

Differentiating Instruction in an Inclusive Choral Setting of a 6th Grade Middle School Music Class

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Best practice teaching and learning emanates from active student engagement, which in turn, springs from a focused understanding of the needs of each child. Inclusive classrooms are shaping motivated, confident, and enthusiastic learners in today's classrooms by means of differentiated instruction.

No longer just limited to the regular classroom, differentiated instruction (DI) is rapidly being applied in the "special subjects" (i.e. Art, Music, PE) classes as well. This paper describes just such a special 6th grade middle school Music class in a suburban NYS public school. The teacher demonstrated how the focus was on student needs, by differentiating the curricular content, process, and products of the music instruction based on the varying readiness, interest, and learning styles of her music students.

Review of Literature

According to the mission statement of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) music education should encourage music-making (Mahlmann, 2003). Sounding a more somber tone, Hill (2003) has identified three student groups whose needs music teachers are largely not reaching. These middle and high school students bring 1. cultural diversity, 2. special needs, and 3. no further involvement in elective music courses. Additionally, Hill (*ibid*) emphasizes that few music teachers are invited members of Individual Education Plan (IEP) team meetings.

The fundamental concept driving differentiated instruction, as stated by Tomlinson (1995) is that students needs must first be identified,

and then met, by enabling them to grasp essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions at their own pace (readiness), according to their own preferences (interest) and in the sensory mode (learning style) which most effectively characterizes their individual nature. Teachers must be well acquainted with inclusion and the differentiated model, as well as key strategies for implementation. McAdamis (2000) points out that transitioning to an inclusive model will likely be slow and difficult. Ritter (1999) adds that learning effective strategies for use with the culturally diverse and special needs of some students is a tipping point for the successful launching of a differentiated curriculum in an inclusive classroom.

Stanford (2003) has stated that strategies and curriculum adaptation are not enough to register successful student achievement. Student assessment is also needed, for pre/post benchmarking of knowledge/skill development, but also as an inventory of student interests.

Gardner's (2001, 1983) theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) is a good way of conceptualizing the range of predispositions that children bring to the learning task. Nolan (2003) observes that Gardner's MI theory posits eight distinguishable intelligences, thus demanding that teachers "adjust their instructional strategies in order to meet students' individual needs." More recently, Gardner (1997) has identified the eight as: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. A ninth intelligence that Gardner is not yet satisfied with is an existential intelligence. Gardner makes the point that each individual possesses all eight of these intelligences in

various degrees. Delisle (2001), however, believes that the Gardner theory essentially displaces the impetus for districts to provide programs for gifted by making all students gifted. Thomas (1990) believes that students with high ability in music-making are likely to benefit from recent developments in technology, electronics, and the internet. These and other strategies were employed in the study to be described, applying the following research hypothesis:

middle school students are able to be more actively engaged when a teacher discovers what their individual needs and concerns are, by investigating students' individual levels of readiness, interest, and learning style.

Method

Participants

Thirty-one sixth grade NYS public middle school students were distributed as 9 boys and 22 girls. Of the thirty-one students, 12 were Caucasian, 9 African-American, 7 Hispanic, and 3 Pacific Rim. Student program eligibilities ranged from 16 in the Regular Class, to 7 in a special education (SPED) class. Six students were in an English Language Learner (ELL) class and 2 students were in a Gifted class. **Table 1** presents the distribution of 31 students in 3 categories.

Data Collection (Quantitative)

Survey Data

Reflecting on the cultural diversity of the teacher's class, and the range of preferred types of music, it was determined

that an instrument that enabled free selection of choice of music would satisfy the purpose of this research, which was to enhance the level of engagement for middle school students in their music class. Additionally, data was collected which identified the process by which students would prefer to demonstrate mastery of targeted goals associated with the course curriculum. An interest inventory was developed to assess those topics that students identified as engaging to them, as well as a process most likely to engage student interest in completion of an authentic product.

Observational Data

One of the free-choice stations that the teacher provided in the music room, for students who had completed their work, was a CD player with headset.

At the station there were 5 CDs, each featuring a different type of music. The five types were: pop, hip hop, classical, country & western, & big band. A sign up (data collection) sheet was provided. The procedure required that students choosing to access the CD player must write their name, choice of CD, date, and time when used. The data thus provided, yielded information regarding the freely-chosen musical interest of those students (a majority, but not all) who accessed that station.

Instrument

To determine students' individual interests, the 20-item musical interest inventory was developed and administered during an entire

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF 6TH GR. MUSIC STUDENTS IN 3 CATEGORIES

| Categories | Distribution within categories | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Gender | Boys 9 | Girls 22 | | |
| Ethnicity | Cauc. 12 | Af-Amer 9 | Hispanic 7 | Pacific 3 |
| Eligibility | Regular class 16 | SPED 7 | ELL 6 | Gifted 2 |

class period of 45 minutes. This survey research invited students to identify their most and least favorite activity as well as their most and least favorite kind of music e.g. pop, hip hop, classical, country & western, etc. The survey peaked students' interest to the point of their asking if they could keep it and work on it for homework. The Music Inventory is provided in the APPENDIX section of this paper.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF ACTION RESEARCH DATA

The interest inventory combined with teacher observation produced the desired outcome of determining the areas and levels of interest regarding the broad topic of schooling, and the narrower topic of music. Based on these findings, the teacher developed a tiered approach to the differentiation of the curriculum content, the process by which it was delivered, and the project-based assessments that yielded

the products of instruction.

Inventory results indicated that the students' interests sorted into the 4 following project types and their frequencies: computer-8, poster-14, solo-6, and research paper-3. Project types, their frequencies and per cent are tabulated in TABLE 2 and graphically displayed in FIGURE 1.

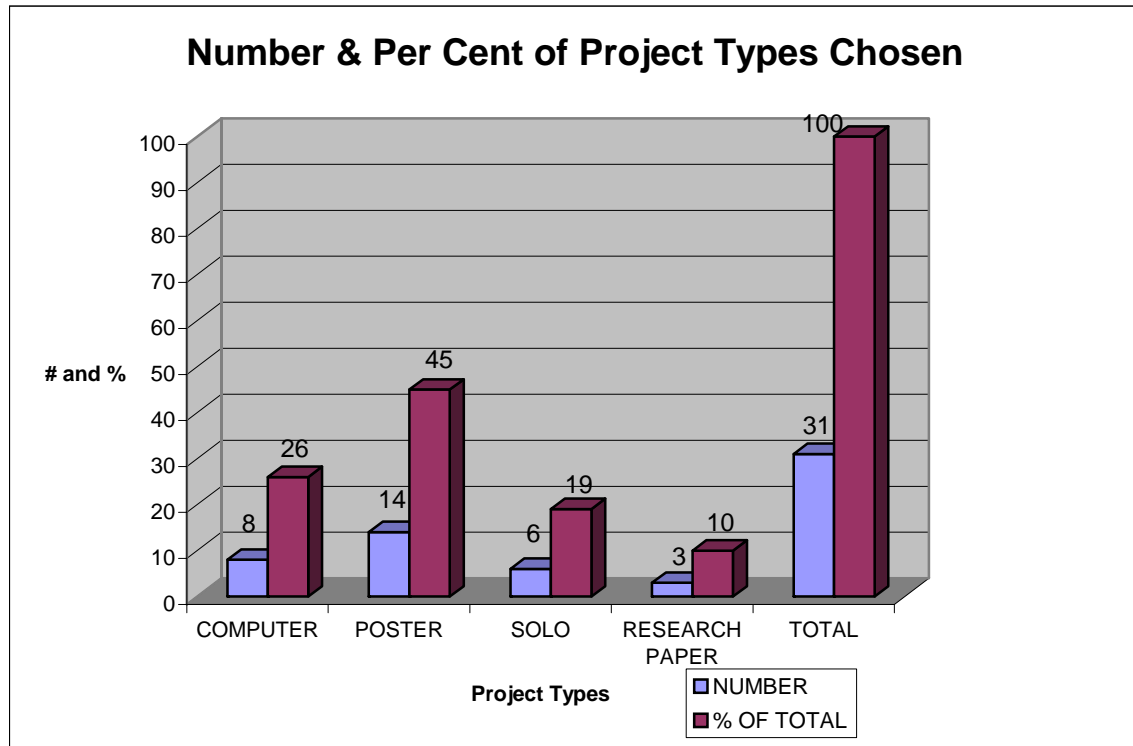
Discussion of Student Engagement

At the class following students' completion of the interest inventory, the 8 students who had chosen the computer project were divided into 2 equal groups of 4. The 14 "poster" students were arranged in 2 groups of 5 and 1 group of 4. The 6 "solo" students were divided into 2 equal groups. The 3 "research paper" students were their own group. The task of each group was to determine a range of within-group choices. This process was observed to stimulate a great deal of enthusiasm, which subsequently developed into a healthy measure of competition.

TABLE 2. 4 TYPES OF PROJECT CHOSEN (BY # AND %)

| PROJECTS | NUMBER | % OF TOTAL |
|----------------|--------|------------|
| COMPUTER | 8 | 26 |
| POSTER | 14 | 45 |
| SOLO | 6 | 19 |
| RESEARCH PAPER | 3 | 10 |
| TOTAL | 31 | 100 |

FIGURE 1



CONCLUSIONS

All of the 31 students were actively and enthusiastically engaged in the class project of their (freely selected) choice. When the teacher inquired of the students what had made such an impressive difference in their approach to the projects, all enthusiastically stated that the opportunity to express their preferred means of demonstrating their newly acquired knowledge and skills was the difference that made a difference. Their excitement and task commitment was the measure of substantial movement toward a proactive disposition toward all elements of the chorus ensemble.

Implications for Future Research

Music instruction can be a powerful source of motivation for teachers in all subject areas. Particularly with middle school students, music is an important part of their lives. The differentiation of the music curriculum in tiered lessons and activities of interest to the students can be a powerful strategy, particularly when those students are surveyed for their input on how they prefer to demonstrate their knowledge acquisition and skill mastery. Does the differentiated approach that spelled success for this middle school music class, have similar potential for middle school Art classes? For Physical Education (PE) classes? Can similar results be obtained for high school Art, Music, and PE? Do the same, or different variables control for gifted or cognitively impaired students? Can the same light on a child's face when (s)he is singing, be obtained when differentially engaged in any of the above-mentioned classes? Truth-seeking investigators have much fertile ground for further research.

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APPENDIX

Music Survey

Name:
Date:

1. Think of at least three words to describe yourself.
2. In Chorus, what is your favorite activity? (Certain jobs, computer, journals, performing, learning new songs...)
3. What is your least favorite activity?
4. Do you enjoy being called on by your teachers?
5. Describe your favorite kinds of music (Pop, Hip Hop, Classical...)
6. Name your favorite musicians/performers/singers/rappers.
7. On a scale of 1-10 how much do you

enjoy singing in chorus? 1=not at all, 5= it's OK, 10= it's my favorite period (besides lunch!).

8. How much do you enjoy singing outside of chorus? And where else do you sing? Use the scale above to rate.

9. If given the opportunity, what would you like to learn about (musically) that Mrs. Lattimer has not discussed this school year? (reading music, composers, other cultures' music...).

10. How do think you would feel if you auditioned for a show like American Idol? (nervous, happy, excited, scared) Would you even consider auditioning?

11. What would each judge say?
"Nice!" "You're the next American Idol!"
"Needs some work."

12. How do think you would feel if you were to perform for a music judge at NYSSMA?

13. How would the judge rate you on the scale of 1-8? 1=very poor, 8=outstanding.

- a. Which category would you be the best in?
- b. Which would you need the most work?

- Expression
- Tone Quality
- Pitch (being in tune)
- Note reading
- Rhythm
- Diction (how the words flow)
- Accuracy
- Breath support

14. Would you enjoy learning to dance?

15. Would you or do you enjoy being an

athlete, if so what kind of sport?

16. Would you enjoy learning to play a musical instrument? If so which one?

17. What careers interest you?

18. In ten years, what do think you will be doing?

19. Suppose you were involved in a play, which part would you most enjoy.

- Director
- Sound or Lights technician
- Stage crewperson
- Lead actor/actress
- Actor/actress- not the lead.
- Set Designer
- House manager/ Advertising

20. Describe something about yourself that makes you really proud.

Farley Middle School
RUBRIC: *Music Ace- 6 lessons and games*



Name: _____ Teacher: _____

Date : _____ Title of Work: _____

| | Criteria | | | | Points |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Pre-progress Report | student did not turn in pre-progress report at all | student turned it in during the project | | student turned in pre-progress report | ___ |
| Completion | student did not complete the activity | student completed part of the activity | | Student completed all activities and games | ___ |
| Progress Report Turned In | report not turned in | report turned in late | | report turned in on time | ___ |
| | | | | | ___ |
| | | | | | ___ |
| | | | | Total----> | ___ |

Teacher Comments:

Farley Middle School
RUBRIC: Poster Project



Name: _____ Teacher: _____

Date : _____ Title of Work: _____

| | Criteria | | | | Points |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Written info: dates, important places and people | 1-2 pieces of info | 3-4 pieces of info | 5-6 pieces of info | 7-8 pieces of info | _____ |
| Artwork: hand drawn, clippings, photos | no artwork | poorly prepared artwork | artwork well displayed | artwork outstanding, placed well and well chosen | _____ |
| Accuracy | info was not accurate | info was partially accurate | info was accurate but minimal | info was completely accurate | _____ |
| Quality | Poster was sloppily made | poster was completed | poster was well made | poster was well designed and creative | _____ |
| Student's presentation | student just held poster | student read poster | student read poster and gave additional info | student read poster, gave info, and answered questions about his work | _____ |
| | | | | Total----> | _____ |

Teacher Comments:

Farley Middle School RUBRIC: Solo Project



Name: _____ Teacher: _____

Date : _____ Title of Work: _____

| | Criteria | | | | Points |
|---------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Presentation | student appears unprepared | student appears slightly prepared | student appears prepared | student appears confident and prepared | _____ |
| Vocal quality | sings in a whisper | very breathy or nasal and harsh | good tone | very clear with breath support | _____ |
| Accuracy | notes/rhythm were not accurate | notes/rhythm were sometimes accurate | notes/rhythm were mostly accurate | notes/rhythm were always accurate | _____ |
| Memorization | not memorized | somewhat memorized, still needs words | 1-2 memory slips | solidly memorized | _____ |
| Expressive quality | little or no expression of the songs message | some expression | expressive in most parts | extremely expressive, student knows the "story" he/she is telling | _____ |
| | | | | Total----> | _____ |

Teacher: _____

Chorus Project

You may choose one activity to complete and present (if appropriate) in place of your journal grade (25%) for fourth quarter.

- 1. Music Ace Project-** Complete 6 new lessons and games, print out progress and turn in.
- 2. Poster-** Research a favorite musician. Create a poster that details his/her life. Include visuals, dates and facts. Check spelling. Present to class.
- 3. Solo performance-** Prepare a song/rap and perform it for the class. It needs to be memorized. Clarity and diction will be graded.
- 4. Research paper-** Research the musical *Hairspray* or *Ragtime*. Write a 1-2 page summary and present your findings to the class.

All projects must be completed by May 28th.

Please fill in a turn in to your teacher at the end of class.

I choose project # _____

I will work very hard to complete this project. I realize that it is worth 25% of my fourth quarter grade _____.