Differentiation of Assignments in Higher Education: A SoTL Project

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DIFFERENTIATION OF ASSIGNMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SoTL PROJECT

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WHAT IS DIFFERENTIATION?

To differentiate instruction is to recognize, and approach teaching and learning for, students’ varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, and interests, and to react responsively. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student’s growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is, and assisting in the learning process (Hall, 2002).
Differentiation is a framework of instruction and assessment that provides students with multiple avenues for taking in and processing information, and demonstrating what they have learned (Tomlinson, 1999; Dodge, 2005).
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION (RtI)

- both a strategy & one part in a process
- schools identify students at risk
- monitor student progress
- provide evidence-based interventions
- adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions
- and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities.

(http://nichcy.org/schools-administrators/rti)
The Problem and the Participants

• undergraduate students who are in elementary ed, special ed, and secondary ed;

• graduate students who are classroom teachers;

• adult ed students who are used to a different, accelerated framework of instruction;

• Target Language Experts who are English Language Learners and graduate students
THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Will there be a difference in the quality and quantity of student course evaluations after instruction of the course has been differentiated?

2. How will the themes of pre-differentiation students’ comments vary from those of post-differentiation students?
THE TRADITIONAL WAY…

- Same specific assignments for all
- Same specific due dates for all
- Little-to-no choice for students re: how to demonstrate knowledge
- Few opportunities for me to see what engages each student
Spring 2011 Assignments

- Grading Chart—keep track!
- Reading Records 50
- Storytelling 25
- Book Talk 40
- Theme Basket 40
- Children’s Literature
- at the Movies 30
- Midterm 50
- Professionalism 25

523 students: your score is out of 300, not 260! See me to plan your graduate project!! (40)
## Spring 2011 Student Comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Professor Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I really liked the theme book project.</td>
<td>I will be using the majority of my work in my classroom in the future.</td>
<td>She is knowledgeable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The book talks were great too because it exposed me to a lot of literature in a short amount of time.</td>
<td>Yes, I can learn much from this class.</td>
<td>The professor was very enthusiastic about the class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The professor assigned a lot of assignment. I felt like I was assigned too many books to read for this class.</td>
<td>Great class.</td>
<td>Patty is very passionate about what she teaches and she passed on her love for literature to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The materials and assignments are really perfect</td>
<td>I truly learned a lot from Patty</td>
<td>I want to say Thank you to the instructor. She is really nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Patty is great.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Excellent and engaging.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The class was well taught and I felt very comfortable participating in class.

Book was very helpful and had lost of information

Maybe mix it up a little bit when exploring the books. There are so many. most of them are great but sometimes its a lot all at once.

and enjoyed being in her class every week.
THE SOLUTION: DIFFERENTIATED ASSIGNMENTS!

Students choose:
- Which assignments to complete
- Whether or not they want to present
- When they wish to complete
THE “MENU”

EDUC 4130/5230 ASSIGNMENTS SUMMER 2011

This summer we’re trying something new! In this table, you see all the possible assignments, along with their possible point values. The assignment descriptions are listed in alphabetical order. By our next class meeting, you are to have created a contract that indicates which assignment in each of the levels you plan to complete. You cannot complete any assignment more than once, and your total must equal a possible 100 points for undergraduates, 130 or more for graduates. Along with these assignments, there will also be points for professionalism (which includes participation, preparation, & attendance) and the final exam.

- Reading Records - 40 pts.
- Author/Illustrator Study-40 pts.
- Literature-Based Lesson & Research - 40 pts.
- Theme Basket—30 pts.
- Content Area Text Set-30 pts.
- Listening Center- 30 pts.
- Story Telling- 20 pts.
- Poem Sharing-20 pts.
- Book Talk—20 points
- Book to Movie —10 points
- Website Evaluation-10 pts.
- Interview two children-10 pts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>I loved this class!</th>
<th>Having options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>well worth the price</td>
<td>I loved this course!</td>
<td>it was nice to have options about assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for me. the book was one of the most useful books i've used and it</td>
<td>Loved this class!</td>
<td>I was very grateful for how the instructor assigned work. We chose our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is one that i will be keeping to utilize in my classroom.</td>
<td></td>
<td>projects and the due dates. This helped me coordinate with other classes and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pick assignments that challenged and interested me in areas i could use in my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>own classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all was eye-opening &amp; an enormous resource</td>
<td>I loved this class!</td>
<td>I appreciated the fact that this was NOT a class of jumping through silly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been able to use more of the books suggested as well as the</td>
<td></td>
<td>hoops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>text in my classes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>My favorite was the delegation of the assignments. Nice job!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I learned a lot that will help me in the future.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I know way more about the subject than before I took this course.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you did great instructing the class. this was one of the classes i was sad to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>see end. i learned so much from</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PR used a variety of assmts we could use in our classrooms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>knowledgeable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR was very enthusiastic about the course, content, &amp; teaching profession.</td>
<td>about the course, content, &amp; teaching profession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she even commented/complimented this class because she stated that due to something she learned from us, she would be making changes to how she would teach this class in the future.</td>
<td>this instructor really knows her subject matter.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This instructor was the first to exhibit the teaching method of how sincerity and excitement can truly make a difference to the desire to be in class and the desire to learn.</td>
<td>She obviously has a great deal of experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Rieman was extremely enthusiastic and this instructor knows her stuff and I felt I got a lot out of this class.</td>
<td>The instructor was knowledgable and helpful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor was knowledgable and helpful.</td>
<td>She returned emails quickly and gave great suggestions when I got stuck on assignments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor was very knowledgable</td>
<td>Instructor was very knowledgable and helpful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She knows alot about literature and being able to pick out books for children and she was able to give us a better understanding of how to do that as well.</td>
<td>She returned emails quickly and gave great suggestions when I got stuck on assignments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was evaluated thoughtfully &amp; given add'l constructive criticism.</td>
<td>I was evaluated thoughtfully &amp; given add'l constructive criticism.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was feedback in class regarding how to run it that I think the instructor listened to and will employ in the future. Despite the obstacles (Blackboard & classroom not being unlocked) this class was very interesting.

I appreciated the instructor’s flexibility in allowing us to be individuals with our teaching styles and methods as well as the constructive advice and comments that were never negative or empty words but were helpful and sincere. It opened my eyes to a ton of new literature and has gotten me so much more excited about teaching!

The honest enthusiasm the instructor displayed was noted every class period and was one of the most honest I feel I have been exposed to since being a student at Carthage. It opened my eyes to a ton of new literature and has gotten me so much more excited about teaching!

The in class activities were fun as well and I enjoyed them because they were something that I would use with students in my own classroom.

Preparation

P always prepared & organized

She was very prepared and told us at the beginning of class what we were covering so we knew exactly what to expect.

Class time was used well in my opinion learning about the different types of literature and getting introduced to new books.

. instead this was a class that challenged intellectually and provided useful and practical applications that will truthfully be copied in my future!!

the whole class set up and atmosphere was great.

. i really enjoyed and learned alot from this class. im sad to see its over

Thank you for making this course so enjoyable!

. I would gladly sign up for classes under this professor in the future!!
CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

- Spring 2011 themes
- Summer 2011 themes
- Higher volume of comments in Summer 2011
- Why I didn’t compare numerical ratings
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- How do the numerical ratings in an undifferentiated course compare to those of a differentiated course?
- How do the volume and tone of the comments in an undifferentiated course compare to those of a differentiated course?
Questions or Comments?
REFERENCES


