

Heacox Reflection

After reading *Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom* by D. Heacox (2002), I found several enlightening concepts to bring forth in my current and future educational career. I have had the opportunity to attend many workshops and practice multiple ways as a teacher to differentiate. The Heacox book provided plenty of reinforcement of my current practices as well as providing some new ideas (even resurrected some old ideas) to reflect on, and implement new and different ways to differentiate.

The first idea that I found fascinating was revisiting Bloom's Taxonomy. As an undergrad, I obviously have seen this idea, worked with it, probably even wrote a paper about it, but never thought about it again until now. Looking at the six levels of thinking known as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation and synthesis, I found a lot of value in these ideas as a veteran teacher. I know that I naturally use these concepts and maybe even have developed a different name for them (growth mindset, understanding, data interpreted), but to immerse myself in Heacox's wisdom was to greatly enhance my understanding of said concepts. This brings me to the "Integration Matrix" (Heacox, 2002, p.83). I found this to really assist me with my objectives that I post daily for students. It really helps with what the goal is for the day and gives more clarity than I have been using when posting these objectives. In fact, I may even give more than one objective in a class period and give it at different times during the period to help students with their executive functioning.

Another great take away from the text was looking more in depth on the multiple intelligences. I think every teacher should have to revisit this concept after they've taught for ten years or more because it made way more sense to me this time. I was able to look at a multitude of my students again and say, "That's why he learns this way and not that." One phrase that I really absorbed is when she wrote about Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. It stated, "Every student has strengths in thinking and learning" (Heacox, 2002, p. 70). Sometimes we educators forget that our own bias of what a student should be like or learn like can often overshadow what the student's ability actually is. It is up to the educator to bring forth a differentiated lesson to allow for these different forms of intelligences to prosper.

Speaking of differentiation, I liked the reinforcement of tiering the assignments while making it invisible. According to Heacox (2002), "Make sure you introduce all tiered activities in an equally enthusiastic manner and alternate which activity is introduced first" (p.98). I couldn't agree more. This quote actually made me giggle a little thinking about how to do it incorrectly. Differentiating is mostly about getting students to rise up to their level of challenge and go just a little bit over so growth can take place. Students really do react to your excitement if you let them. "I'm so excited to see which challenges you will overcome today!" They may not jump for joy with you, but it will resonate with

them to explore new ideas and challenge themselves. For a math teacher such as myself, I may put several problems in front of the students and they will differ greatly, but the main concept is always present. For example, the concept will be “solving for x ” and the requirements will be distribution, combining like terms and undoing operations. One problem will look like $3(x + 5) - 2 = 10$. Another will look like $-4(-2x + 5) - 8 = 13$. The third will be $-8(2x - 7) - (3 + x) + 17 = 4x - 6x$. All three questions fit the criteria and objectives that I am looking for the students to achieve, but the first one does not deal with distributing a negative. The second problem only has a variable on one side and the third has both, plus a negative that distributes without a number in front of the parenthesis. I may be speaking math “blah blah” to you, but this is data that I use to drive my instruction and it naturally tiers assignments for me so that differentiation will occur.

My final take away from the book was about choices. I fully believe that autonomy for both teacher and student is the best way to keep engagement alive. The more you create a safe classroom, the more the autonomy will provide students to naturally challenge themselves and bring about intense differentiation. Heacox (2002) explains, “Offering choices is an important way to motivate students and get them interested in a project” (p.101). The one caution I will make to educators out there is I know autonomy is great, but too much autonomy will destroy any chance of a student who lacks strong executive functioning skills to be successful. We just need to give a few choices, or give a subject that the choices are specific. For example, a social studies teacher will do a project on countries and each student has to pick a country to research and present. The students have autonomy, yet the choices are specific. On the other end, if that social studies teacher said to pick any city, state, country, region, county or neighborhood to research, then there would be several students who would never pick, or pick one day and change the next. An example for math would be an IXL assignment from me. I would put three review choices on the board, X.1, X.7 or X.9 and tell the students they get to choose the one they want to work on. This way, they are limited in what to work on and the assignments will be chosen on the same concept but at different levels, yet the students will all be reinforcing their knowledge.

I know there were other ideas that I could have talked about, but these were the most important to me. I often work with students with special needs, students who are high achievers and students who are gifted. I know that differentiation needs to happen for these special groups and I believe that everything I’ve been writing about falls into those situations. This book gets a solid “A” from me and will be shared with my PLC group, and have a place on my shelf. There were many useful resources and ideas that I believe will benefit any educator. I look forward to seeing what else Heacox might have in the world.