Brittany Bettin

EDTL 7100

25 February 2010

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

*Professional Development Workshop on Differentiated Instruction*

The Problem:

 This five-week professional development workshop is intended to address the problems and difficulties associated with simultaneously meeting the diverse needs, interests, experiences, and ability levels of all students in a classroom. This workshop aims to produce teachers who feel confident, capable, and motivated to meet all students’ needs and abilities through the use of differentiated instruction. Differentiating instruction is an important aspect in teaching students of various levels and appropriately implementing inclusion in the classroom. According to Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, and Reid (2005), “it is a comprehensive approach to teaching, which enables the successful inclusion of all students” (p. 194). Differentiated instruction is defined as ‘teaching with student variance in mind, it means starting where the students are rather than adopting a standardized approach to teaching that seems to presume all learners are alike,” (Cox, 2008, p.53).

Needs of the Learner:

As a professional development workshop, the students of this course would be current or prospective educators seeking to further their education and to further their success and effectiveness as teachers. With the obligation of No Child Left Behind and the constant pressure to meet state and national standards, teachers are constantly challenged with the difficult task of meeting the needs of all students in the general education classroom. However, as Bloom (1956) expressed, it makes no pedagogical sense to expect all students to learn in the same way or at the same pace when the variance in students’ background knowledge, readiness, learning styles, and strengths are taken into account. Therefore, the learners (educators) in this course need to learn strategies and teaching methods to meet the needs of all students in their classroom.

 Understandably, the focus of student differences will vary with community. Some classrooms may have a more diverse set of socio-economic statuses, others may have a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Regardless of where the major focus lies, all classrooms will embody a diverse group of students; students who possess many different needs, learning styles, background knowledge, and ability levels. It’s important the learners of this course understand where the differences in their students lie and appropriate ways to meet the differences specific to their students. Through discussion, personal reflection and evaluation, application of the content in this course, students are presented with a highly contextualized, relevant curriculum.

 In terms of personal growth and fulfillment, successful citizenship, and potential pay incentives, educators enrolled in this workshop are actively displaying the desire to be a more *successful* teacher. By exploring differentiated instruction and being expected to implement it in their own curriculum and teaching, they create opportunities for better teaching and improved student learning.

Needs of the Society:

 As educators, we must successfully meet the needs of our students. To properly meet these needs, we must first understand them. We need to understand how an individual’s socio-economic status, culture, race, family composition, residence, background, language, and ability levels affect their ability to learn and interact within the classroom and society. We need to find ways to prepare them for their future as competitive, successful, capable members of our global society. Creating a contextualized, authentic, meaningful curriculum for each student is important to developing and producing well-rounded citizens. Through the implementation of differentiated instruction, this course aims to provide a basis for creating this curriculum.

Value of the Subject Matter:

Having the ability to successfully reach and teach all of our students in the classroom is vital to creating successful teachers. To effectively teach all students in the classroom simultaneously, differentiated instruction is necessary. Bloom (1956) expressed, it makes no pedagogical sense to expect all students to learn in the same way or at the same pace when the variance in students’ background knowledge, readiness, learning styles, and strengths are taken into account. Similarly, Hall (2009) states, “Students arrive from a montage of backgrounds with very different needs. They form a mosaic of diversity – academically, culturally, linguistically, economically, socially, and motivationally,” (p. 1). Therefore, it is understandable that students require different instructional strategies. “The ‘teaching to the middle’ approach used in many classrooms does not provide optimum learning opportunities for such diverse student populations,” (Hall, 2009, p. 1). On the contrary, differentiated instruction is considered an effective method for catering to all students and “promotes equity and excellence by focusing on best-practice instruction in mixed ability classrooms,” (Tomlinson, 2000, p. 25).

Broderick et al. (2005) explain by using differentiated instruction, teachers expect students “to bring a variety of experiences, abilities, interests, and styles to their learning; they acknowledge that these affect students’ performance in the classroom; and they address this natural diversity when planning and delivering rigorous and relevant, yet flexible and responsive instruction,” (p. 196). The importance of utilizing differentiated instruction seems evident when considering these statements. For all students to be engaged and motivated in the classroom, simultaneously, teachers must understand and acknowledge their differences when teaching. Anderson (2007) writes, “Of the utmost importance to the teacher who differentiates is providing a learning environment and opportunities [for learning] that exclude no child,” (p. 50). Clearly, differentiating instruction to create such an environment makes sense; for every child deserves the best possible education.

Specific to the professional development of educators, this course serves a select audience. However, the value of the subject matter taught through this course benefits many beyond the students (educators) enrolled. As a result of this course, teachers will be able to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of all students, resulting in more successful learning, experiences, and educational value. Teachers become more successful educators, students receive a more valuable and fulfilling education, and society gains more collaborative, cooperative, successful citizens.

The Educational Goal:

 The course intends impart the value of and need for creating a differentiated curriculum in educators. This course also aims to produce advocates of differentiated instruction and teachers who strive to implement differentiated instruction in their own classrooms for the benefit of their students. This course is designed to provide educators with a foundational knowledge of differentiated instruction, appropriate and attainable ways to utilize differentiated instruction, and opportunities to apply self-created differentiated lessons in their classrooms. Students will attain these goals through an exploratory, experiential, authentic, and relevant curriculum with a focus on application, synthesis, and evaluation.

Essential Questions:

Essential questions should focus on: (1) effective instruction methods that utilize differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students; (2) describing and understanding the main characteristics of differentiated instruction; and (3) appropriate and attainable ways to utilize differentiated instruction in the classroom for the purpose of meeting all students’ needs.

**References**

Anderson, K. M. (2007). Differentiating instruction to include all students. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(3), 49-54.

Broderick, A., Mehta-Parekh, H., & Reid, D. K. (2005). Differentiated instruction for disabled students in inclusive classrooms. *Theory Into Practice, 44*(3), 194-202.

Cox, S. G. (2008, May). Differentiated instruction in the elementary classroom. *The Education Digest,* 52-54.

Cusumano, C., & Mueller, J. (2007, March/April). How differentiated instruction helps struggling students. *Leadership,* 8-10.

Hall, B. (2009). Differentiated instruction; reaching all students. *Research Into Practice Mathematics,* 1-5.

Lawrence-Brown, D. (2004). Differentiated instruction: inclusive strategies for standards-based learning that benefit the whole class. *American Secondary Education, 32*(3), 34-62.

Levy, H. M. (2008, March/April). Meeting the needs of all students through differentiated instruction: helping every child reach and exceed standards. *The Clearing House, 81*, 161-164.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2000, August). Differentiation of instruction in the elementary grades. *Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.* ERIC Digest.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2000, January). Differentiated instruction: can it work? *The Education Digest,* 25-31.