging in talk related to the content of what has been read." Poole also explains that good small group instruction includes repetition and rehearsal as a means to move toward reading proficiency not just single-attempt cycles of reading aloud from new text segments (Poole, 2008, p.239)

Flexible Grouping

Flexible grouping was implemented in classrooms because of the diversity of learning levels. "It acknowledges that all grouping patterns; large groups, small groups, teams, partners, and individuals, have value because they all offer the reader slightly different experiences with different outcomes. Flexible grouping was defined by Radencich and McKay (1995) as "grouping that is not static, where members of the reading group change frequently" (p.11). For example students may work with a partner, in a small cooperative or teacher-led group, or the whole class. The basis for grouping may be students' interest or needs. Typically, flexible grouping may revolve around a core grade-level selection read by an entire class or around an individual trade-book program. Teachers attempting flexible grouping recognize that reading achievement is a function not only of the text but also of the conditions that surround the learning situation. (Radencich & McKay, 1995, p.11).

"Ideally a flex group means that you take mixed students with varying degrees of abilities, so if it's specifically a reading group you need to have a high reader, medium reader, and maybe a reader who is an English-language learner or maybe has learning disabilities.

Table 1. Common Grouping Arrangements, (Ford, 2005, p. 20).

Dimension of Grouping	Homogenous Small Groups	Whole-Group Instruction	Flexible Grouping
Group Size	Typically three small groups	All students in one large group	Variable use of large group, small group, partner, and individual work
Membership	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous	Variable use of homogenous and heterogeneous groups
Purpose	Differentiate instruction along the lines of three ability groups	Build community and contribute to an effective use of resources and time by providing same instruction to all	Differentiate instruction while building a classroom community in an effective use of time and materials
Texts	Different texts for different groups	Same text for all students	Variable use of same texts or multiple connected texts
Disadvantages	Inequality of access to meaning-based instruction	Inequality of access to instructional level texts	Need for students and teachers to be able to flow in and out of a variety of grouping patterns within and across lessons
Affective Concerns	Social stigma of being in groups with lower levels of achievement or stuck in mid-level groups	Disengagement of students for perceived lack of challenge or lack of success	While visual structural changes should minimize affective concerns, invisible structures still may contribute to affective concerns

Preparation

1. Select a text that most students are able to read and respond to without support of the teacher and that remaining students are able to read and respond to without direct support of the teacher.

2. Plan prereading activities that adequately will introduce the lesson for all readers. Focus on standard based skills and strategies needed by your students, as revealed by ongoing assessments.

3. Plan response activities that will engage as many students as possible working independently from the techer. If possible, let these flow from the instruction done in the prereading phase of the lesson.

4. Be prepared to provide direct support and additional instruction to students who require additional teacher guidance.

5. Plan extension activities that bring the class together as a community of learners and enable all students to make an important contribution. If possible, let these build on the introduction and engagement activities (Ford, 2005, p.21)

New Ways to Teach Reading

In the article, *Teaching all Students to Read in Elementary School*, Dr. Jeanne Chall, a leading reading researcher and educator for many years at Harvard University, coined a phrase that is widely quoted, but often misunderstood. She pointed out that, in grades K-2, students are "learning to read," while in grades 3 and above, they are "reading to learn." While reading does become an increasingly important tool for helping students expand their knowledge after grade three, learning to read hardly comes to an

abrupt halt at the end of second or third grade (Torgesen, Houston, Rissman &

Kosanovich, 2007, p. 16).

Our current understanding of reading growth indicates that students must

continue to learn many new things, and acquire many additional skills, in order

to maintain reading proficiency as they progress from early to late elementary

school and beyond. It is a serious mistake to think that we can stop teaching

reading after third grade—many students continue to need explicit and

systematic instruction in increasingly complex skills in order to move to higher

levels of reading proficiency (Torgesen, Houston, Rissman & Kosanovich, 2007, p. 16).

Common Core Curriculum

The article, *Advancing Our Students' Literacy,* elaborates on the importance of

challenging our students with complex text. *"*In creating the common core curriculum,

the goal is neither to dictate nor to limit what all students should be able to know and do.

The core curriculum might fill only two-thirds of the students' instructional time.

Perhaps, too, the units would be populated with alternate sets of readings. After all, the

greatest benefit of a well structured program of reading and learning is that it prepares the

student to read other materials with competence and thoughtful comprehension. If

education is to nurture interest and support relevance, it must also leave room for some

choice. The purpose of the core curriculum is to build the foundations that will put

students in good stead to choose and pursue what they wish to learn and do, which of

course, depends integrally on their being able to learn and do it (Jager-Adams, 2010, p.8).

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The capacity to understand and learn from any text depends on approaching it with the language, knowledge, and modes of thought, as well as the reading skill that it presumes. It would seem, then, that when assigning materials from which students are to learn, there are basically two choices. First, the materials must be sufficiently accessible in language and concept for the students to read and understand on their own. Second, the students must be given help as they read. Some students receive such help in their homes, but many do not and this is likely the major factor underlying the achievement gap.

A great benefit of the common core curriculum is that it would drive and overhaul the texts we give students to read, and the kinds of learning and thought we expect their reading to support. Teachers in any grade would do well to follow this relatively straightforward strategy:

1) Select a topic about which your students need to learn. (there will be plenty of time for other topics once you've started this process.) If the students are below grade level, begin with shorter, simpler texts.

2) Teach the key words and concepts directly; engaging students in using and discussing them to be sure they are well anchored.

3) As the student learned the core vocabulary, basic concepts, and overarching schemata of domain, they will become ready to explore its subtopics, reading (or having read aloud to them) as many texts as needed or appropriate on each subtopic in turn.(Adams, 2010, p.11)

Common core curriculum will need to start early in a child's educational career. Beginning reading instruction will need to help students gain control of early reading skills as quickly as possible and prepare them for the integrated instruction expected in upper grade levels. These goals are embodied in an approach such as the research based Interactive Strategies Approach (Scanlon, Anderson, & Sweeney, 2010), which teaches children, including those who are struggling with language and literacy; to use what they have learned independently and flexibly. This type of early literacy instruction is essential if students are to succeed with the more challenging texts and tasks that lay ahead. Higher expectations are likely to result in even greater variability in student performance and increased need for differentiated approaches characterized by Response to Intervention (RTI) (Wixson & Lipson, 2012, p. 389).

Another aspect to consider when discussing the common core curriculum is professional development. Teachers will need significant professional development in order to put into practice the ideas set forth in the standards.

1. Assessment: Assessment should reflect the needs of instruction and provide data that will inform instruction in a meaningful way. Reaching all students: The standards should be implemented in a way that reflects the needs of students representing diverse cultures and backgrounds.

2. Text complexity: The issue is especially important for the states that have already incorporated this research into their own standards.

3. Motivation: Although difficult to measure, student motivation to read is a critical factor that should be further considered as the standards are used to guide the development of instruction to close the achievement gap.

4. Comprehension: Comprehension instruction needs to be part of the instructional program from the earliest grades. The goal for students in beginning reading instruction and through all grades is to develop a wide array (on comprehensive set) of skills and strategies for word identification, vocabulary learning, and reading comprehension (Long, 2010, p. 26).

Multiple-Entry Journals

A multiple-entry journal provides a statement to guide students' reading by promoting focus, concentration, and thought as they read. When multiple-entry journals are carefully designed, they can be powerful tools to help students become more proficient in using text material effectively.

Journal Example: This format calls on students to look for certain elements in a chapter as they read and then to reflect on certain elements after they read. At any point when students use the multiple-entry journals, the teacher indicates elements on which they should focus both as and after reading.

The more basic version provided first is geared to the reading needs of students who struggle to some degree with text materials. Because this version is very flexible, teachers can spotlight different skills for different learners and change prompts with particular assignments as students needs become evident. New vocabulary students can

record the words they are using in their content reading and writing. There are usually

two broad categories of words: high utility words, used throughout the year in studying

content; and topical words that connect to specific concepts or themes being studied.

Strategies for learning can also be an entry in a multiple entry journal. Students

can keep track of the strategies that help them become more competent readers, writers,

researches, and learners. Typical entries in this section might include how-to-lessons such

as how to use text supports, prediction, inferences, and questioning. Students can also

explain how they monitor for understanding when reading text.

Teachers may select from prompts such as the following for this version, which is just

one sample of how a multiple-entry journal might be structured (Ford, 2005, p. 26).

Sample "As You Read" Prompts for Basic Version	Sample "After You Read" Prompts for Basic Version
Key phrases	How to use ideas or information
Important words	Why particular words are important
Main Ideas	A prediction based on current information
Puzzling Passages	Why a passage seems puzzling
Summaries of sections	A reaction to a passage
Passages that seem powerful	A comment on the author's view or style
Key parts of the chapter	How graphics connect with the text
Interpretation of graphics	Meanings of key words
Beginning, middle (with detail), end	What a puzzling passage seems to mean
Connections with what you already know	
Questions you have as you read	

For the more advanced version, students have a three-column format. The prompts ensure focus on basic elements of the text, but push students ahead to grapple with more abstract elements stated in the text. For the more advanced version, the teacher might select from prompts such as the following (Ford, 2006, p. 23).

As You Read	As You Read or After You Read	After You Read
Key Passages Key Vocabulary Organizing Concepts Key Principles Key Patterns	Why particular ideas are important How the author has developed his line of logic, thought, or argument How parts and whole relate Assumptions of the author, especially those that probe for deeper understanding Connections with other subjects and areas of life	Hypothesize what a person might actually say to you about what's in the reading; for example: • The teacher • The author • An expert in the field • A character • A satirist • A political cartoonist • Someone with a different perspective on the topic

Interactive Note Taking

Interactive notes help you read informational or literary texts. Interactive notes guide you through a reading process to help you develop your ideas and express them in academic language. You may put questions, comments, or favorite lines in any column; use the prompts (or create your own) to help you write. Interactive notebooks enable students to organize process information and develop life-long study skills. Using the left and right sides of the notebook fosters active engagement in the learning process. The left side of the notebooks students explore diverse methods of demonstrating learning

through graphic organizers, poems, charts, etc. The right side is for the teacher

information of classroom notes, presentations, and other information. For students,

teachers and parents, the interactive notebook becomes a portfolio of the student's

learning and growth during the year. Students and parents are able to review assignments

and new learning concepts as well as student grades, thinking, writing, illustrations, and

organizational skills.   Student interactive notebooks are graded. A "master" copy of the

notebook is in the classroom for students to review due to absences or if they should

misplace their notebook. Learning study skills and taking notes is an acquired skill.

Students who develop these skills increase their learning curve and will have more

positive assessment results.(Ritterkamp et..al, 2001, p.7)

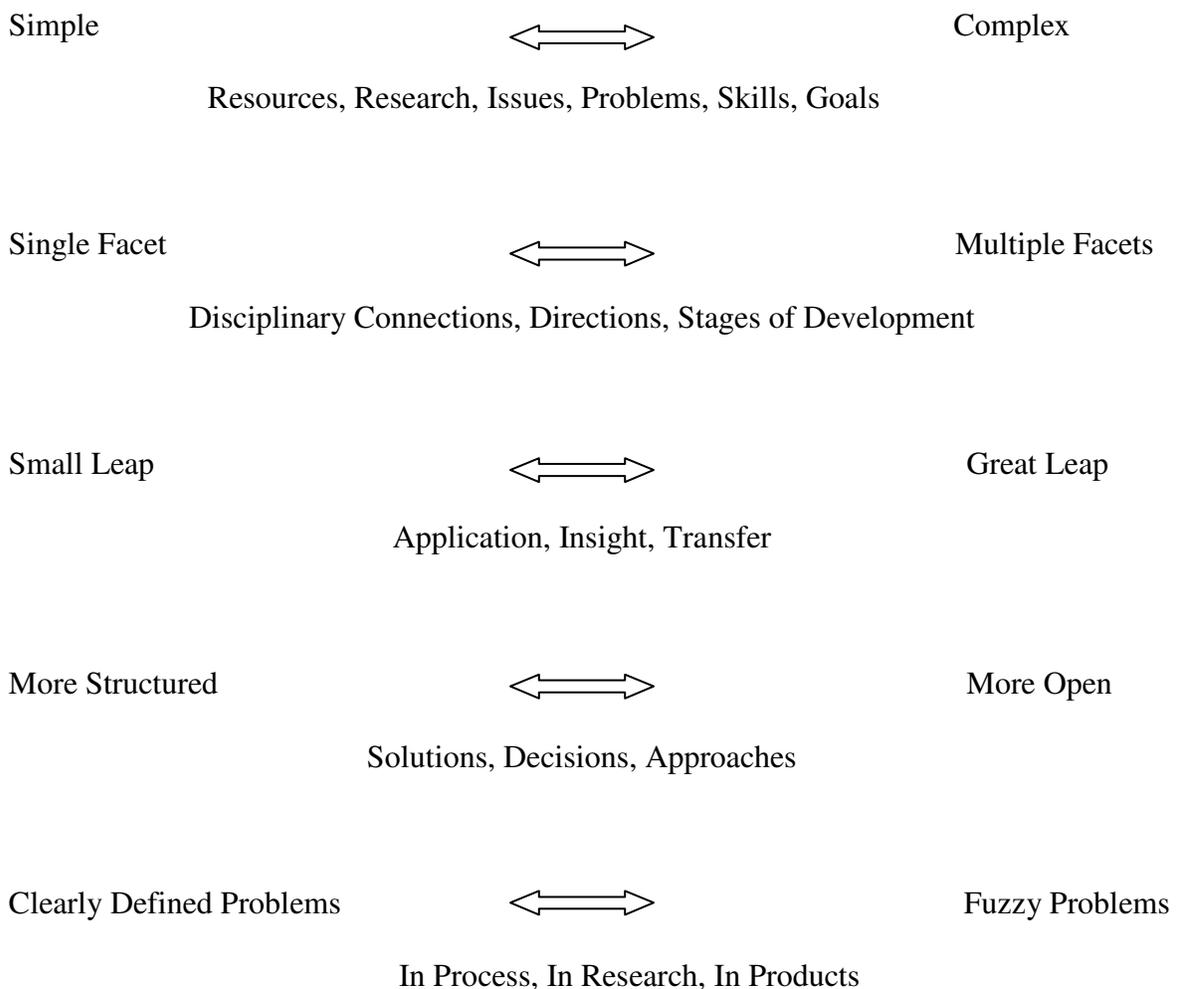| Before Prepare to Read	During Questions and Comment	After Summarize and Sympathize
List: • Titles • Headers • Subheaders • Captions • Objectives • Themes • Words to Know Ask Questions Make Predictions Set a Purpose Decide what matters most	I wonder why….. What caused…… I think……. This is similar to……. This is important because… What do they mean by…… What I find confusing is….. What will happen next is…. I can relate to this because... This reminds me of…… As I read, I keep wanting to ask……	Three important points/ideas are…. These are important because… What comes next… The author wants us to think…. At this point the article/story is about… I still don't understand… What interested me most was… The author's purpose here is to…

Tiering

Tiering is an instructional approach designed to have students of differing readiness levels work with essential knowledge, understanding, and skill, but to do so at levels of difficulty appropriately challenging for them as individuals at a given point in the instructional cycle. To tier an activity or work product:
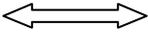
- Clearly establish what students should know, understand, and be able to do as a result of the activity or product assignment.

- Develop on activity or product assignment that is interesting and engaging for students, squarely focuses on the stated learning goals, and requires students to work at a high level of thought. It's a good idea to begin with an advanced level activity, because doing so is likely to raise the teacher's sights for other learners as well. It is also possible to start with a version of the activity or product that teacher and students have used successfully in the past.

- Think about the readiness levels of students in the class based on pre-assessments, ongoing assessment, and continually growing teacher knowledge of student's general skill levels in reading, writing, math, or whatever skills are fundamental to the subject at hand.

- Develop enough versions of the original task or product assignment to challenge the range of learners. You may need to create one, two, three, or four additional versions.

- To create multiple versions of a task at different degrees of difficulty, refer to the following graphic "The Equilizer" and ensure that the versions for students who

continue to struggle with the ideas and skills the task calls for are more foundational, concrete, simple, have fewer dimensions, and so on. To increase the degree of difficulty of a task, move the "Equalizer" buttons to the right making the task more transformational, abstract, complex, multifaceted, and so on (Tomlinson, 2010).

Continual Assessment and Adaption

The Equalizer

Simple   ⟺   Complex

Resources, Research, Issues, Problems, Skills, Goals

Single Facet   ⟺   Multiple Facets

Disciplinary Connections, Directions, Stages of Development

Small Leap   ⟺   Great Leap

Application, Insight, Transfer

More Structured   ⟺   More Open

Solutions, Decisions, Approaches

Clearly Defined Problems   ⟺   Fuzzy Problems

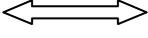In Process, In Research, In Products

Less Independence   ⟺   Greater Independence

Planning, Designing, Monitoring

Slower   ⟺   Quicker

Pace of Study, Pace of Thought

Multiple Intelligences and Differentiation

The term differentiation has assorted meanings for various individuals. Some may believe that to differentiate simply means to have separate lesson plans for each student. The expert, Carol Ann Tomlinson, would probably disagree and expand that differentiation to more than that. It is student-centered, crafted to encourage student growth, and multi-faceted, blending whole group, small group, and individualized instruction (Tomlinson, 1999). One very important component that seems to get forgotten in the whole "differentiation thrust," nonetheless, is multiple intelligences (MI), which is just one approach of differentiating. Without careful consideration of the characteristics of each student, it is pointless to consider methods of alternative instruction (Bean, 2009. p. 5)

Before an instructor can plunge into new material, it is imperative to understand the population with which he or she works. An effective practice of getting to know the student is to use a type of interest inventory. The interest inventory allows not only the teacher to know what type of learners are in the class (i.e., MI), but it allows the

student to better understand him or herself, as well. There are several versions of the MI

test located on the World Wide Web, but one that the teacher can give in class is a simple

pencil-paper test. (Bean, 2009, p.6)

Student Interest Survey (Differentiated Instructional Strategy)

Student Interest Inventory/Survey is another strategy that can be used to differentiate in

information gained by conducting student surveys yields a profile of traits, likes/dislikes, int

and more. The inventories are for self reporting and reflect ones personal preferences.

The best inventories/surveys are simple and direct. They allow the students some

flexibility in his or her answer. The educational survey should convey sufficient

information about the student and his or her preferences.

Using information from a student's survey has many benefits. Teachers will be able to

gain information to better know their students. Inventories can be created to gather data

about content area activities and preferences students may have about particular topics.

Teachers may use the inventories as a means of assessment.

Surveys/inventories can be useful in determining what aspects of a subject a teacher

will give students opportunities for choices, differentiated activities, or differentiated

processes of content. Inventories may be given as often as teachers want to gather

information about their students (Tomlenson, 2010)

Student Profile Survey

Explanation: This is an example of a student profile survey developed by a teacher to

help her and her students begin to think about their learning preferences and interests.

Directions: Below are some words that describe how people learn and what they like.

- Look at the list and decide which ones really sound like you. Put those in the column on the right.

- Look at the list again. Pick out the words that really don't sound like you. Put those in the column on the right.

- There will be some words that you will not put in a column because they are little like you, a little different from you, or you aren't sure.

- Also put in the "like me" column other important things to know about you, your interests, and ways of learning that are not on the list you were given to pick from.

Very logical	Like to do one thing at a time	Need quiet when I work
Very Creative	Like to do several things at a time	Need noise when I work
Sit still when I learn	Like to do work with words	Like collecting things
Wiggle when I learn	Like to work with numbers	Like making things
Like to plan things	Like to work with objects	Like to work alone
Like to be told how to do things	Like music	Like to work with people
Like choices about how to do things	Like art	Like to see the big picture

Like Me	Not Like Me

Multiple Intelligence Test, based on Gardner's MI Model

1. _____ I'd rather draw a map than give someone verbal directions.
2. _____ I can play (or used to play) a musical instrument.
3. _____ I can associate music with my moods.
4. _____ I can add or multiply in my head.
5. _____ I like to work with calculators and computers.
6. _____ I pick up new dance steps fast.
7. _____ It's easy for me to say what I think in an argument or debate.
8. _____ I enjoy a good lecture, speech or sermon.
9. _____ I always know north from south no matter where I am.
10. _____ Life seems empty without music.
11. _____ I always understand the directions that come with new gadgets or appliances.
12. _____ I like to work puzzles and play games.
13. _____ Learning to ride a bike (or skates) was easy.
14. _____ I am irritated when I hear an argument or statement that sounds illogical.
15. _____ My sense of balance and coordination is good.
16. _____ I often see patterns and relationships between umbers faster and easier than others.
17. _____ I enjoy building models (or sculpting).
18. _____ I'm good at finding the fine points of word meanings.
19. _____ I can look at an object one way and see it sideways or backwards just as easily.
20. _____ I often connect a piece of music with some event in my life.
21. _____ I like to work with numbers and figures.
22. _____ Just looking at shapes of buildings and structures is pleasurable to me.
23. _____ I like to hum, whistle and sing in the shower or when I'm alone.
24. _____ I'm good at athletics.
25. _____ I'd like to study the structure and logic of languages.
26. _____ I'm usually aware of the expression on my face.
27. _____ I'm sensitive to the expressions on other people's faces.
28. _____ I stay "in touch" with my moods. I have no trouble identifying them.
29. _____ I am sensitive to the moods of others.
30. _____ I have a good sense of what others think of me.

Student Interest Survey

Explanation: This is a second example of a teacher-developed survey to gather

information about student interests and learning preferences.

Directions: Please help me know you better so I can teach you better. Give as much

information as you can (Tomlenson, 2010).

1. What are your favorite things to do outside at school? (Please tell me why you like them.)

2. When have you felt really proud of yourself? Please explain why you felt that way.

3. What are you good at in school? How do you know?

4. What is hard for you in school? What makes it hard?

5. What are some ways of learning that work for you?

6. What are some ways of learning that do not work well for you? Why?

7. What is your favorite?

- Book

- TV Show

- Movie

- Kind of Music

- Sport

8. What are some things you would really like to learn about?

9. What are some things you really care about getting better in? Why?

10. What else should I know about you as a person and a student that could help me teach you better (Tomlenson, 2010)?

Jigsawing (Differentiating within a Text)

Whole-class instruction for informational reading often involves a single text. There are times when students need to analyze multiple texts at the same time. When a group of readers is presented with information from several texts, they are more likely to make connections among those readings, called intertextuality (Bloome & Robertson,

1993). The readings of jigsaw may be chosen may be chosen because they offer similar perspectives of the same concept or event. (Frey & Fisher, 2008, p. 26).

Jigsawing grew in popularity when it was used to support cooperative learning activities. Its basic premise is that each team is responsible for one predetermined portion of the text and each team reports what they learned to the other teams. Jigsawing cannot be used with every text, jigsawing lends itself well to any text structured primarily as a main idea with supporting details, which is can be seen in trade books and content- area textbook selection.

When implementing a jigsawed lesson, it is wise to keep the students in whole group during content introductions. This should help build background information, vocabulary, and reading strategies needed to work in a team setting. Careful team selection lends itself to good differentiation practice. If the teacher carefully selects teams using their knowledge of student reading levels, it should help insure that all student will learn the content. Differentiating by using different text for different groups gives students who struggle the opportunity to learn alongside their peers. Along with text selection to support differentiation, teachers can provide extra support for any group that is struggling with the selection or content.

Jigsaw can also be accomplished using two types of groups-the home group and the expert group. First members of a home group divide the task of reading multiple texts among themselves. Each reader is responsible for identifying and reporting the important elements of the text to the home group. Students then meet with the expert group and discuss the reading (Ford, 2005, p.18).

Elements	**Jigsawing** (Ford, 2005, p.18).
Text	Different parts of the same text for different groups of students
Grouping	Connected small groups that also may include the use of whole-class, partner, and independent work
Differentiation	Predetermined parts of the texts are assigned to better match the performance levels of members of homogeneous groups of students. Additional differentiation may include varying the level of support form the teacher of each group.
Best Uses	When common text is being used by all the learners in the classroom community, from nonfiction and informational tradebooks, textbook selections, or class magazines and newspapers that are easily divisible into portions: however, it does not work well with texts that follow a narrative theme
Advantages	It builds community across the classroom by providing shared experiences. It requires a limited amount of materials. It allows the teacher to provide support to those who need it while others are kept engaged with similar tasks.
Disadvantages	The teacher must have knowledge of how to divide texts into sections with various reading levels to provide appropriate reading opportunities for teams of students. Students must be well prepared to work effectively as teams, requiring an uofront investment of time and energy.

Preparation

1. Select text that lends itself to easily divisible parts and allows for multiple levels of

reading.

2. Plan prereading activities that adequately will introduce a lesson to all students. Focus on standards-based skills and strategies and/or content needed by your students as reveled in your ongoing assessments.

3. Carefully consider how to match sections to homogenous teams of students.

4. Plan team response activities that will engage students as they work together. Build on instruction during the introduction of the lesson.

5. Be prepared to provide support to any tem that may rquire additional tacher support.

6. Plan extension activities that bring the class together as a community of learners. Continue to build on previous instruction. Consider how extension activities may lead to additional inquiry opportunities.

7. Plan for evaluation of work habits of individuals within teams to strengthen skills for use beyond the lesson (Ford, 2005, p. 24).

Connected Literature Circles

Social studies textbooks are a perfect example of challenges that teachers are confronted with when trying to differentiate instruction. What If you were studying western expansion with your class and had access to the same novel on the subject that read at four different reading levels? The use of novels may help students understand the subject of western expansion at a deeper level because of there true event stories. The use of literature circles may help with the goal of differentiation. "Literature circles emerged as a classroom organizational structure as teachers integrated the use of trade books in reading programs. Teachers organized literature circles in a variety of ways. Many assigned text sets containing multiple copies of the same text to more small, homogenous

groups of students. Each group would meet with the teacher or on their own to read and respond to the book. An effort was made to make sure that the text selected for the matched its reading level. In some classrooms, the titles assigned to each group were not related to each other, and each circle often received instruction different from the others. In other classrooms, the text sets were connected in the same way, whether it by theme, content, genre, or author. Connected literature circles allow for similar instruction across groups and connected conversations throughout the class" (Ford, 2005, p.15). Literature circles allow for differentiation by selecting different text for different groups of students. The differentiation does not come from within the text as in jigsawing, the teacher differentiates by providing support to different groups at varying degrees.

When implementing connected learning circles it is important to start with whole group instruction at the beginning of a new lesson. This helps because all the students will receive the instruction that will help support their upcoming work. Once students start working in their groups, the teacher can decide how much support is needed. The support may come through simple monitoring and others may need focused intervention.

It is also important that connected learning circles have parameters in place. Teachers should decide whether all literature circles will read for a set amount of time, pages, or chapters. Teachers should also decide the manner in which the reading takes place-silently or aloud, separately or collectively. Clearly identifying one or two activities is also a good idea for students when they have completed their work especially if other groups are still working (Ford, 2005, p. 25).

Elements	Connected Literature Circles (Ford, 2005, p.20).
Text	Different but related groups of students
Grouping	Connected small groups that also may include the use of whole class, partners, and independent work.
Differentiation	Predetermined related texts are assigned to better match the performance levels of the members of homogeneously groups of students. Additional differentiation may include varying the level of support.
Best Uses	When multiple sets of connected texts of various levels are available for use by all learners in the classroom community to collaboratively explore a common topic, theme, genre, author, element or strategy.
Advantages	It builds community across the classroom by providing shared experiences while matching students with texts more appropriate for their reading levels. It uses real texts in a setting that more closely mirrors what real readers do in the real world. It adds a critical social dimension to the reading instructional program that may have a strong appeal to some students.
Disadvantages	The teacher must have access to and knowledge of multiple sets of texts written at various reading levels that still provide an opportunity for connected conversation across the classroom community. Students must be well prepared to work effectively in small group. For example, they should make sure they honor all voices, not privilege some while marginalizing others.

Preparation

1. Select texts sets with a common element that are written at multiple levels to match the readers in the classroom. You also may ned to select some additional related titles, picture books, and excerpts from book chapter for modeling.

2. Plan prereading activities that will transcend the titles but connect the conversations across them. Focus on strategies defined by local standards and needed by the students as revealed in ongoing assessments.

3. Carefully consider how to match texts to small, homogenous groups of students.

4. Plan response activities that will engage students as they work together in small groups. Build on the focus lesson taught in the pre-reading phase.

5. Be prepared to provide support to any small group that may require additional teacher guidance.

6. Set up a structure to meet with each literature circle to access whether standards are being met.

7. Plan extension activities that bring the class together as a community of learners. Continue to build on the previous instruction, but lead students to conversations across and beyond the texts.

8. Plan for evaluation of work habits of individuals within the literature circles to strengthen work skills for use beyond the lesson (Ford, 2005, p. 25).

Chapter Three: Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to identify best practices for differentiating instruction that lead to increased student achievement. One of the areas in reading instruction that came to the forefront was the separation of students into reading groups according to their reading level. This type of reading instruction can be seen as static because students are not able to move within the reading groups. Homogenous grouping into small groups and the use of ability grouping can cause social stigma for the lowest achievers in the classroom. The use of ability grouping can also keep the middle level students stagnant. The reason the middle level students become stagnant is that many times a teacher places all their concentration on the highest and lowest achieving students

in the classroom. I remember when my children were in school and they would come home and say, "I am in the green reading group." The green reading group, and all the students knew, was the high reading group. The groups were categorized using colors green, yellow, and red. I can't imagine doing that to a child; placing them in a group that was that highly publicized. The teacher has to differentiate instruction; but that differentiated instruction should be done in away where all students feel good about their learning and the classroom is seen as a community.

Homogenous grouping into small groups typically uses different texts for each group. This does not lend itself to the new Common Core Curriculum where content instruction is immersed into the reading program. I find, with my own students, that acquiring texts with the same subject at different levels of reading ability helps all the students learn as a group, or, can we say, a community of learners. Differentiating instruction is not easy; it takes a lot of thought and planning. It also takes a great deal of time finding materials; like leveled books with the same topic.

In the district that I teach for, the teachers are provided reading materials that correspond to the Common Core Curriculum. The texts are all at the same reading level and really cannot be used in leveled reading groups. I have found that using the provided texts for whole group instruction is a great precursor to leveled group instruction. It takes time to find leveled texts on the same subject, but with help from the school librarian it can be done. Having leveled texts with the same subject gives all students a richer learning experience. The traditional reading strategies can still be utilized to help students' fluency and vocabulary development.

Differentiation can become meaningful when teachers incorporate flexible grouping into their classroom. Radencich and McCay (1995) coined flexible grouping as "grouping that is not static" where students change from one group to another frequently. Flexible grouping allows teachers to use the same texts (or multiple connected texts) for all students in the class. Teachers are able to use same texts because they recognize the variables in the classroom and attend to those variables. Flexible grouping provides differentiation within the reading program while building a classroom community. If done correctly, flexible grouping can create a classroom where all students feel part of a community.

One of the ways that I provide flexible grouping is by having centers that students rotate through. The centers provide activities that correspond with the whole group lesson. One of the centers that I set-up is for independent reading. I include books (at all different levels) on the subject(s) they are learning about for that week. I first teach the students the "Five Finger Rule" about choosing a just right book. Students choose a book from the provided texts and turn to any page. Then students make a fist and silently read the page they chose. When they come to a word that they do not know they put up one finger, if the students put 0-1 fingers up that book is too easy; if the students put up 2-3 fingers that book is just right; and if students put up 4-5 fingers that book is too hard for them to read. The five finger rule helps students to differentiate for themselves. They can use this strategy during other activities such as visits to the library. This rule can be utilized in primary classrooms and some intermediate classrooms. Independent reading,

in my opinion, is under used in the classroom. Independent reading gives students a chance to read about what interests them and they can feel that ownership. Independent reading helps students to become lifelong readers.

Another way to differentiate reading instruction is to use cooperative learning techniques such as jigsawing. Jigsawing, as in flexible grouping, helps build a feeling of community across the classroom. The shared experience of working in groups of varied ability while working on common materials lends itself to a good use of time and materials. Jigsawing also allows the teacher to provide support to those who need it while the other students are working on similar tasks.

One of the texts that I like using in the primary classroom is the *Weekly Reader*. The *Weekly Reader* is a great classroom subscription to have and lends itself to Common Core instruction. I like to have jigsaw groups (mixed levels of ability) read a different article in the reader and then report what they have learned to the rest of the class. This gets the task of reading the material done in an efficient and collaborative way (again building on that community feeling). Differentiation is utilized by placing lower level students with a mix of middle and higher level students. The lower level students learn and unknowingly are helped by the other students in the group. I usually rotate around the classroom and support students as needed.

Connected literature circles also lend itself to community building in the classroom while differentiating instruction. Literacy circles use related text that match the students' ability levels in homogeneous groupings. The best use for connected literature

circles is when multiple sets of connected texts are available. This strategy lends itself to common core instruction because the connected text can cross reading instruction with content instruction (social studies, science, and math).

One of the connected literacy circle ideas that I used in my class was to study the author Ezra Jack Keats. The students that I teach come from an urban setting and Keats series of books are also from an urban setting. With all the non-fiction books that were being read in the classroom because of the Common Core curriculum, I found it refreshing to include some fictitious texts. This series of books allow for several different themes to be studied. One of the topics we studied was Keats's illustrations. The illustrations were simplistic (gave a real feel to an urban environment) and helped tell the story when it was being read. We also studied the setting of the book and made connections to our own neighborhoods. It was fun for the students to study an author and follow the same characters through several well written stories. During the time of the author study I used leveled text related to one of the themes of the book when conducting guided reading instruction. This gave another facet to differentiation that allowed for a continued community feel to the classroom.

Researching best practice strategies for differentiation supported the notion that knowing your students reading ability, likes, and dislikes is very important. Differentiation of instruction should incorporate student's interests and preferences. Knowing your students will give them opportunities for choices, differentiated activities, and differentiated processes of content instruction. One of the best ways to gain

information about students is to use surveys or interest inventories. Once a teacher has found out the interests of students a classroom library can be put together that support those interests. If students have an interest on a certain topic and that topic is provided in the texts that are available in the classroom; student are more likely to read independently.

Professional development is also of great importance. Instructional practices and curriculum are always changing and it is up to the teacher to continue to keep up with improved methods of teaching. Teaching students to read is probably the most important part of a child's educational process. Differentiating reading instruction according to a student's ability, interests, and the knowledge of best practices will help lead students to achieving successful outcomes.

Additional Resources

Using Graphic Novels: A Unique Approach for Reading Instruction

Graphic Novels have become a top reading choice for many young readers, it makes sense to look at how they might fit into an educational setting (Botzakis, 2009, p.15) They lend well to instruction because of three features:

1. Transitions: inference making actions are happening between panels and students use higher level thinking without even knowing it.

2. Contextual information: images provide clues for comprehension, interaction between text and image can open doors for further academic discussion

3. Visual permanence: students can read at their own rate because words and pictures are fixed on the pages (The entire class reads the same text).

Illustrated Journals

Students can learn to create their own illustrated narratives by observing the features of illustrated journals. The features of illustrated journals help students understand the meaning behind the text.

Content Learning

Graphic novel authors take great care to be accurate about historical or scientific details through research. This can be a great supplement to content instruction because students are easily engaged when using graphic novels. Teachers need to research and know the graphic novels they will use in the classroom (it should be relevant to the instruction and provide accurate information). Teachers should look for additional resources to go along with the graphic novels. Using graphic novels can be an excellent supplement to content instruction.

Graphic Novels to Use in the Classroom

Yotsuba&! (Azuma, 2003) is a magna (Japanese comics translated into English) series about a young girl who moves into a new neighborhood with her father, complete with the misadventures that happen when she gets to know her new neighbors and surroundings. With her green hair and unique outlook on the world, Yotsuba learns about a variety of subjects from cicadas to air conditioning to global warming. She gets into a lot of mischief (Botzakis, 2009).

Uses: Understanding sequential art, making inferences using a combination of words and images.

Format: Sequential Art

1. Ask students to look at a page from the book in pairs.

2. Have students attend to the pictures and text, and ask them what they think happened (be sure to have them make a list of evidence from the text that helps justify their responses, How do you know that they are right?)

3. Have students report to the class about what happened and what on the page made them think that.

Creating a list of text features, such as the word balloons, panels, facial expressions, symbols, and characters' positions, can help struggling readers pick-up on visual cues that help them understand these kinds of texts. It would also be important for the teacher to point out that manga read from right to left, in contrast to how English is typically read (Botzakis, 2009, p.17)

Format: Making Inferences

1. Students are asked more detailed questions about what they have read, such as how old they think Yotsuba is or why the girl in the background thinks she is a foreigner.

2. Students can be asked what they think will happen on the next page (making predictions helps with comprehension).

3. Students can be asked about the design and layout of the page (Why does Yotsuba crouch as she does? Why did the artist depict her as she is? How does the story flow? What is the sequence of the action?)

Discussing how the author uses text features and art to compose a message is and important step in getting students to write and draw on their own (Botzakis, 2009, p.17).

Other Graphic Novels to Use in the Classroom

Journey into Mohawk Country (Dutchman & Bogaert, 2006)

Uses: Great for incorporating in a Language Arts class or Social Studies class, many historical and cultural references, glimpse into 17th century life, compare and contrast between Mohawks/Dutch, graphic organizer use.

Clan Apis (Hosler, 2007)

Uses: Science, bee development, hive behavior, social lives of bees, use of sequential maps, opportunities for compare and contrast using content vocabulary.

Other Resource: The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)

The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) is a unique and vital gathering place for books, ideas, and expertise in the field of children's and young adult literature. The CCBC is a non-circulating examination, study, and research library for Wisconsin school and public librarians, teachers, early childhood care providers, university students, and others interested in children's and young adult literature. The CCBC is part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) School of Education (SOE), and receives additional support from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/

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