

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study examined and reported the experiences and observed behaviors of students in a kindergarten classroom when differentiated instruction was used in multiple forms. The study explored the effects of student learning when strategies used such as choice, homogeneous learning centers, tools, flexible grouping, assessments, reporting/report cards, and learning style were incorporated into daily activities.

Students were ages five and six and varied in socioeconomic status and race. Many methods of data collection were utilized. Prior to the ten-week study, students were assessed to gain an accurate level of instruction in order to plan homogeneous learning center groupings and locate each student's zone of proximal development. During the study, students' learning center work was evaluated to determine whether the students were grouped so centers were instructionally appropriate. Extensive field notes were taken to document signs of progress and growth in students. It was found that flexible grouping was very beneficial in meeting students' needs more appropriately. Choice provided students with a play-like environment with areas around the classroom that were geared towards learning like fine motor area, math area, ABC area, nature area, listening area, writing area, music area and easel area. Learning styles were taken into consideration when planning choice time areas and when performing routine activities. Learning styles were also considered when giving post-assessments at the conclusion of the study, allowing students to choose different methods to show what they know learned.

The study suggests that when students are instructed in their zone of proximal

development they have a positive outlook on their learning. Students were highly engaged during choice time and worked in heterogeneous groups where students shared the role of instructing their peers and showed a great level of pride and engagement. Flexible learning centers provided appropriate amounts of challenge while allowing students to change groups based on their needs. Students listened to each other more and learned from one another. In addition to having more pride, students' frustrations lessened as the teacher found and instructed in their zone of proximal development, providing a more positive classroom climate and consistent steady growth from most students.