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The importance of differentiated instruction to student involvement, motivation, and learning

Emily Christine Fandino

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THE IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION TO
STUDENT INVOLVEMENT, MOTIVATION,
AND LEARNING

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Reading/Language Arts

by
Emily Christine Fandino
September 2008
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STUDENT INVOLVEMENT, MOTIVATION,
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ABSTRACT

Student motivation and engagement in reading and learning has always been the desire of teachers. The more diverse schools become, the harder this dream is to achieve. Schools and teachers get stuck in routines that eventually decrease variety in a classroom. When activities and teaching methods are the same for different children, learning only takes place in a select few. Differentiated instruction is a way of looking at teaching and learning that allows variety to be a part of the daily routine. Students think, learn, and demonstrate learning differently so teachers need to give these options in classrooms.

This study was focused on what differentiated instruction is, what it takes to have a differentiated classroom, and if differentiated instruction really helps increase student motivation, engagement, and learning. Two classes of eighth grade students were taken through the process of differentiating assignments using four ways differentiation can take place: variety, choice, relevance, and centers.
Differentiation takes considerable amounts of time and creativity from teachers who wish to differentiate their instruction. It is a process that needs to be done slowly with explicitly clear and goal-oriented instructions. Students were found to become more motivated and engaged in classroom activities and learning using differentiated instruction only when instruction was written clearly and with specifically outlined goals.
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As classrooms are more diversified and test scores and scoring proficiency is more important, teachers are asked to do the very difficult task of teaching the exact same content to the point of proficiency for each student. Teachers are asked to teach content to a diverse population of students coming from a variety of family backgrounds, prior knowledge, interests, and language ability without leaving any student behind intellectually (McMackin & Witherell, 2005). Anderson (2007) sums up the feeling among teachers, “although teachers have yearned for decades for more responsive and effective methods in addressing students’ differences, many children perform daily on the ‘margins’ of their classrooms – never fully engaged and rarely ever catching a glimpse of their brightest potential” (p. 49). Teachers know what is achievable; teachers have dreams of success for all students in their classrooms but are at a standstill when it comes to what action to take. Differentiated instruction is a way to accomplish that difficult task. Unfortunately, it can be
implemented poorly if not completely understood by the teacher.

Week after week teachers question why students with learning potential choose to respond below their capacity academically. Week after week teachers wonder why students get less and less motivated to achieve. And yet week after week, teachers do nothing to change the way things are done in the classroom. Concepts are taught the same way, stories are read in the same fashion, and tests look almost exactly the same week after week, year after year. As the year progresses, teachers begin to question whether the students will be ready and have the necessary skills for the next year. Teachers question whether or not students actually learned anything.

Both students and teachers are bored. Teachers look back over the year and reflect with discouragement on what teaching has become. Teachers know deep down that teaching and learning is not boring; students need to be involved and motivated to achieve. Students feel successful in order to be successful. Students need to be actively drawn into learning to enjoy that learning.

In a differentiated classroom this is not the case (Tomlinson, 2000). Success, involvement, and enjoyment
take place because students have a variety of readings to
learn particular content, a variety of activities to choose
from, and a variety of assessment to demonstrate learning.
An important part of differentiating instruction is to make
sure all students are learning the same content and
mastering the same skill. Classrooms are set up in
centers or stations where students move through content and
activities at their own pace. Students are able to read
stories, relate to characters and situations, and show
understanding of standards through a variety of means all
geared toward their various learning styles and multiple
intelligences. Students are motivated to learn and begin
taking control of their own learning while the teacher
plays the role of facilitator, able to spend more one-on-
one time with the students who need it.

Background

In the past, teaching had the image of individuality
and isolation. Prior to No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
teachers were free to do what they thought was best for
their students in their classrooms. Now, because of NCLB,
states and districts have a duty to more closely monitor
what and how teachers are teaching. Recently there is a
huge emphasis on collaboration and integration with other teachers and disciplines. Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, 2004) are finding their way into more districts and schools as an attempt to bring teachers together in the planning and teaching process. When teachers collaborate about lessons, strategies, students, and activities differentiated instruction becomes easier. Other teachers’ ideas and insights can be used to differentiate a classroom and help all students become engaged and motivated. According to DuFour, Professional Learning Communities is one way to increase the climate of community between teachers, students, and teachers and students which all impacts how classrooms are differentiated. Pettig (2000) says that when using differentiated instruction as a way of thinking and planning in the classroom, collaboration is key. He goes on to say that teaching should not be in isolation. To obtain the most benefit out of differentiation and to meet the needs of all students, many minds are needed. Discussing and collaborating frequently with fellow teachers is the key to being effective. This idea of collaboration is supported by Bush (2006). She believes educators have to really know their students academically
in order to effectively differentiate instruction to meet all needs (2006). Through collaboration and teacher discussions, methods and activities that will meet the diverse needs in the classroom will be discovered. Teachers have different experiences with teaching and with a variety of students, and those experiences need to be shared in order to have effective differentiated instruction in all classrooms.

In the past, many teachers taught lessons and then made modifications or adaptations for those students whose formal assessment scores show they have not mastered the skill or concept being taught. Mora (2006) believes that more is needed than these random modifications to really internalize a specific skill. When teachers assess students' learning throughout a daily lesson and unit and differentiate the next steps based on the assessment results, activities will be more beneficial for students' understanding, leading to potential mastery of a skill or concept. This means that meeting the diverse needs of students should not be an afterthought based on the final assessment but something that is done when planning a lesson and unit. Teachers need to differentiate content, process, and product for the skill being taught based on
what is already known about individual student needs, interests, and readiness. Flexibility in unit plans is necessary as activities for students change based on the ongoing assessments given during daily lessons (Mora, 2006; Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

Understanding the ideas and pedagogy behind differentiated instruction is important for all teachers. It can bring life, success, and enjoyment back into teaching and learning. Many of today’s students do not enjoy school or have feelings of success in school. This makes the idea of differentiated instruction a very important one for teachers to consider.

Statement of Problem

Teachers today hear more and more about differentiated instruction. Administrators talk about differentiation with their teachers, planting the need for implementation in lesson plans and classrooms. Unfortunately, many of these teachers are left to make inferences and to fend for themselves as to what differentiation in the classroom actually looks like. Bewildered teachers make an occasional reference to this mysterious term in their lesson planning, meanwhile continuing in their classrooms
the same way they always have. What is differentiated instruction and how it works inside the classroom is a common question among teachers.

Teachers are also expected to meet the needs of all the learners in their classroom, getting each student engaged and interested in learning while preparing these students to perform well on district benchmark and state tests. How do teachers go about achieving this required success and how does differentiated instruction fit into this kind of success? Student motivation is very much a factor in student success, so how much student motivation lies in differentiated instruction and the different learning styles addressed through it? How does differentiated instruction engage, motivate, and involve students? Does involvement and higher motivation guarantee or show correlation to higher test scores, mastery of standards, and understanding of skills being taught?

This study aims to find the connection between differentiated instruction as a way of thinking about teaching. It is a way of reaching all students, increasing internal and external motivation within students to read and involving students with the text being read.
Purpose of the Study

Teaching in a district where differentiated instruction is an expectation, the need for deconstruction while seeking understanding holds critical importance. Students possess a variety of readiness levels, interests, backgrounds, language proficiency, and beliefs about school, and the importance of education. On the surface, differentiated instruction appears to be a wonderful savior for the diversity issue in the classroom, yet little is known about how effective it actually is in motivating and engaging students in the learning process. The purpose of this study is to discover what differentiated instruction really is, what is required of a teacher who differentiates, and if it truly helps and motivates the wide range of students in the classroom. It also aims to decipher how important motivation and student engagement are to the success of differentiated instruction.

This study is significant as it is a start in understanding, showing, and clarifying the effectiveness and extensiveness of differentiated instruction. It is also significant because it aims to define what differentiated instruction is so teachers can begin to use it in their classrooms. There is little research done on
the actual effects of differentiating instruction within a classroom. When schools and districts require or strongly suggest their teachers use this way of teaching, they need to be aware of its potential and what is required to reach success.

There are some aspects of this study that are different from previous studies examining and concerning differentiated instruction. For example, there has yet to be any conclusive evidence on how much differentiated instruction affects student motivation in the classroom and for learning. This study aims to make a connection between the use of differentiated instruction and how much it can increase and help students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Since the aims of this study point to how differentiated instruction helps students' motivation, the material being learned in the classroom will not be changed or modified, what will be different is the method of delivery used within the classroom.

Theoretical Bases and Organization

Research has been done in the past on the variety of ways students learn and different strategies and methods that result in learning for students. Throughout all the
research, one thing has become very evident, no one method, strategy, or way of learning works for everyone. Children and teachers differ, so classrooms should not be catering to only one type of learning or one way of teaching (Allington, 2006). Through differentiated instruction, educators will be able to see that there is a way to use the variety of strategies and methodologies in the classroom so that all students are given the chance to excel in their own way.

This study is constructed along the theoretical base of students having multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and different learning styles (Carbo, 1984). According to Gardner multiple intelligences are the different ways people learn and process information best. There are eight different multiple intelligences: verbal linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. Carbo explains learning styles as the approach and preference of learners in the classroom when new information is taught and practiced. Learning styles are how students take information in effectively, the environment while learning, and the method information is then reproduced to show learning. If students learn information differently, then
teachers should present and assess what is being taught differently based on those diverse intelligences and styles. Teachers need to be able to teach the necessary content, using different strategies for how students will learn content and what they will use to teach content, while ensuring success for each individual student in the classroom. Through the use of multiple intelligences and different learning styles all students will have a chance to see themselves succeed in school which should lead to an increase in motivation.

Differentiating instruction, through the use of a variety of motivational strategies, activities, and assessments, builds upon these ideas of multiple intelligences and learning styles while staying faithful to all students with the same curricular goals and mastery of the same content standards.

Limitations of the Study

A major limitation to this study is the sample size. Since the researcher is performing the study on students in two classes, the study is limited to fewer than 100 participants. The study will be able to give an idea of how differentiated instruction is effective but in very
general terms. The researcher will use as many of the students as possible to make sure the study covers a diversity of students.

The study is also very limited in time, taking place in a time frame of ten weeks. Once again, it will only give a general idea of how effective differentiated instruction can be for increasing motivation and involvement in students. The Language Arts classes that are participating in this study are block periods. Consequently, the researcher will be using as much time from those periods as possible to ensure students have a maximum amount of time to experience differentiated instruction and its effects.

The study will also be limited in the content available to use for differentiation. The district in which this study takes place is committed to using a specific curriculum "with fidelity". The researcher must abide by the rules the district has put in place and use only this pre-set curriculum. Due to the nature of differentiated instruction, outside sources will occasionally be used to support the curriculum but on a very limited basis. These outside sources will be very carefully chosen and will be of a variety of reading
genres, making sure they are directly tied to the specific standards being taught.

A final limitation for this study is the drawback of only being able to have participants from one grade level. The researcher is a teacher for an eighth grade Language Arts class, therefore will be going through this study using only those students. Differentiated instruction may affect students at different grade levels and teachers of different grade levels in a variety of ways. This study will show how only one grade level is motivated through differentiated instruction.

Definition of Terms

Differentiated instruction is not a strategy used in the classroom but according to Bush (2006) is an "approach to instructional strategies, the delivery of the curriculum, covered within the study of curriculum" (p. 43). Garderen & Whittaker (2006) add to this definition saying that differentiated instruction is a "practice" (p. 12) where all students are having their needs met in a classroom that is focused on the standards. All students, no matter the level of diversity, are taught the same concepts and skills in a way that is relevant to who they
are as individuals and as learners. Classrooms may be set up in centers where students have the choices of which activities to participate in and how long to spend on those activities.

Throughout this study, learning will be referred to many times. For the sake of general understanding, the term learning should have a specific definition. The term learning is understood as "the process of acquiring knowledge or skill" (Webster’s College Dictionary, 1997).

When students have motivation they have a reason for doing something, in this case for participating in school and classroom activities. This motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic, intrinsic being the more beneficial type of motivation. Extrinsic motivation, according to Ginsberg (2005), is more commonly seen in schools today. Extrinsic motivation is when students receive tangible rewards for their efforts and success; therefore, their motivation for doing the work is based on whether or not they want the reward that is offered. For example, when students receive a sticker for doing a good job on an assignment they are receiving extrinsic motivation to do more assignments. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is when students can internalize what they are learning and the importance
it holds for their own reality. An example of intrinsic motivation is when students are given an assignment using basic technology and end up turning in something that uses above and beyond the teachers instructions just for the sake of figuring out how to do things on the computer.

When discussing differentiated instruction, content, process, and product come up very often. Content is the subject matter or specific topic, the “what”, which is being learned. Process is the manner or the “how” that content is learned, such as activities, readings, and projects. Product is how students will demonstrate the content that they have learned. It is the assessment options given by the teacher (Flemming & Baker, 2002).

Conclusion

Differentiated instruction is a way teachers can perceive teaching. It can give much searched for enjoyment to teachers and students. Having differentiated instruction as part of a teacher’s outlook and repertoire to teaching, students will have a chance at finding real intrinsic motivation for learning and school that can be used for all areas of life, in the present and the future. In our current educational system where diversity is not
foreign, differentiated instruction is a way to ensure success for all students, from all backgrounds, with various talents, and various levels of readiness. Differentiated instruction is a way for all students to know and experience what success in school is like.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of Differentiated Instruction

Differentiating instruction within a classroom is not a new concept. It has been around since the one-room schoolhouse of the colonial days (Anderson, 2007; Tomlinson, 1999). Classrooms have always contained a variety of students at many levels of achievement; teachers have always been faced with the challenge of teaching all the students, no matter how varied the levels. The increase in diversity among students within classrooms in content knowledge, reading levels, language proficiency, culture, physical and mental abilities, home lives, and teacher background has created a need for teachers to find a methodology that benefits everyone. As schools and classrooms become more diverse and challenging in all aspects, teachers see the importance of delivering pedagogical practices in different ways so all students are learning (Tomlinson, 2004a; Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

The increase in technology and new learning from the area of brain research has proven that each brain is unique (Tomlinson, 1999). There is research that suggests, due to
the uniqueness of each student's brain, educators need to provide various opportunities for students' learning. In the 1990's, Carol Ann Tomlinson took the idea of differentiating instruction and arranged a how-to strategy for meeting the needs of all learners (Schumer, 2003). This gave teachers and schools a starting point for differentiating classrooms and lessons and making content accessible to all students.

**What is Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiation is such a broad and all-encompassing part of teaching and learning, that it cannot be classified as a strategy, but is instead a way of thinking and learning within the classroom. To differentiate a classroom, and a lesson, is not to do something in one specific way. Differentiation is more personalized instruction in a classroom setting. There are many ways to differentiate a classroom (Tomlinson, 1999; Cobb, 2004; Tomlinson, 2000). It is a way to "bring the ideas and concepts of the curriculum to the learner at a pace and depth that is appropriate for the abilities of each student" (Larsen, 2004, p.14). When diverse groups of learners all have the same opportunity to access,
interpret, and disseminate a common goal and skill, differentiated instruction is taking place. Differentiation is exemplified in the way thinking happens in the classroom and the way assessments are assigned. A differentiated classroom starts with the students working at their individual readiness levels. It is student-centered with the teacher as a facilitator (Tomlinson, 1999, 2004). For the teacher to be a facilitator, he or she must take a step back from being the center of the lesson and provide students more control over their learning. The teacher guides students, making sure they stay focused on the overall goal and objective.

According to Doll (1993), education from the viewpoint of modernist pedagogical curriculum does the exact opposite of what differentiated instruction ought to do. The modernist curriculum has one linear way of pedagogy in the classroom and of approaching school in general. He suggests what education needs is a post-modern view of education and curriculum which he calls a “dancing curriculum” (p.103). Dancers have their own unique way of performing specific dances so to must curriculum allow students to have their own way of reaching mastery of content. Students need to not only be able to make the
content being learned their own, but they also need to make meaning out of what is taking place within the classroom. This happens daily in a post-modern view of education; students take the goal and objective and go about learning skills and content in a way that makes sense to them, a way that creates real meaning for them (Doll, 1993). Classroom instruction should be recursive, flexible, and unique to the various learners and various stages of the students; in essence it is differentiated. Doll goes on to say there is no one way to package curriculum or teaching, but instead it is a process that is transformative as it changes based on readiness level, prior knowledge, interest, and the situation the learner finds themselves in. Teachers must constantly be aware of transformative curriculum and teaching, making sure they are always prepared to meet students at their readiness level. The idea of rigor and relational-based context is also required in transformative learning. These ideas are an aspect of what differentiated instruction is in the classroom.

Throughout all the research, the most consistent aspect of differentiation is that it takes place in all facets of teaching and learning. It challenges all students in the classroom, brings meaning to students, and
allows them to relate what is being read and learned to their own schemas and prior knowledge. Relevance is an important aspect of differentiated instruction. Students learn effectively when they can connect the familiar - pathways already created in their brain - to that which is unfamiliar - new concepts and ideas (Smith, 1997; Tomlinson, 2000; Gregory, 2005; Campbell, 2007). Because each student in a classroom has different prior knowledge and/or different pathways to prior knowledge, it is important to have a plethora of ways students can relate to new information. In differentiating all parts of instruction, teachers are creating opportunities for the various student interests, abilities, and classroom experiences to learn and develop the skills being taught. Through differentiation teachers are helping connect the unfamiliar with the familiar. This connection is where learning begins.

There is no specific and single method or strategy to use in order to differentiate. It can take place in all subjects, skills, and approaches to teaching and learning (Tomlinson, 2000). Tomlinson emphasizes that instruction can be differentiated in various ways. These include content (what is being learned), process (how it is being
learned), and product (how that learning is being demonstrated).

Content

According to Bush (2006), differentiating by content is determining the level of difficulty of a specific skill, topic, and/or reading for individual students or groups in the classroom. Tomlinson (1999) defines content as what students are to learn, as well as the materials and methods by which they will learn. Based on these differences, teachers will have multiple sources to read and will deliver information so that all students can access and understand what is being given to them. Fisher and Frey (2004) stress textbooks should not be the only source used within a classroom, but all genres of text should be used, old and current, making content more applicable to students’ lives. Teachers can use flexible grouping, audio books, or the internet as ways to help all students understand a text or concept (Anderson, 2007). Differentiation though content can take place via the interpretations of how a text is read which leads to different understandings by the whole class or individual students. Garderen and Whittaker (2006) claim content can be differentiated in several ways: the various reading
levels of text given out to students; in the type of
graphic organizer students use to take notes on the text;
the examples and illustrations used to help students with
different interests understand a concept; and the way a new
skill or idea is presented. Johnson (2006) and Carbo
(1984) place an importance on learning styles when it comes
to differentiated instruction through content. They say it
is important for students to be metacognitive of their
learning styles, how they learn best, when a classroom is
being differentiated. On occasion students should choose
which method of accessing and learning information is most
beneficial for them. This gives students an equal chance
at success and an ownership over their own learning.

Through the differentiation of content students will
have a better chance at grasping new ideas, concepts,
stories, and skills (Tomlinson, 2000; Gregory, 2005). Once
students have a basic understanding of the new information,
the practice and actual learning of that information will
be easier. Engagement and motivation will continue to
increase because students have already had success in
understanding the readings.
Process

Differentiation through process is what students do to comprehend and pull meaning about concepts or from text. Tomlinson (1999) and Bush (2006) define process as how the students understand what is being taught, the activities created to make certain students use the skills being taught to help make sense of the ideas and information, and how it is connected to their schema or prior knowledge already in place. An example of differentiating the process is when students are put in a variety of reading groups or literacy circles where questions are leveled according to the groups’ readiness or language proficiency while staying true to the standard and goals set out for students. Process can also involve students being given variety and choice in activities, assignments, pace of working, and the order in which classwork is completed (Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Anderson continues with these ideas for differentiating process by organizing assignments to be done individually or with specific groups and individualized homework projects based on the students’ readiness and interest. Process is also differentiated through multiple intelligences. Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences are the numerous ways different people learn
new information best. These multiple intelligences include linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, kinesthetic, musical, naturalist, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. He states that each student has a specific way they learn best. When teachers use these intelligences to help shape assignments and activities students do, there is a higher likelihood more students will begin to understand and learn content and skills. Shearer (2003) suggests that assignments focus on students' specific intelligences to genuinely help students learn information. This variety and choice allows each student an equal opportunity to learn the standard and content and reach the goal set out by the teacher (Campbell, 2007; Benjamin, 2006; Tomlinson, 2000; Flemming and Baker, 2002).

**Product**

Product is defined as varied and ongoing assessments that are evidence and representative of what students have been taught (Bush, 2006). Tomlinson (1999) goes further to say product is the vehicle in which students show what they have learned and expand on that learning. Teachers can give choices and variety in informal and formal assessments, always using the results to continue guiding students through skills. Using a variety of assessments
while tapping into different interests and strengths of the students allows the teacher to acquire a better understanding of where students are in the learning process. When students can accurately produce new concepts in different ways, their understanding of those skills is deeper. Anderson (2007) articulates various ways to differentiate product through "choice boards" that emphasize various learning styles and intelligences or open-ended product options from which students may choose. She explains "choice boards" as assignments that have a variety of activities catering to different intelligences and interests, all having the students reach the same goal. Students are then able to choose which activity to complete based on what they know about their interests and strengths. Garderen and Whittaker (2006) and Anderson say that an important part to differentiating formal assessments is providing students with rubrics that guide them in their choice of relaying information learned. This rubric is used to individually assess each student, even though students chose different activities. Differentiating product doesn't always have to be a variety of choices from which students choose. If many informal assessments are given throughout a lesson or unit, a
differentiating teacher would use one assessment on the whole class yet make each assessment given a little different in how students show what is being learned.

One example of differentiating through product is seen through writing. Student writing and the attainment of knowledge through that process demonstrates differentiation for readiness level and interest. This process allows students to take more ownership and become engaged in their writing leading to a more well-written and detailed piece of writing. Differentiation and its effects are seen in the teaching, encouraging, editing, and publishing of student writing (Graves, 1994).

Other Considerations

Garderen and Whittaker (2006) agree with Tomlinson’s means of differentiation through content, process, and product. They add two other ways to consider differentiation in a classroom: affect and environment. Affect is the emotional aspect of classrooms. It is evident when students are emotionally supported within the classroom and by the teacher as well as when students make an emotional connection to what is being learned in the classroom. When each student is involved, connecting to information, concepts, and stories, and looking for the
various perspectives on an idea, differentiation through affect is taking place. Differentiating for environment is creating a classroom environment that helps meet the diverse needs within the classroom. Rearranging furniture or classroom setup to encourage student learning and allowing materials to be available if and when needed will differentiate environment. Students have a variety of different learning needs when it comes to environment. To allow students to reorganize furniture based on what assignment is being worked on is differentiating for environment. Teachers can also differentiate for environment when they have areas in the room that allows students to complete work where they are not sitting at the traditional desk and chair. They state that differentiation in all these areas needs to be based on the readiness level, interest, and learning profile for each student. The idea of differentiating affect and environment is seen as significant by Anderson (2007), Most important to differentiated instruction are the elements of choice, flexibility, ongoing assessment, and creativity resulting in differentiating the content being taught or how students are processing and developing understanding of concepts and skills,
or the ways in which students demonstrate what they have learned and their level of knowledge through varied products (p.50).

No matter how differentiation takes place in the classroom, it is essential that it be geared toward improving student learning. Petting (2000) emphasizes that differentiation takes time and is not a practice that is learned immediately. When differentiating a classroom, a teacher needs to start one step at a time. Petting advises teachers to not differentiate everything at once but allow time to adjust to differentiation in small doses. Tomlinson (2007) agrees with this and says that teachers who wish to differentiate need to start with one activity at a time. She emphasizes the importance of carrying out that activity at the end of a class period, and then teachers and students will not have to recover from an experience that didn’t go as planned. As teachers begin to differentiate their classrooms, they will learn what works with their set of students and can add more differentiation into a lesson. It may take a while to integrate differentiation through content, process, product, affect, and environment into a classroom, but Petting says to
persevere, it pays off for teachers and students in the end.

Instruction

Routman (2005) and Tomlinson (1999) make the excellent point that differentiation is not having different instruction, curriculum, or expectations for different groups of students, but having a wider variety of the same excellent instruction, curriculum, and expectations to those students who need different methods of reaching the goal set out by the teacher. Differentiation is not about changing things completely because a student, or a group of students, is not proficient or up to grade level. Those students need to continually be held accountable to the same content and skills proficient students are held accountable to. Teachers need to use many strategies and provide choices to their students, allowing the students, their abilities, and their strengths to pick the activity or way of learning that is at their level and that they are comfortable with (Tomlinson; Tomlinson, 2000; Benjamin, 2006; Cole, 2004). Cole also emphasizes that different strategies or cueing techniques be flexible and varied depending on the situation the students are in. Teachers do not want to ostracize students by singling them out for
different instruction or curriculum, but instead need to give them the extra support they need to meet their proficient classmates on common ground.

When thinking about the different ways students learn, differentiation, in all the facets of teaching, seems to be the most logical way of running a classroom. As Graves (1994), Weaver (2002), and Villano (2005) state, differentiating the classroom involves more than just changing up the assignments. It embodies showing and telling, using different strategies and approaches to the reading and writing that take place, and different strategies to get students mentally engaged in what is being taught. Not only are the differentiated activities important to student involvement, but keeping these activities and readings focused around a specific skill, standard, or “centerpiece” is crucial as well (Mora, 2006, p.35). Smith and Wilhelm (2006) say it best: “With no guiding purpose or overarching framework, these kids do not know which details to study or discard, or how to link, organize, and use the details they learn” (p.62). This is especially important when students are working on different assignments and activities. They want to know everyone is completing the same goal and will be ready for the same
assessment. When the central focus and goal is clear and students are given a variety of options to choose from, student engagement takes place. This is the essence of what differentiated instruction is.

Teachers need to be continually reevaluating what is happening in the classroom, what is working, what is not working, and why (Tomlinson, 1999; Gregory, 2005). With an increased knowledge base in the classroom, the needs of the students change (Tomlinson, 2000). When units or concepts change, knowledge base will be at a different level once again. This requires the teacher to alter the method and strategies used in differentiating if learning is the continued desire. Looking at differentiation as something that transforms on a daily basis depending on what the students already know, what their background is, and what their motivational level is, is a very important part of having a differentiated classroom. Tomlinson (2000) emphasizes the importance in remaining alert to this continual metamorphosis in order to keep each student learning, challenged, engaged, and motivated in the classroom.

Teachers do have to be aware of falling into a habit of differentiating the same way all the time.
Differentiated instruction is only useful when it isn’t allowed to fall into the same routine teachers may find themselves in currently. With consistent variety in the what, how, and when of differentiation, students will have more motivation, be more involved, learn more, and enjoy what and how they learned (Tomlinson, 2000; Benjamin, 2006; Mora, 2006). Once again, differentiation is a way of thinking about the classroom, the students, and the learning; this way of thinking needs to change towards the students and the content in order for it to be effective.

Differentiating a classroom, in all the various stages and aspects, can be a daunting task if thought about outside the idea of learning styles, modalities, and intelligences. If teachers hope to reach each student - both proficient and non-proficient, language learner and learning disabled, over-achiever and underachiever - they need to make sure that the content, process, and product all feed into several of the learning styles and intelligences in the classroom (Sternberg & Zhang, 2005; Gregory, 2005; Johnson, 2006). Sternberg and Zhang and Gregory are also very quick to point out that not all learning styles or intelligences need to be catered to for every concept, activity, method, or assessment. Teachers
should use a variety of learning styles, modalities, and intelligences throughout the teaching of units to guarantee all students are being reached at various levels of a lesson and unit. This gives choice to what is being learned, makes the classroom more interesting and challenging, and allows each student to experience learning and success in units or activities (Johnson; Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew, 1999).

**Why Differentiate Instruction**

The need for diverse ways of teaching, assessing, and learning is more prevalent now than ever. Society is becoming more and more diverse; learners are bringing more and more particulars into the classroom, while schools are focusing less on the diversity and richness students bring and more on state tests and the traditional, factory-model ways of teaching students. Van Sluys and Reiner (2006) say, "Mandates, like standardized testing, wear away at what teachers know about good literacy practices... school literacy is often streamlined to match state objectives and tests instead of 'emphasizing the complexities and cultures of each student...’" (p.322). Schools are making state tests and their scores such a priority that the students are
being taken out of direct focus, where they belong. Students are not all the same; therefore teachers cannot assume they will all learn the same. Educators need to remember that just because tests used to score a students' proficiency level are standardized — students are not standardized. Teachers are unable to really tap into student uniqueness and differences because schools are overly focused on state tests and moving through content in time for those tests.

One of the major difficulties faced today by teachers and students is language proficiency. There are many different levels of language proficiency surrounded by various cultures and beliefs about education in every classroom. Children of immigrants enter school with a varying knowledge of English. Some students catch on quickly to English while others struggle to learn the new language. Some students know a great deal about a particular topic and catch on quickly to the academic vocabulary that is used in a classroom while other students know very little and have to learn English as they are learning content. Many times, all these students are in the same classroom. Part of a teacher's job is to make sure no matter how much of the English language students
know, they are continually learning content. Young and Hadaway (2006) see this as a major reason to differentiate and stay away from using only one way to teach all students. Language learners who have not reached proficiency in English will not be capable of completing the same exact assignment and learn the required content as a proficient English speaker. Differentiating activities for language proficiency while keeping the same goal in mind help all students complete assignments and learn content.

Motivation

A vital question that teachers have involves student motivation and how to get students to want to achieve the goals set out for them. The problem with creating motivation for students is that teachers traditionally create the goals and tell the students how to get there, not allowing students to participate in what those goals are or how to reach them (Flemming & Baker, 2002; Grave, 1994). Each student brings his or her own strengths and interests into a classroom, differentiation brings these strengths and interests out (Christensen, 2000). Van Sluys and Reiner (2006) indicate that accessing and validating these strengths and interests will build confidence in
students. It will challenge other students, build community, and give ownership, motivating every student in the classroom. Giving students a say in how they are going to go about learning something, allowing them to voice their opinion and tell their stories, and using their interests to help the achieving of a goal, will give them the necessary freedom that creates the intrinsic motivation all teachers desire in their students (Ginsberg, 2005; Campbell, 2007; Tomlinson, 2000; Cole, 2004; Van Sluys & Reiner, 2006; Christensen, 2000).

There are two different types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic motivation is the type of motivation that easily changes based on what is desired. It is when students receive a tangible reward, such as candy or a grade, for correctly completing an assignment. Extrinsic motivation is seen very often in schools and classrooms as all students are encouraged to complete classwork so they can receive a good grade in the class. This type of motivation doesn’t always work. It is fickle and may change depending on the teacher, other students in the class, what’s going on at home, or problems with friends. Intrinsic motivation is more stable and lasting. This type of motivation is created by the individual and
comes from within. Students with intrinsic motivation have a specific purpose for completing assignments and doing their best that is outside grades or the expectations of others. Intrinsic motivation is based on being engaged with and enjoying content and activities, seeing the relevance of what is being learned to their lives, and believing they can achieve personal success through the tasks given to them (Ginsberg, 2005). Differentiating instruction builds intrinsic motivation in students as they begin to take control over their own learning and experience success in that learning.

Motivation for learning is created in students when they can make sense of what they are being taught and apply or relate it to their own experiences and knowledge in a contextual framework. Williams (2005) believes a student’s feeling of competence is derived from his or her experience; the more experience, the more competence, and more motivation that student has. Smith and Wilhelm (2006) believe competence plays an important role in students’ motivation to learn. They saw many students motivated to learn when activities and information used in class were based on their specific modalities and intelligences. This led to an increase in their feelings of competence and
their involvement in learning. Teachers need to make sure they are meeting students where they are intellectually, no matter where that may be. The place students are at is where a feeling of competence and learning starts, through increasingly challenging activities, students will begin to see and feel an increase in their level of competence and learning.

Students need to be treated with respect, have their stories and experiences listened to, and be given choices in their learning (Tomlinson, 2000; Benjamin, 2006; Christensen, 2000). Engagement, learning, and retention of knowledge are not going to take place if the information given to them is not meaningful. Without meaningful material, a student’s motivation will drop significantly, quickly followed by a drop in their involvement and learning. Teachers can make information meaningful to students by meeting them where they are and relating the material to their individual realities, connecting it to their prior knowledge (Wink, 2005). The focus of teachers should be “on strategic thinking, problem solving, and comprehension techniques that students can use” (Young & Hadaway, 2006, p.13). Young and Hadaway stress the importance of information, activities, and assessments
being as relevant to the variety of lives and cultures within the classroom as possible. A teacher who pays attention to what is meaningful, what is liked, and what is being experienced will increase the students' desire to participate and learn the skills and concepts required (Wink, 2005).

At the same time that students are requiring meaningful and relevant activities, readings, and connections in order to learn, each student needs the continuing trust and emotional support of the teacher (Smith, 1997; Cole, 2004). Students stay interested in topics and are able to achieve success, leading to increased motivation when they are allowed to pick their own books to read, topics to write about, and ways of being assessed. They learn to feel successful and motivated because they are doing activities and reading text that is of interest yet still challenging. Teachers continue to build upon that motivation through encouragement, constant affirmation, and challenging questions. Meeting the emotional needs of the students will help them feel connected, accepted, and cared for, which in turn allows them to focus and learn (Routman, 2005; Gregory, 2005). When students feel safe and accepted they can begin
trusting the teacher and what is being asked of them.
Cole, Tomlinson (2000), and Van Sluys and Reiner (2006) all emphasize that the majority of students' needs are met in the interactions between teacher and student. The gestures, the words, and the activities of the teacher are all part of the interactions with the students and the need to be positive, encouraging, and caring in order for differentiation of content, process, and product to really work.

How to Differentiate Instruction

The key to differentiation for learning is to make sure that there is a goal and a standard that is pre-determined and established to help guide learning and teaching. Petting (2006) highlights that the entire class should have the same overall goal and objective, yet individual students should work at their own readiness level to achieve that goal. In order for students to work at their own readiness levels, teachers need to be aware of those levels and need to allow students to slightly change the goal to fit their readiness level. Differentiation cannot take place if there is no goal set up for students to aim for or if that goal is out of reach for individual
students. Teachers need to identify where students are in their knowledge of a particular topic and provide "targeted instruction" that will allow students to understand, relate, and retain necessary skills and information (McMackin & Witherell, 2005, p.242). Tomlinson (1999, 2000), Christensen (2000), and Benjamin (2006) believe that each activity within a differentiated classroom must have a goal and purpose. No matter how many variations of an activity teachers have, they all need to be centered on the same skill, concept, and goal for learning. Without a goal, students are unsure what part of differentiating activities to put their energy in.

Smith and Wilhelm (2006) found in their studies that many students not only learned with differentiation and the use of different modalities and intelligences, but also began to feel they could learn. As students learn and go about achieving a set out goal through the various methods of differentiation, the pathways in their brains where prior knowledge is coming from is accessed and reinforced, creating meaning in what is being taught, learned, read, and thought about. To guarantee success for every student in the classroom, each one needs to be able to relate what is being taught to their own lives, to what they already
know, and to what already makes sense to them (Routman, 2005; Smith, 1997). Smith and Wilhelm also found that along with connecting information to the students’ lives, repetition, and revisitation of skills in different and challenging ways assisted with learning and mastery of standards. By making the repeating and revisiting different, teachers are creating an environment where more students have the ability to follow and comprehend skills and concepts. This is similar to Doll’s (1993) Richness, Rigor, Recursion, and Relation.

In order for teachers to differentiate according to students’ various levels, it is necessary to assess students to figure out what their readiness level is. Readiness level and targeted instruction of students cannot be an estimated guess by teachers. It is only effective when it is the product of on-going assessment throughout lessons and units (Petting, 2006). Teachers need to continuously assess students, both informally and formally, for learning will only take place when information is at their readiness level, and, according to Pilgreen (2006), at their level of conversational flow and academic language proficiency. In addition, Bush (2006) agrees that on-going assessment is essential for it tells teachers where, when,
and how to challenge students with content, activities, and sources used. Students are constantly learning therefore teachers need to constantly be attentive to the learning and changing taking place. Fisher and Frey (2004) support this as well when they mention the importance of using various readings from various genres and authors that appeal to various student interests, emotions, and social development. If teachers are to engage students and help them become intrinsically motivated in school, they need to make sure they appeal to the variety of students.

Success in learning occurs when teachers adopt the differences and similarities among students and their experiences as a part of the classroom climate. Without teachers taking the perspective of differentiation as a way of thinking about the classroom and teaching, students will have a hard time making meaning out of content. Students learn when meaning is found in what they are being taught. Teachers need to understand that all students think slightly differently, find meaning through different methods, have different background experiences, and have different things make sense in different ways (Smith, 1997; Tomlinson; Gregory, 2005; Christensen, 2000). Students can help make these connections for each other and can learn
through another student’s experience and story. When teachers think only about adopted or planned curriculum, they are losing the opportunity to help students find meaning in the content and skill. Garderen and Whittaker (2006) saw positive effects in student learning when culturally relevant information was part of the content used to relay a goal and objective. Because today’s schools are so culturally diverse, having a variety of content sources emphasizing various cultures can be a tactic of differentiating. Arroyo, Rhoad, and Drew (1999) see this as setting a climate of success, creating a framework that will allow all students to be successful in learning the standards and goals. Christensen (2000) backs up this idea with her Social Injustice Unit where students read and write about a topic that is part of each of their lives and their experiences. This awareness by teachers can increase the number of engaged learners in a classroom, the motivation of those learners, and the amount of real learning taking place. Smith (1997) and Weaver (2002) emphasize the importance of the connection between personal experience and classroom learning. Without this connection, students will not be able to relate new information to old information; they consequently become
discouraged, increasing the difficulty of learning any new concept. Relevance is crucial in differentiation. 

Student involvement in activities and readings is imperative; this involvement has a better chance of existing when students are engaged at the beginning of the lesson. Differentiation should not only be something for content, process, and product but for initial engagement and interest-grabbing purposes as well (Fisher & Frey, 2004). A classroom is so diverse in needs, prior knowledge, culture, intelligences, and styles, that to get all students involved in a lesson, differentiation needs to take place at the onset of the lesson or class (Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Introducing a new concept, skill, or story using a variety of intelligences and styles will give each student, no matter how diverse, a chance at being engaged. Pilgreen (2006) makes an extra emphasis on interactive activities at the opening of class and later in activities and assessments. She sees students as extremely social and getting students involved will require some form of social and interactive experience.

Learning styles are very integrated with the idea of differentiation and are defined as different ways in which individuals learn information as well as ways they
perceive, understand, retain, and solve what is being taught to them (Kauchak & Eggen, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Gregory, 2005). Focusing on learning styles (Carbo, 1984), as well as multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), is a way to differentiate a classroom so it is customized to meet the various needs of its diverse population of students. Carbo goes into depth when explaining the ways learning styles can be focused on when differentiating a classroom. She suggests teachers be aware of the environmental preferences students have when learning. The amount of light in a room can help or hinder a student’s learning as well as the level of formality a lesson is taught with. Some students need a room to be very light while others focus more when the light is dim. By creating different sections of the room with different levels of light or by varying the level of light at different times of a lesson is part of differentiating. There are times students need a formal classroom setting to learn while others need an informal setting. Adding this type of variety and differentiation to a classroom can help students feel comfortable and able to complete an assignment or story. Carbo also states it is important as teachers to know where students are developmentally. Learning styles can develop
and change as a child’s brain develops and as they progress through school. Teachers, therefore, cannot depend on the same styles for the same children all the time.

Centers or activities need to show creativity, allow student choice to come into play, and reach an assortment of different schemas (Johnson, 2006; Gregory, 2005). Tomlinson (2000) and Gregory (2005) point out that because each student’s brain is unique and has a certain way of learning, the providing of different modalities, or activities, within a lesson or unit allows all students to do their best because they are doing the activities in a way that comes natural to them. Learning styles affect a student’s way of receiving, understanding, and producing concepts and new ideas. If learning styles affect student learning at all levels, then differentiating to accommodate and challenge learning style at all levels is necessary.

Differentiation and student involvement is seen and influenced by the set-up of the classroom and behavior of the teacher. In changing the classroom environment to benefit the diverse styles, needs, and interests, a teacher can be differentiating instruction. When teachers make the classroom a place where students can feel accepted and show respect to each diverse student through the array of
activity options, they are creating a positive and encouraging environment for each student to be successful in his or her learning (Kauchak & Eggen, 2003; Arroyo, Rhoad, & Drew, 1999; Wink, 2005). This method of differentiation is not one normally thought of by educators, and yet has a great influence on the way information is perceived and how engagement takes place. Classroom set-up and teacher attitude are ways students can see and discover pleasure and enjoyment in a particular topic or discipline. Williams (2004) sees this as necessary if students are expected to be involved in classroom topics and activities. Anderson (2007) supports William’s ideas articulating the importance of an environment that involves all students in the classroom no matter how diverse, while Fisher and Frey (2004) maintain that a differentiated environment related to what is being learned in the classroom grabs the attention of students getting them involved and making them feel they have ownership over their classroom and learning.

This idea of differentiating the environment is explained by Cossentino and Whitcomb (2007) as a vital part of the Montessori philosophy of education. Children should be able to move around the room, doing assignments and
projects at various stations. This gives the students a feeling of ownership and freedom and, yet they still have the ability to seek out peers or the teacher for help if it is needed. The learning is differentiated and the students are allowed to pick what works best for them on that day and for that assignment. This ownership gives students motivation and helps with the learning of information.

Flemming and Baker (2002) suggest that one way to differentiate a classroom and build motivation is to allow students to be involved in the decision making of what and how to differentiate a lesson or topic. Helping to make the decisions for the choices that permeate differentiated instruction gives a sense of control, ownership, and empowerment to students. These key factors of motivation are natural results of differentiating content, process, and product within the classroom (Cole, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Gregory, 2005). Graves (1994) and Routman (2005) believe this is also very helpful when writing. Giving a student the right to choose whether writing should be continued, stopped before revision and redrafted, or even thrown out can increase the motivation and desire to produce something of which they can be proud. If a student is not interested, or not at a readiness level where they
can benefit from a certain activity, differentiating where they go next is important in order to keep that student motivated to learn and to continue challenging them. When students see they have ownership over their learning and progress, they will be more motivated to do their best on all activities and assessments.

Many of these researchers see these ways of motivating students essential in a differentiated classroom. Anderson (2007) says that teachers who want students to remain motivated should differentiate by aligning content, process, and product to the student’s interests, learning preferences, and choices in how they work on activities. Choice is very vital to a student’s motivation to learn in the classroom. Effective differentiation views student choice as an essential part of the daily lesson (Petting, 2000). Fisher and Frey (2004) see choice in the strategies used in reading text as motivating for students and a part of differentiated instruction. Giving different opportunities to read text in various ways will cause more students to be motivated to read the required text for pleasure and understanding.

Villano (2005), Johnson (2006), and Van Sluys and Reiner (2006), credit formal and informal assessments as
yet another very important factor in differentiation and building motivation. If an assessment is something that makes the students feel incapable and ineffective, their involvement and motivation for doing their best on the assessment will decrease. Assessments need to be just as differentiated as activities; they need to have choice involved, and they need to highlight the strengths of students (Johnson; Campbell, 2007). Informal assessment is just as significant as formal assessment, sometimes even more so when differentiating. It is much easier to have differentiated informal assessments that are less stressful for students and show the learning of students. Van Sluys and Reiner see student reflections as an important informal assessment. Most teachers see reflections as something that is only written, yet even these can be differentiated to tap into the different interests and learning styles of the students in the classroom. This guarantees the teacher receives an accurate idea of what students thought, experienced, and learned. To keep motivation on the rise, teachers need to ensure they are assessing both informally and formally, using differentiation and keeping the pace of the classroom challenging for each student.
Conclusion

Differentiating instruction in content (what students are learning), process (how students are learning and practicing), and product (how that learning is being demonstrated) effectively so all students benefit is not a task to be taken lightly (Tomlinson, 1999, 2000). It is a way of approaching the teaching practice to ensure all students, no matter what their differences may be, will be engaged, motivated, and able to learn new skills and concepts. Classrooms are made up of a variety of diverse learners and teachers need to be ready to teach to proficiency the same content and standards to that diverse group.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Many students in classrooms today lack motivation, involvement, and learning. All three of these are important within a classroom if students are expected to master content and standards with them to the next grade level. Differentiation is closely tied to student learning, student involvement, and student motivation. Differentiated instruction seems to be a strategic way of thinking about teaching and planning that may encourage motivation, involvement, and transferable learning to happen among students.

The purpose of this study is to see how close the connection between differentiated instruction and motivation and engagement of students is with content being learned. Does differentiated instruction have a connection to the level of motivation and engagement of students when they are learning content?
Population and Sample

The sample of this study is based on students in two 8th grade Language Arts classes. A majority of these students are Hispanic and speak both English and Spanish; fourteen are second language learners, with eight being reclassified as English proficient, three being advanced in their English proficiency, and many of the participants continue to use Spanish while at home. Thirty-seven of the students scored below proficient on the most current state test, all of which indicates that their reading, fluency, comprehension, and content skill are below grade level. This sample represents the population at the school the students attend who are in 8th grade. They attend a middle school in Cathedral City, in Southern California. Many of the students in the sample do not see college as a reality, let alone a dream, while many come from families that understand the importance of education, but do not have a history of higher educational achievement. Students in this sample understand and access external motivation to read and do well in school.
Treatment

Treatment in this study will consist of a student reading survey, student and teacher reflections, interviews, and student work. Participants in the study initially fill out a short reading survey that is to be evaluated by the researcher before the results of the study are obtained. The information from this self-assessment is used to get an idea of what students think about reading and school and how motivated they are to read on a regular basis.

At the end of each week, after the participants have experienced a strategy or method of teaching, they will reflect on those experiences and write out their thoughts explaining what they did or did not like and why. Each week the researcher will also interview two to four randomly chosen students on the events of the week, the strategies, and the differentiated methods used. This information will be tabulated at the end of the study to see what method or strategy motivated and engaged students the most, which ones students enjoyed the most, and which ones students believed helped them learn the most. During this study the researcher is focusing on four specific
ideas: choice, centers, relevance, and variety. Each of these ideas is a vital part of differentiated instruction.

The teacher is using the Language Arts curriculum assigned by the district and is going at the pace the district expects of the teachers using this specific curriculum. The teacher is taking each standard that is being covered on a weekly basis and directly asking students to tie it into their lives. These questions and answers usually are asked in a journal format where students write out in sentences or draw pictures relating the standard and concept to their lives. Discussion between partners follows and then a whole class discussion occurs on the variety of answers and ways students can connect the concept being learned to their individual lives.

There is no one way to differentiate instruction within a classroom but many different methods to differentiate according to the students, grade level, and teacher. This study will focus on four aspects of differentiation: choice, variety, relevance, and centers.

Choice

Choice is being seen in a variety of ways throughout the study. Students are given choice options for almost
every activity that is assigned. The choice lies in whether the students complete the activity on their own or with a partner, in which activities to do and in what methods to do them, in the pace they go through the activities assigned to meet and master standards, in the strategy used to complete an assigned reading, and in which type of assessment they will do to show understanding of the concept being taught during a particular week or story. Some weeks all of these choices are given to students. Other weeks only a few are given to students as choices. At the beginning of the study, students will have less choice so they can learn certain strategies and procedures. Once they have learned these, students will have more choice in what and how they complete assignments.

Variety

Variety will be seen by students in the type of strategies, assignments, and assessments developed. Assignments and assessments will not be the same week after week. The teacher will make sure to show variety in the types of multiple intelligences the activities are targeting to so the same ones are not repeated twice in a row. At times students will only choose one of the activity options given; other times students will be
required to complete two of the activities. The teacher will also show variety in the way students read through the assigned text. Students may read independently, cooperative groups, with an audio version of the story, or whole class with volunteers and teacher reading. When a video version of the story being read is accessible, students will have the opportunity to watch the video as a pre-reading activity.

The readings the students must get through are part of the core curriculum. There will be occasions where the teacher will supplement the required text with additional historical information such as the time period of the story, the history of world events, the relevant biographical history of the author, or extra information on the topic of the story. These supplemental readings will be found in books from the library, resources from the history teachers at the school, and legitimate online resources chosen by the teacher. Methods of activities and assessments for students will vary. Students may see assignment options in list form, choice board form, or in centers. With certain activities students will be assigned a specific activity or a specific list of activities based
on their proficiency level with the particular standard and concept being covered.

**Relevance**

Students will be given the chance to personally relate to content more often and apply it in ways that make sense to them and their prior knowledge. On a weekly basis, students will be asked to think and discuss Language Arts concepts and the main ideas of stories and how they are related to their lives. The chance for students to relate to what is being read will happen through journal prompts. Students may write, draw, or categorize their responses to a question written by the teacher to help them make the connection. There will be times students’ opportunity to see the relevance of content will come through an activity students are required to complete as they move through centers. The opportunity for students to connect the importance of a skill to their reality and future dreams will be regularly seen by participants. This will help show that by differentiating and making content real for each unique individual, motivation and engagement will increase among students.
Centers

Students will experience centers or stations throughout this study. The classroom will have a variety of centers around the room, the number varying depending on the skills that need to be mastered in a particular time frame, although never exceeding four centers at one time. Each center will focus on one particular concept or skill. At times the centers may focus on different standards, other times the centers will vary depending on the complexity of the standard being covered that particular week. Each center will have a specific title with specific assignments to be completed before moving on to the next center. Some weeks students will have the opportunity to work through the centers at their own pace and in the order of their choice. In these instances centers will have sign in and out sheets as a method for the teacher to quickly know who is where and what has been accomplished. Some weeks students will be assigned to particular centers based on proficiency levels or areas of need. Toward the second half of the study after students have learned the procedures and expectations of behavior and work production, a teacher-directed center will be implemented. This center is where the teacher will stay and focus on
helping students with individual or small group areas of need.

Each week will start with a whole-class lesson where past standards and concepts are reviewed and new standards and skills are introduced. The middle two or three days of the week will be focused on using centers, choice, and/or variety with the content being learned and story being read. The week will end whole-class again, reviewing what was learned throughout the week, completing the end assessment, and once again relating the concept and story to individual lives and to our community as a class.

Research Questions

**Motivation**

Does differentiated instruction actually help increase internal and external motivation in students? Student will be given many different opportunities to pick assignment options that they are comfortable with and require skills they are confident they have. This will give them success in their school work which may in turn begin to develop internal motivation. The variety experienced through the assignments can also begin to show students there are multiple ways of expression and of accomplishing things.
Through the use of variety and choice in the content, process, and product of what happens in the classroom, students will begin to feel more in control of their learning. By choosing activities to complete instead of being told specifically what to do, students will feel confident in the idea of success and more motivated to finish class work that might not have been attempted without differentiated instruction.

Data on student motivation will be measured through the pre and post self-assessment surveys students are taking on reading. The data from both surveys will be compared to see if reading increases. Motivation will also be measured through the reflections and the responses student’s have towards class, the assignments, and the readings.

Engagement

How does differentiated instruction engage, motivate, and involve students? In order to discover if differentiated instruction really does increase motivation in students, a variety of reading strategies will be introduced and used to help students read through a difficult text. After these have been introduced and practiced, students will have the option of choosing the
strategy they find most helpful and effective while they read. Students will also have more choice in the activities done for each standard and concept as well as the way they are assessed. The variety and choice seen through the centers and other activities has the potential of engaging all students as they are doing an activity they enjoy and are confident in completing.

The data for student engagement will be gathered and measured from student reflections and comments made towards assignments, activities, and readings. Student engagement data will also be measured through the teacher journal and observations made by the teacher of actions and verbal comments from students. Student work samples will also be collected to measure data on the engagement of students during a lesson.

How to

How do teachers go about achieving differentiated instruction in the classroom and how does it lead to success in students? The teacher will begin by offering choice in assignments and strategies. Students will be prompted, by the teacher and through journals, to relate each story read to experiences they have had, feeling they have felt, or things they have seen in movies, TV shows,
and real life. The teacher will design centers or stations in the classroom. Students will then be able to proceed through assignments by moving through the centers.

The ability to choose will allow students to begin to feel more empowered in the classroom and motivated to be engaged in their own learning. Students will also do activities that permit them to be continually successful at what they do in school. This success will build up confidence and motivation to continue high achievement in school.

This study will also show which methods of differentiated instruction work best with the particular sample of students. By giving students' permission to voice their opinion about strategies, assignments, and methods, the study will demonstrate what is preferred by students and causes students to feel the most success, therefore, leading to higher motivation to complete more assignments.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data will be collected in a variety of ways. All participating students will take a self-assessment survey. It is a likert-scale questionnaire about reading, what they
like or dislike about it, and when and where they do it most often. This data will be tallied up and calculated into the percentage of students who like or dislike reading as well as where and when they read most. It will be analyzed using descriptive statistics such as range, mean, and mode.

The teacher will also be keeping a journal of activities that are done as well as the prep work for those activities. Student’s responses and discussions the teacher has about what is going on in the classroom will be recorded in the journal along with successes, failures, and things learned by the teacher. Students will also write a weekly reflection on what they did in class and what they liked best. They will have the chance to voice their opinion on what they felt helped them the most with learning new and difficult information in addition to what helped them review already learned information. This data will be analyzed qualitatively by categorizing common responses and attitudes towards the way differentiated instruction was seen in lessons. Groups of similar responses will be compared with other responses to obtain an idea of student’s thoughts, motivation, and engagement with the activities in the lesson.
Students will also have a chance to explain what they liked, disliked, felt helped them, and felt was not helpful through an interview conducted by the teacher. An average of three interviews will take place with each new story and set of activities. Students will be randomly selected to participate in the interview and the teacher will have a chance to expand on certain ideas and responses the students makes, asking for clarification and explanations. Student responses will be analyzed for an average of what students liked the most and what they felt helped them with motivation, engagement, and learning.

Student work is another way data will be collected and analyzed throughout the study. Samples of the work students do that was the result of choice, variety, relevance, and centers will be chosen from each selection read and analyzed for quality and effort to see if there is a connection between differentiating instruction and student engagement and motivation.

Conclusion

Implementing these practices into an already existing classroom will show an improvement in student motivation and engagement toward content being learned. Students will
begin to see themselves as more active participants in their learning. They will begin to feel more successful and more in control of their learning, in deciding how they do in school, and what they are capable of in the future. The methods of analyzing data will give researchers a starting off point to further decide how to use differentiated instruction to increase student motivation and engagement in the classroom.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

Through the use of descriptive statistics, the research questions for this study were addressed. Motivation, engagement, and learning were observed through the use of a questionnaire, student and teacher reflections, and interviews given to the students. This offers a wide range of results to analyze and discuss as to the effectiveness and importance of using differentiated instruction in a classroom to increase student’s motivation, engagement, and learning capabilities.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire given to students had six questions about the when, where, what, and why of reading. It was set up as a likert-scale questionnaire with answer choices ranging from five to one. An answer of one was no, two was in between a no and maybe, three a maybe, four was in between a maybe and a yes, and five was yes. A total of
seventy-two students filled out the questionnaire with one questionnaire only partially filled out.

**Question One**

The first question asked students if they liked to read: a total of 11% said no; 13% were in between a no and a maybe; 33% said maybe; 29% were in between a maybe and yes; and 14% said yes (Table 1). The mode for question one was 33% saying maybe they like to read.

**Question Two**

The second question asked if the students liked school: four percent said no; 13% were in between no and maybe; 33% said maybe; 32% were in between maybe and yes; and 14% said yes (Table 1). The mode for the second question was again 33% saying maybe they like school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Number of Students Who Like Reading and School</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Reading</td>
<td>Number</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Like School</td>
<td>Number</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Question Three

The third question asked when students read and there were three options to respond to: in school, at home, and when bored. For reading in school, 4% said no they don’t, 11% were in between no and maybe, 29% said maybe, 30% were in between maybe and yes, and 25% said yes. The mode for reading at school was 30% responding between maybe and yes. For reading at home, 1% didn’t answer, 5% said no, 35% were in between no and maybe, 25% said maybe, 18% were in between maybe and yes, and 15% said yes they read at home. The mode for the second part of question three was 25% saying they read at home no to maybe. In answer to reading when bored: 1% didn’t respond; 29% said no; 10% were in between no and maybe; 39% said maybe; 4% were in between maybe and yes; and 17% said yes (Table 2). The mode for the third part of question three was 39% saying they read when they were bored.

Question Four

The fourth question asked what students read and had three different options: books, magazines, and letters. One percent of the students did not respond to reading books; 10% said no they don’t read books; 25% were in between no and maybe; 24% said maybe; 18% were in between maybe and
yes; and 22% said yes. The mode for reading books was 25% saying they were in between no and maybe.

Table 2
When Students Read

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<th>3</th>
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<td>Reading at Home*</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One no response for this question

Eleven percent of the students said they don’t read magazines; 10% were in between no and maybe; 18% said maybe; 18% were in between maybe and yes; and 43% said yes to reading magazines. The mode for reading magazines was 43% saying yes they read some type of magazine. For reading letters 14% said no, 14% were in between no and maybe, 22% said maybe, 24% were in between maybe and yes, and 26% said yes they read letters (Table 3). The mode for reading letters was 26% saying yes.
### Table 3
What Students Read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>2</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Read Letters</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One no response for this question

### Question Five

The fifth question asked students where they read: in their bedroom, in the car, in the living room, and in the classroom. One percent of the students didn’t respond to reading in the bedroom, 14% said no, 8% were in between no and maybe, 19% said maybe, 20% were in between maybe and yes, and 36% said yes. The mode for reading in their bedroom was 36% saying yes. Once again, 1% of the students did not respond to reading in the car, 50% said no, 17% were in between no and maybe, 13% said maybe, 8% were in between maybe and yes, and 11% said yes. The mode for
reading in the car was 50% saying no they do not read in
the car. For reading in the living room, 3% did not
respond, 24% said no, 21% were in between no and maybe, 31%
said maybe, 11% were in between maybe and yes, and 10% said
yes. The mode for reading in the living room was 31%
saying maybe. For reading in the classroom, 1% did not
respond, 11% said no, 10% were in between no and maybe, 18%
said maybe, 25% were in between maybe and yes, and 35% said
yes (Table 4). The mode for reading in the classroom was
35% saying yes they do read in the classroom.

Table 4
Where Students Read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Read in the Car*</td>
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<td>Read in Living Room**</td>
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<td>18</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*One no response for this question
**Three no responses for this question
Question Six

The sixth and last question asked students why they read: parents say they should; it’s homework; it’s an in-class assignment; and they enjoy it. One percent of students did not respond to reading because a parent says so, 50% said no, 14% were in between no and maybe, 14% said maybe, 6% were in between maybe and yes, and 15% said yes. The mode for reading because parents say was 50% saying no. When asked if they read because it’s homework, 7% said no, 8% were in between no and maybe, 21% said maybe, 25% were in between maybe and yes, and 39% said yes. The mode for reading because it’s homework was 39% saying yes. For reading because it’s an in-class assignment 4% said no, 11% were in between no and maybe, 17% said maybe, 24% were in between a maybe and a yes, and 44% said yes. The mode for reading because it’s an in-class assignment was 44% saying yes. For reading because it’s enjoyed, 26% said no, 17% were in between no and maybe, 29% said maybe, 8% were in between maybe and yes, and 19% said yes (Table 5). The mode for reading because it’s enjoyed was 29% saying maybe.

Summary

There are very few instances when students are adamantly against or for when, where, why, or what they
read. It was surprising to see a majority of students don’t mind reading. It was also surprising to see students do read books and that when students are bored there is a possibility they will read a book. Students, on average don’t read unless they are in their room or in a classroom. Reading in places where there were distractions by others was not frequently mentioned as places students enjoy reading in. It was interesting to see that students do not read because parents ask or tell them they need to but instead read because they have a desire to, either because they enjoy it or they want to read for school.

Student Reflections

Week One

At the end of the first week, fifty-two students wrote reflections on the week’s activities. They were asked to reflect on how they felt about what the class did and how it was done. They were asked to explain if they found the ideas of choice and relevance helpful and if it was something they would like to do again. Forty-six percent of the students said they really enjoyed being able to choose whether or not to work in groups or individually and that they enjoyed working with others. Two stories were
Table 5
Why Students Read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><strong>Parents Say</strong>*</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>For Enjoyment</strong></td>
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<td>Number</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One no response for this question

read this week and those stories were divided among the students so only half the students read one story while the other half read the other. They then had to present the main points of their stories to the other class members. Thirty-four percent of the students said they really enjoyed reading the stories this way and the idea of other students presenting stories to them, while 15% said they would have rather read the two stories themselves. Twenty-nine percent of the students said they enjoyed the presentations and the chance to make posters to relay the
important information. There was an issue with the time given to complete assignments, 13% of the students thought the activities from the week would have been more helpful if there was more time to complete them. While there were 6% of the students that thought the activities were hard to understand, 19% said it helped them understand. Thirteen percent really enjoyed tying relevance into the week and found it helpful and 19% liked the way choice was seen, especially in the chance they had to decide what to take notes on, how to take the notes, and what to present on. One student believed it made her feel more independent and in control of her learning.

Week Two

At the end of the second week of the study, sixty students wrote reflections on the story, the activities, and the centers that were in place throughout the week. The students were asked if they liked the centers and the way they were set up, what they liked the best, what they didn’t like, and what they would fix from the week or the activities. Fifty-three percent of the students said they really liked the centers and how they were set up although 28% said it would have been more helpful for them if they had a little extra time, preferably one extra day. Twenty-
five percent said the centers helped them understand the concepts being taught while 3% said it was a little confusing. One percent of the students said they would have found it easier to follow if they had one sheet full of instructions they could follow while 3% said it would have been more effective if there were fewer centers. One percent of the students said the centers really made them think about the story differently than ever before. Fifteen percent of the students said they enjoyed being able to walk from center to center to get the assignments, and 5% said they really found it helpful saying that they could seek out different classmates for help with different activities. There were five different centers for this week and a couple of the centers had a few different options students could pick from to complete the center. Ten percent of the students said they would have liked more options that allowed more creativity while 3% said there were too many options and felt overwhelmed by them all.

Week Three

In the third week students had a choice board of activities to choose from that catered to a variety of intelligences. At the end of the week students wrote a reflection of the different stories, the choice board, and
The activities on the choice board. They responded to what they liked best, what they didn’t like, and what they would like to do again. Forty-eight percent of the students liked the fact that they could choose what they found interesting, easier, or most enjoyable. Twenty-six percent liked the choice boards and the activities and found the experience fun while 15% did not like the choice boards. Eleven percent said they found the activities helpful while 8% said they were not helpful. Fourteen percent believed the choice boards and their activities made the concepts being covered easier to understand while 21% said the activities on the choice board were too hard or too confusing. Students who liked the choice boards and the idea of choosing their activities said it made them feel more in control of their learning and many students said they would like to do certain activities from the choice board again while they would never like to do other activities from the choice board. Twelve percent said they would have liked to have better directions for the choice boards and some of the activities.
Week Four

For the fourth week reflections were not written by students about the stations and the activities from the week.

Week Five

For the fifth week students wrote a Response to Literature essay. They were given one option of a graphic organizer and were able to choose whichever story they liked best or remembered from throughout the school year. Fifty-five students wrote reflections about the experience they had with this essay. Sixty-five percent of the students said they really liked that they were able to write their essay on the story of their choice. Thirty-eight percent said this method was very helpful and they felt they did better because they were more comfortable with the story. At the end of the week students were asked to present their essays and had three different options to choose from. Seven percent of the students said they liked the ability to choose the method of presentation. There were a few students, 9% who did not like the essay or the choosing of the story to write on. Four percent of the students said they liked the essay and the ability to
choose but would have liked more options during the pre-writing stage.

Week Six

During the sixth week, The Diary of Anne Frank was introduced using a variety of intelligences and modalities. There were fifty-four students who wrote a reflection for this week. Ninety percent of the students liked the various methods used to introduce Anne Frank while 6% did not like all that was done. Thirteen percent said they found all that was done and learned as interesting and 35% said they learned new things about Anne Frank and the Holocaust.

Week Seven

There were fifty-one students who wrote a reflection for the seventh week. Students focused on grammar centers this week and were able to work in groups if they wanted. Fourteen percent liked that they were able to work in groups of their choice. Sixteen percent did not think there was enough time to complete one of the centers but felt the other centers had enough time. Forty-three percent liked that centers were used to work on grammar and 19% said the centers helped them understand the grammar concepts being reviewed. Thirty-one percent did not like
the centers, 4% saying they did not like that I was unavailable to the students not working at the teacher center. There were 16% of the students who thought the centers and the work assigned was too difficult for them.

Week Eight

The eighth week of the study centers were completed again, this time using more explicit instruction with step-by-step instructions for each center. Seventy-three students wrote reflections at the end of the week and 70% said they liked the centers a little better than previously. Eleven percent said they didn’t like the centers, making comments that they just don’t like moving around the classroom and doing things on their own. Fourteen percent said the instructions were easier to understand and helped them understand the skills and concepts more while 5% specifically said the centers helped them with the story and the concepts. Fourteen percent also made comments that the directions and instructions were clearer, making the centers more enjoyable and easy to complete. Eighteen percent said the centers were fun and enjoyable. There was still 7% who said they felt they didn’t have enough time to finish the activities at the
centers and 1% who said they would have preferred fewer centers to work on.

Summary

As a whole, students tended to respond positively to centers, choice, relevance, and variety seen in lessons. They liked these activities yet did not like when activities were difficult or challenging or when given a specific time frame for completing the assigned activities. There was a much higher percentage of students liking centers and choice and feeling they were beneficial later in the study after students had a chance to adjust to the different method of completing assignments and after the instruction sheet became clearer and focused with goals and steps to reach completion.

Student Interviews

There were six interviews given to randomly chosen students. More interviews were not given due to time constraints of the teacher. The interviews asked six questions about what was liked, disliked, something they'd like to do again, something they never like to do again, and helpful strategies.
Question One

The first question asked was what was liked most about the lesson. One student said they enjoyed being able to get in front of the class and present what their story was about. The second student they really liked being able to choose partners for the activities being done, while the third student said they liked the idea of choice in the order and pace of completing assignments. The fifth student also liked being able to choose, specifically choosing activities from a list. The fourth student said they liked being able to listen to a story while following along and they enjoyed being able to read more of that particular authors writings. The sixth student said they really enjoyed being able to work in a variety of groups.

Question Two

The second question asked what was least liked about the lesson or week of activities. The first student said they didn’t like only reading one of the two stories for the week, they would have preferred to read them both while the second student didn’t like the idea of presenting to the class the contents of the story read. The third student didn’t like a center focused on the history of a particular author, not seeing how knowing history was
important. The fourth students didn’t like that writing was involved in the centers and the fifth student didn’t like that out of five activities each student had to do two. This student thought it was too much work for the time given to complete. The sixth student didn’t like that the centers required so much work on the individuals’ part.

**Question Three and Four**

The third and fourth questions asked what strategy they would want to do again or never do again. The first student wanted to do a relevance piece again while the first, second, and third students said there wasn’t anything they would never like to do again. The second student liked the RAP strategy used to read through the story and wanted to use that again in class. RAP is where students read a selection, ask questions on how the selection is related to own lives, and put selection into own words. The third and fourth students said they wanted to do the centers again in the future while the fifth student liked the strategies of choice and variety and wanted to see those in future lessons. The sixth student wanted to do Reciprocal Teaching again, specifically asking questions about the story and didn’t ever want to work on theme again.
Question Five

The fifth question asked students what strategy helped them the most throughout the lesson, story, centers, or activities. The first and second students said the idea of relevance and connecting to individual lives was very helpful. The third and fourth students said the idea of centers and being able to work at a comfortable pace and learn a variety of information was very helpful. The fifth student thought choice and variety was most helpful, for an activity choice could be made based on what was liked the most. The sixth student thought all the activities done throughout the week combined were helpful.

Question Six

The last question asked students what strategy was confusing for them and hindered their learning. The first, third, fourth, and sixth students said there was nothing that confused them more than helped them. The second student thought comparing and contrasting characters traits was confusing while the fifth student thought the activities on a choice board given were confusing and not explained thoroughly enough.
Summary

The interview results mirrored the student reflections. Out of the six interviewees, three specifically mentioned how they enjoyed the idea of relevance and would like to include a specific relevance piece again. Four students said the part of the lesson they liked best was the idea of choice in all aspects: choice of pace, choice of story, choice of activities. Three of the students said they really liked the centers and would want to repeat those again in the future.

Teacher Reflections

The teacher wrote a reflection journal throughout the process of the study and made comments on student’s reactions, what they liked or didn’t seem to understand or do well with.

Centers and Choice

Throughout the teacher’s reflections it was observed that choice was something the students really enjoyed. They respond positively and with more enthusiasm when they get to choose the activities to complete or to practice a particular skill or concept. Even though there were a few students who didn’t adapt to the centers, most of the
students seemed to really enjoy the centers as well. The teacher made the observation that as much as students liked the centers and the choice boards, they need to enter into these ideas slowly, adding options, centers, and activities after they have confidence in the process and expectations. The teacher's reflections found that students need a lot of guidance with the centers and choices given to them. Clear examples of expectations are desired by students and a better end product is given when students are given examples to guide them. Students also need very explicit directions for each activity with goals, due date, and steps to completion very evident. Students enjoy the option of working in groups, yet the teacher has noticed that very few of them actually use their group members or classmates as a resource that can help them. It was also observed that if they have questions, they go straight to the teacher instead of asking the various people around them or in their groups.

During the first couple of weeks of the study the teacher made two observations: students had a hard time grasping the idea of centers, and had a hard time choosing and completing assignments individually instead of whole group. The teacher observed students tend to seek out the
teacher’s advice, affirmation, and explanation of an assignment or center before they are able to really get anything accomplished. The students had to be trained how to use the instruction sheet and get a center done on their own. The more students worked with the centers having the explicit instruction sheets, the more comfortable they became doing an assignment on their own. After the first couple of weeks, the teacher noticed the student’s grades were beginning to drop. Assignments and stories were examined with the conclusion reached: students were more interested and motivated in choosing and completing activities and centers when they enjoyed or were connected to the story or stories with which the activities were correlated. This was specifically seen by the teacher when the play The Diary of Anne Frank was introduced and read. To help students raise their grades, more whole class lessons began taking place with more guided and goal-oriented centers and choices.

In week seven the classes began The Diary of Anne Frank and the teacher gave students a step-by-step instruction sheet on what to do for the two centers. This new instruction sheet had a more positive reaction from the students: they were more able to do the activities on their
own. The centers used at the end of week eight were much more successful than those of the previous weeks. Students were on task and engaged in what was required of the centers. Some students needed a little more help with the instruction sheet than other students but were able to work on the activities as soon as it was made clear. The teacher observed students very interested in finding out additional information involving Anne Frank or the Holocaust. They enjoyed reading the story and doing related activities.

Relevance

Students responded very positively to all relevance activities and journals in the various lessons. They had a hard time making the connections the first week, but progress was seen in the following weeks when relevance was used as a strategy. Students were at first only able to make connections when prompted by the teacher. But throughout the week students started making more connections to their own lives, TV shows, movies, and other stories read throughout the school year without teacher prompting. During this time, the teacher also made an extra effort to mention connections and relevance in
introductions to stories, summaries of stories, and explanations of activities and centers.

Response to Literature

During week six, when the students were working on their Responses to Literature, the teacher noticed a very majority of the students fully engaged in the essay. Conversations were taking place around stories; students were talking about events from stories and the variety of themes for specific stories being written on. The teacher was surprised at the engagement level of the students because in the past this essay was always the most difficult for her students to become engaged in and complete.

Summary

Overall the teacher observed a general partiality to the use of centers, variety, choice, and relevance among the students. It was something that, if implemented slowly and clearly, is very effective with getting students more engaged in stories read and activities done within the classroom. It was also been observed that students have a very hard time disciplining themselves and staying on task. There are forty-three students in each of the classes that are participating in the study making it difficult for
individual students and groups of students to get away from other students in order to focus. One of the groups is better at staying focused when they have enjoyed a story and feel competent at the tasks being asked of them.

Being eighth graders, the students really like the idea of choice and variety in the lessons and activities yet still have a hard time choosing activities. However, many have a hard time choosing activities at which they can best express themselves and even excel. Choosing activities that a friend is choosing or an activity they feel would require the least amount of work becomes the most common motivating factor. The teacher observed students are conditioned to having instructions, answers, assignments, and opinions given to them as well as being a reactive participant in the classroom. They are having a difficult time re-adjusting to being more in control of their learning and assignments and being a proactive participant in the classroom.

Conclusion

It was found that students in general are not totally averse to reading in and out of school. They do not hate the idea of reading, being in school, or completing
assignments surrounding stories. It is also seen that students at the eighth grade level are extremely social and like the idea of autonomy and being able to choose things for themselves although they are not fully ready for the responsibility that comes with these choices. This is a positive aspect when thinking about differentiated instruction. It is important students are willing and able to work in groups and seek help from each other in a differentiated classroom. They still very much need guidance and clear, explicit directions as well as the opportunity to slowly adjust to change and different methods of completing assignments when differentiating instruction. Even though motivation and engagement in class activities by some students is seen throughout the variety of activities, strategies, and centers done in this study it is not seen by all of the students, meaning some students are still not experiencing intrinsic motivation or engagement in what's taking place in the classroom. Differentiating instruction has potential as a means for increasing student motivation, engagement, and learning. The teacher must make sure students are prepared and well-instructed expectations and goals for differentiation to have optimal effects.
Education is an ever-changing institution. With every year a new set of students enter a classroom. They interact in a new way; they have different strengths, weaknesses, and interests; and they learn at different rates than the students from the previous year. As the students change, so too must the teacher. Experience and continuing education influence the way teaching happens for various educators. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind and the push for districts and schools to have students reach proficiency, educators are becoming more and more aware of the diversity of students and their learning. Many educators believe that differentiated instruction is the way to achieve the goal of proficiency for all students. Differentiated instruction is an approach in teaching that allows students an opportunity for motivation, engagement, and success in learning. Differentiated instruction is teaching and presenting information in a way all students - no matter how diverse in prior knowledge, interests, cultural background, and language proficiency - can master a concept, reach a goal,
and become proficient in the content being taught. There is an assortment of ways to differentiate instruction and limiting those options is limiting the students in the classroom. This study began to see differentiated instruction and the effects it can have on students in their motivation, engagement, and learning.

Conceptual Framework

For this study, four ways of differentiation were practiced: choice, variety, relevance, and centers. This study started with a look at a group of eighth grade students and their reading habits. Where, when, why, and what students read most often was analyzed through a self-assessment questionnaire to determine engagement and motivation for reading in and out of school. Reflections were also evaluated on a weekly basis throughout the study to monitor the various aspects of differentiated instruction used. Students were asked to comment on the week and the various activities they enjoyed, found helpful, and would like to do again. Students were given many different choice options in the weekly lessons, as well as occasional journal writes and prompts that allowed students to relate the story and concepts to their personal
lives and what they already knew. Students worked in centers on a regular basis, each center focusing on a different aspect of the story or concept taught through the story. Instruction sheets were provided for the various centers, and there was often choice within a center on specific activities to be completed. Variety in assignments and the multiple intelligences and interests they catered to was attempted each week, sometimes more successfully than other times.

The school this study took place in is committed to using, with fidelity, a particular language arts textbook and its supporting ancillaries. There is no room for leeway and very little room for creativity; therefore, students are not familiar with a great deal of variety in lessons and activities or much choice in the assignments done that surround a story. Group work is encouraged at times and takes place in classrooms but is a very structured, teacher-directed activity.

Research Questions

This study considered four different research questions. Through the use of differentiated instruction in the classroom and student reflections on activities
completed throughout the lessons, insights were gained about the research questions. There were some limitations to the study which led to some insufficient answers to a few of the questions.

**Question One**

Differentiated instruction is a term being used more frequently in schools today, yet has never really been defined and explained in a method that makes it understandable and usable for teachers. The first research question addressed this and asked what differentiated instruction really was. Through this study it was learned that differentiated instruction is not a strategy that teachers can pull out whenever they need something new in the classroom or when they feel a student isn’t learning and needs something different. Differentiation is a constant way of thinking and learning within the classroom that allows all students to learn content at the readiness level they are allows students to learn content at individual readiness levels. It is a way of thinking and learning in the classroom that puts the focus on the students, their strengths, their interests, and their specific way of learning. Differentiation takes place for and with all students not just a select few. Teachers can
differentiate for content, process, product, environment, and affect. They can differentiate using multiple intelligences, learning styles, interests, prior knowledge, and students cultures. It allows all students to see what is being taught in a manner that makes sense to them as individuals.

The teacher becomes a facilitator in the classroom, giving students more control over what reading material is used to learn content, what activities are done to process and practice skills and concepts, and how to disseminate and demonstrate what they have learned. Differentiated instruction is delivering pedagogical practices to the whole class, in small groups, or individually, depending on what the students need. It is, as a teacher, being aware of when students are ready for autonomy and independence and when they need more teacher-directed learning. It is having available and allowing students to participate in different activities based on their readiness level, their intelligence, and their interests. There is no one way to make teaching and learning differentiated, it is open to interpretation as long as students are the main focus and goals are set and reached by every single student in the classroom. Differentiated instruction is an adjustment for
teachers and especially students. It will also take time to differentiate: time learning how to make it unique and effective for the teacher and students within the classroom.

**Question Two**

The second research question asked what is required of a teacher who differentiates within a classroom. This study has shown there is definitely a great deal of work and effort required by teachers who decide to differentiate instruction in their classrooms. Because research suggests each individual is unique, teachers who differentiate need to use a variety of informal and formal assessments as well as surveys to determine their student’s reading and readiness levels, interests, backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses when it comes to learning. Teachers need to be creative using a variety of activities, intelligences, and styles within a lesson or unit, making sure these are not too repetitive and that each student’s intelligence and interests are accommodated throughout a unit. Teachers who differentiate need goals for each activity and should be able to clearly define and explain those goals. They need to be able to teach students to write out and explain their
own goals for particular assignments and activities as well.

Because of the traditional, teacher-directed experiences students were used to, they had a difficult time adjusting to the concept and expectations of differentiated instruction, especially centers. The level of independence, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation needed for centers and choice to be effective is higher than the students in this study were accustomed to having towards reading and subsequent activities. This led to students being unable to quickly adapt to the use of centers in the classroom, to grasp the necessity for self-discipline in completing assignments, and to choose activities they were interested in and could complete on their own. For this not to happen with students, teachers need to slowly add centers making sure students understand work is to be completed without direct teacher involvement. Teachers need to emphasize to students, in oral and written form, the specific goals of assignments and centers and the specific way the activities will be graded. At the middle school level students believe they are independent and capable of doing things on their own; however, in reality they need very explicit guidelines and explanations.
In this study, lesson and unit preparations took more time with differentiated instruction than lesson and unit preparations without differentiated instruction. Teachers will need to spend time putting assignments and centers together always using a variety of modalities and activities. They will have to occasionally rearrange the classroom to differentiate for student’s learning styles and the set-up of centers. Energy putting the centers and choices together, setting the classroom up efficiently and effectively, and prepping students for differentiated instruction was also more intensive than lessons without differentiation. Once students understood the concepts and expectations, felt competent in their abilities and understandings, and capable of doing the assignments and activities, less was required of the teacher while in the classroom. The teacher became a facilitator instead of the dictator, students doing all the work. It was essential for student understanding and success that all assignments, activities, and centers were tied back to the specific standards and goals that had been set out and discussed by the class. It was also important for students to know that all assignments, no matter how different, were to be graded
equally, using the same rubric, the same grading scale, and worth the same number of possible points.

**Question Three**

The third research question asked if differentiated instruction truly helps and motivates a wide range of students. The limitations of this study, specifically the short amount of time it was to take place in, may have had an impact on the building of motivation in students to become more engaged and interested in learning and the activities scheduled in the classroom. Class size also had an impact on the ability to connect differentiation using centers and the level of helpfulness and motivation it had for students. Class size had an impact in really making gains in motivation and engagement through the use of differentiation. With classes as large as forty-four, many students found it difficult to concentrate on the activities for each center, for any type of student-centered activity created loud levels of noise. The students who were already intrinsically motivated continued to do well on activities and with differentiated instruction. Students who had difficulty in the past with motivation were seen to participate more when they were given minimal choices, had those choices fully and
explicitly explained, were given examples of what was expected, and found a choice interesting, fun, and attainable. A decrease in motivation and engagement and an increase in off-task behavior when centers were attempted for consecutive days were also found throughout this study. When students felt they had multiple days and plenty of time to complete an activity, they would more easily go off task and socialize instead of work.

Overall engagement and motivation in learning and assignments did not increase in students until the instruction sheets that went with centers and activities were made to be explicit, goal-oriented, and explanatory in a step-by-step format. When students felt they truly understood an assignment, had enough time to complete the assignment, were competent in completing the assignment, had the goal set for them, and saw a majority of other students focused and on-task, motivation and engagement in students was high. When these things were not in place, motivation and engagement were much lower. Because it took the teacher the first couple of weeks to figure out what caused the decrease in motivation and helpfulness, the study was unable to really monitor a steady increase in motivation among students who experienced differentiated
instruction. Once the instruction sheet became more explanatory, explicit, and goal-oriented, student’s motivation and engagement were observed to gradually increase.

It was also noticed that students were so accustomed to question-answer type activities that they had a difficult time transitioning into a method that required them to take information, content, and skills and put it into an activity that needed them to think outside their comfort level. Differentiation and using multiple intelligences and learning styles within activities and lessons required the teacher to take students away from the question-answer method, asking them to transfer knowledge and think critically. Because students were not used to working and thinking in this fashion, they had difficulty seeing themselves competent and capable of achieving success with these differentiated activities. It took students a couple of weeks to begin to see themselves capable enough to complete activities this way. This made motivation and engagement weak at the start of the study. It slowly began to rise once students started to get comfortable with differentiated instruction and the activities from which they were being.
Question Four

The fourth research question asked how important motivation and student engagement are to the success of differentiation within a classroom. It was found that motivation and engagement have a huge impact on the success of differentiated instruction. When a concept was not explained with enough detail and students were asked to complete activities that had not been explicit enough in directions, they did not feel they knew or understood enough to complete the activity (ies) with success. When this was the case, student motivation for actually starting the activity and doing their best was minimal. With no motivation, engagement was seen to be lacking. When engagement was lacking, continued motivation also decreased. Differentiation will not help students if they are not motivated and engaged in the activities. In the first few weeks of the study, centers and activities were not explained thoroughly and with enough detail; consequently, optimal time was not spent on reading and comprehending stories. This led to very low motivation for student engagement in centers and activities. They had a hard time choosing which activities to complete and then a
much harder time actually completing the activities using the detail and independence being asked of them.

Directions, time spent, and activities were changed after the teacher picked up on this decrease in motivation and student engagement. This change, along with beginning a more interesting story, proved to increase motivation and engagement in students. They were more excited about reading and completing the centers as well as more confident in what they were being asked to do and how to accomplish their assigned task.

Significance of the Study

The idea of differentiated instruction and how it can be helpful in teaching has been discussed in many different studies and articles. This study is slightly different and significant as it goes through the process of what it takes to differentiate a particular classroom and a lesson using certain aspects of differentiation. It shows the details that are needed to allow differentiation within a classroom to have the impact and effect on student's motivation, engagement, and learning that is desired by teachers and schools. This study shows the importance of slowly taking students away from the traditional, teacher-directed lesson
that is familiar to them and bringing them to the more student-centered idea of differentiated instruction. This study showed that when students are not used to thinking independently and differentiation is desired, the teacher needs to make herself available to slowly guide students along until they become able to think on their own, understand and complete assignments without the teacher being directly involved. This study was a first step at understanding the impact of differentiated instruction on student’s motivation, engagement and learning. It also was significant in that it gave a small picture of what is required from the teacher in order to differentiate instruction as well as show the potential that differentiated instruction has on student motivation and engagement.

Recommendations

This study has made it clear that future research is needed on the relationship between differentiated instruction and student motivation and engagement and other implications of differentiated instruction on students. It is also suggested that more research take place on the logistical aspect of differentiating secondary level
classrooms. Does class size have an impact on the effectiveness of differentiated instruction? Does the high level of social need in adolescents affect the success of differentiated instruction in classrooms? Since differentiating instruction is becoming a term educators are familiar with, what kind of professional development or training is needed to help teachers understand what differentiation is and how to use differentiation effectively?

Conclusions

Although there is much to still learn and understand about differentiated instruction, much has been learned about the subject - what it is, what it entails, and how to make a classroom differentiated so all students can learn and master content. Differentiation is not a new idea but an old way of teaching and learning that was used in the days of the one-room schoolhouse. It has the potential for being an effective way to help an increasingly diverse population reach proficiency in all content areas. Differentiation is a way of thinking about teaching and learning that takes time and energy but is effective and worthwhile for students. Teachers are in the
profession of teaching to help students, not just bright and already proficient students, but all students, no matter where they are or what their backgrounds are. Differentiated instruction is a way to help teachers more successfully teach students and a way for students to more successfully learn content in school.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER
Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently writing a thesis on motivation and what teachers can do in the classroom to increase student motivation, involvement, and learning. I will be using my current students to see if using differentiated instruction will increase the motivation and involvement of students. To differentiate instruction is to use a variety of readings, instructional strategies, assignment options, and methods of assessing students when teaching content. The content being taught during this study will not be different from the other 8th grade classrooms at Nellie Coffman.

I will be using a variety of different activities and motivation strategies in the lessons to complement this regular content. All students will have the same overall goal to reach. Your children will be going through the variety of options, choosing assignments they feel confident in, and working at a pace that is comfortable to them. I will be more a facilitator in the classroom, guiding them through the activities and assignments chosen to complete to reach the designated goal.

All work and analysis done during this study will be held confidential. At the end of the study the results will be available for you if you wish to see it. Please let me know if you are interested in seeing those results.

I will keep you updated on the variety of strategies and activities we do in the classroom through the classroom website (emfandino@googlepages.com/home). If you have any questions or comments please email me or call me and I will gladly discuss them with you and answer any questions you may have. If you do not want your student
participating in this study please let me know through a letter, a phone call, or a face-to-face conference. There will be no consequence to your child or his/her learning if you choose to exclude them from this study.

Emily Fandino

8th Grade English Language Arts

Nellie Coffman Middle School

efandino@psusd.us

760-770-8617
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE
For each of the following statements, circle the number that best matches your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you like to read?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like school?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you read?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you’re bored</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you read?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do you read?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your bedroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the car</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your living room</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you read?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent says</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class assignment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You enjoy it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the following space to describe what you remember about learning how to read.
APPENDIX C

CENTER INSTRUCTION SHEET
Center

Standard:

What my goal is:

What I'm learning:

What I'm doing:

Example:

Thoughts: Circle the statement below that summarizes the understanding you have for

I understand    I kind of understand    I need more practice

Write a brief reflection on... What did you like or dislike about it? What would have made it more enjoyable, more engaging, and easier for learning?
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM
April 18, 2008

Ms. Emily Fandino
c/o: Professor Kimberly Harnett-Edwards
Department of Education
California State University
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Ms. Fandino:

Your application to use human subjects, titled, “The Importance of Differentiated Instruction to Student Involvement, Motivation, and Learning” has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Your informed consent document is attached. This consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following requirements: You are required to notify the IRB of the following: 1) submit a protocol change form if any substantive changes (no matter how minor) are made in your research prospectus/protocol, 2) if any unanticipated/ adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research, and 3) when your project has ended by emailing the IRB Coordinator. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu.

Your project is approved for one year from the letter approval date listed above. If your project lasts longer than one year, the investigator/researcher is required to notify the IRB by email or correspondence of Notice of Project Ending or submit a Request for Renewal at the end of your approval end date. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, IRB Coordinator. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillespie@csusb.edu. Please include your application identification number (above) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Sharon Ward, Ph.D., Chair
Institutional Review Board

SW/mg

cc: Professor Kimberly Harnett-Edwards, Department of Education
REFERENCES


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