A Basic Qualitative Study Investigating the Use of Differentiated Instruction in a High School Art Classroom

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A Master’s Project in Art Education

A Basic Qualitative Study Investigating the Use of Differentiated Instruction in a High School Art Classroom

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements For the Degree of

Master of Science in Education
May 2014

Approved by:  
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Acknowledgments

I would like to express sincere gratitude to the Art Education Department at Buffalo State College for their continuous support of both my undergraduate and graduate degrees over the last seven years, especially that of Dr. Shirley Hayes who had belief in my ability to complete this document.

Special thanks go to my parents, who continuously obliged my absurd demand for complete and utter silence when I was writing.

Words cannot express how thankful I am for my sister, Lindsay and my boyfriend, Alex. Both have provided unwavering support, love, and encouragement. This project would not have been completed without them.
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Abstract

The initial purpose of this study was to understand how one art teacher applied aspects of differentiated instruction in her art classroom. In the review of literature, I documented research and theories about differentiated instruction, which showed an overlap between theories of constructivism and differentiated instruction.

The methodology relied on a basic qualitative case study in which I played the role of participant as observer. Through the use of observation, interview, and document analysis, I sought to uncover aspects of differentiated instruction that one high school art teacher applied in her classroom over a period of twelve weeks for one period per day. I took careful observation notes during each visit, conducted daily informal interviews and one semi-structured interview at the end of the period of research. First, I did open coding on the data and then gradually found categories that emerged from the data. As I read and reread observation notes, transcriptions, and reflective memos, these essential categories emerged as findings for the study: empowerment, diversity, warm demander, constant flux, flexible grouping, harmonious classroom, involvement of student, unwavering support, investment in students, and reflective practices. These were categories that coincided with what research showed as desirable to differentiated instruction in the review of literature.

At this point in her teaching career the teacher’s methodology appears implicitly informed by the principles of differentiated instruction, in which she internalized the differentiated method of instruction that has become automatic in her daily practice. What the teacher was able to articulate as aspects of differentiated instruction were different from those aspects that I observed in her ability to do differentiated instruction
as I observed it. The teacher does need to give more thought in terms of how to devise conceptually based art curriculum using differentiated instruction rather than relying totally on art technique and skill-building. Future research could determine whether other veteran teachers embody characteristics of differentiated instruction and/or constructivism even when they are unable to verbally communicate the theories.
Chapter I: Introduction

Background Narrative

The act of teaching is a continuously changing, evolving, wonderful experience. The education system has an important goal—to provide students with skills that will enable them to act as good citizens of the world and lead happy, successful lives. In order to achieve this goal, children need to become critical thinkers and problem solvers, capable of analyzing material and inventing creative solutions. As an educator, I believe my job is to both model and facilitate students’ acquisition of these skills. I believe this is achieved by promoting students’ active engagement in the learning process through the use of flexible teaching styles. Among other factors, the teacher is responsible for developing an appropriate environment for learning—a space that considers each student’s individual learning needs and ensures his or her success. It is my belief that these goals can be achieved through differentiated instruction.

While pursuing my career as an art teacher, I have always tried to reach out to each of my students in a positive, meaningful way. This comes out of my own experience as a student. When I reflect on my academic career, it strikes me that I have always been able to perform successfully when material has been presented to me in a tactile or visual way. My personal success with visual demonstrations has, therefore, informed and shaped my practice as a teacher. I am acutely aware of the importance of meeting each student’s individual learning needs, having experienced both the advantages and disadvantages of teaching practices that do not account for different learning styles. In other art teacher’s classrooms, I was surprised to find that not all teachers present students with a variety of ways to access new concepts. I was struck by the seeming
closed-mindedness of some teaches’ management of art classroom environments in which I have participated. In one art classroom, for example, the blinds remained closed to the sunshine all day long. The teacher gave minimal instruction, which led the students to socialize and dismiss the project, rather than truly comprehend the concepts. To counter this type of teacher behavior, I began to create bright, bold instructional posters and thorough slide shows with photographs of the steps that were to be taken to complete their assignments. I reminded students of meeting the criteria that was required on their rubric, and constantly circled the classroom, offering help and encouragement where needed. Fountain (2014) states that for a teacher to proactively use differentiated instruction, she must “design both spaces and learning experiences that provide all students of diverse learning styles and choices to access knowledge in different ways” (p. 10). Taking her point, I was able to connect with my students and witnessed their serious engagement with the material I presented.

Forms of differentiated instruction began to develop in the 1970’s during the rise of constructivism: Teachers focused on student motivation and child development as key concepts of learning. Joanne Yatvin’s (2004) study Room with a Differentiated View explores the history of differentiated instruction, how to apply it to a curriculum, and the successful inclusion of exceptional students. According to Yatvin (2004), differentiated instruction is so fundamental, and is supported by two apparently disparate teaching philosophies. Of one of these teaching philosophies, she writes:

The major impetus comes from believers in standards and accountability. In their view schools should use alternative classroom configurations, teaching methods, and student activities to help struggling learners score high on standardized tests.
They use “prevention” and “intervention” as key words to signal more and
different instruction for children who are not making it in ordinary classroom
programs. (p. 12)

Yatvin (2004) asserts that the believers in standards and accountability focus on
differentiated instruction as a tool to help students earn high scores on standardized tests,
while others believe that the student’s uniqueness as a learner should serve as the driving
force for the practice of differentiated instruction. Both of these principles inform my
own teaching philosophy. My hope as an educator is to constantly incorporate my
students’ uniqueness and personal qualities within my teaching practice in order to
provide them with what I believe will be the best education possible, and to prepare them
for success.

Given my minimal understanding of differentiated instruction and a desire to
improve my teaching strategies in art, I am interested to find out more about what an art
classroom that practices differentiated instruction looks like. More specifically, I want to
discover ways that art teachers apply differentiated instruction in the art classroom in
order to appeal to students’ wide range of learning abilities, as well as ways to maintain
student motivation. I am also interested to discover the challenges that a teacher is faced
with when striving to reach out to each of her students. My research project documents
that journey and I address the problem for that study in the following section.

Statement of the Problem

My study was prompted by the realization that many classrooms are still
structured in a way that treats students as if their learning needs are identical, despite the
known problems with this style of teaching (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000). This problem
was reflected in my own experiences as a novice teacher when I consistently witnessed a similarity in that student art products—I noticed that students’ completed projects were nearly identical and that their delivery was similar in content, process, and product. Their projects were indicative of a style of teaching that was limited and limiting in its capacity to motivate students to express themselves and engage with the material. I do not believe that any two students learn the same exact way, nor do I believe that each student merely responds to one style of teaching. Differentiated instruction is “simply providing instruction in a variety of ways to meet the needs of a variety of learners” (Nunley, 2006). Differentiated instruction theory seeks to synthesize a number of educational theories and practices and provide practical solutions to these problems (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000). I am interested to discover more about the intersection of this individualized style of teaching with creative practices and learn how these theories can be practiced in an art classroom.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to discover the ways that art teachers use aspects of differentiated instruction in the high school art classroom. I expect to see how employing aspects of differentiated instruction allows their students to create meaningful artwork, and avoid creating an army of identical pieces. I hope to learn how I can practically address each student’s needs and use their personal strengths and interests to facilitate the mastery of creative techniques, without effacing their individuality or stifling self-expression.

students with a variety of instructional tools that are all focused on the same objective and can lead to the same learning goal. John Hattie (2012), a Professor and Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute at the University of Melbourne, Australia, argues that students are eager to be challenged into learning. He points out that a teacher that practices differentiated instruction will not only challenge students daily, but that the lessons will result in a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the material, as well as promote the development of multiple learning strategies and encourage in students a desire to master learning (Hattie, 2012, p. 27). These skills will prove invaluable as students continue to grow as learners. Tomlinson and Sousa (2011) state that learning style comes from the “belief that people learn differently and will learn more effectively when the circumstances of learning match their particular approaches of learning” (p. 138). In addition to this individualized style of learning, Julie Gess-Newsome and Catherine Wilcoxson Ueckert, Professors of Science Education at Northern Arizona University, investigated active learning strategies in their classroom in 2008. Gess-Newsome and Ueckert (2008) state:

> Active learning involves students in debating ideas, asking questions, comparing answers to what is known, using evidence to develop explanations, considering alternatives, and making ideas public while recognizing that explanations may change following discussion. (p. 47)

Though this research was done in a science classroom, these concepts are easily applicable to an art classroom, and can support student growth as learners. The active learning that Gess-Newsome and Ueckert describe, in concert with the tenets of differentiated instruction, offer an innovative model for teaching. The research that
follows will seek to understand how an art classroom successfully and practically incorporates differentiated instruction to promote active learning. The following research questions will shape my study.

**Research Questions**

Central and sub questions for this research project include:

- What does the practice of differentiated instruction look like in a high school art classroom?
- What does an art teacher need to consider when planning and executing differentiated instruction?
- How does differentiated instruction benefit and/or challenge art teaching practices?
- What can I learn from art teachers who practice differentiated instruction?

**Significance of Study**

Art teachers advocate the importance of the visual arts. Hughes (2011), for example, asserts that the art classroom is a place where students are given the opportunity to express themselves in a way that can positively impact their sense of self, as well as their understanding of the world for many years to come. She argues that the visual arts share something with every other language, making their mastery a way to transcend barriers and effectively communicate with diverse groups of people. In addition, Deborah Scigliano, an Assistant Professor at Duquesne University who has been implementing differentiated instruction in her elementary classroom for thirty years, and Shellie Hipsky, an Educational Consultant for the Tri-State Study council at the University of Pittsburgh and an Assistant Professor at Robert Morris University, argue that
differentiated instruction has the potential to provide students with increased content understanding, learner empowerment, as well as increased academic achievement. Their 2012 study is significant because it offers information that may add to art teachers’ repertoire of teaching strategies that will ultimately benefit both teachers and students on their journey to experiencing an education through the visual arts. Tomlinson and Allan (2000) state that “Most educators appear to lack images of how a classroom might look – how we would “do school” – if our intent was to respond to individual learner needs. In fact, the challenge of addressing academic diversity in today’s complex classrooms is as important and difficult a challenge as we have before us” (p. 1). Though the exploration of this strategy in the art classroom will begin as a challenge, it is my hope that my study will be valuable to the art education community because it will provide insight for teachers who are searching for a way to reach all of their students and one way to do that is through differentiated instruction. My next section will provide definitions for the key terms of my research.

**Definition of Terms**

Differentiated Instruction – As mentioned earlier, Nunley (2006) defines differentiated instruction as “simply providing instruction in a variety of ways to meet the needs of a variety of learners” (p. xvii). Fountain (2014) defines differentiated instruction as “an approach to teaching that is informed by a combination of best practices and beliefs” (p. 12). These definitions highlight two variables inherent to differentiated instruction: the individual needs of the student that constitute their learning style and the variant methodologies that a teacher might employ in meeting these needs. Each of these variables informs the other in a mutual relationship that my research will bear in mind.
Constructivism – Brooks and Brooks (2001) define constructivism as teaching methods that focus on the idea that learning is not a linear process but rather it is a complex process that is highly affected by the individual.

Learning Profile – Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) define learning profile as an umbrella term for “four aspects of how individuals learn, how they process what they need to learn, or how they think about, remember, and prefer to use what they learn” (p. 137).

Warm Demander – Fountain (2014) provides this term, explaining that it “beautifully encompasses the idea of pushing students to achieve more than they think possible, while also supporting them and helping them to believe in themselves and their abilities” (p. 67). My use of the concept of a warm demander, therefore, is indicative of the energy of differentiated instruction. In this study, I conceive of differentiated instruction as utilizing a teacher’s capacity to sympathize with and nurture their students, as well as motivate them through positive reinforcement and encouragement.

**Limitations of Study**

The limitations of this study include time constraints for data collection based on the length of a college semester, as well as research limited to one high school in one region of Western New York. My results will be unique to these particular circumstances and provide a thorough analysis of a current art teachers’ interpretation and practice of differentiated instruction. I will evaluate the data according to my particular understanding of differentiated instruction and the terms described above.

**Conclusion**

As an educator I believe it is my responsibility to my students to constantly seek to improve my practice and stay informed of contemporary innovations in education.
This research project is intended to benefit all teachers interested in appealing to a variety of student abilities, interests, motivation, among others, and presenting them with practical and realistic ways to engage the principles of differentiated instruction. Through studying one teacher’s methods and approach to determine aspects of differentiated instruction that are used within the art classroom, I hope to learn more about how to plan and execute the strategies and practices of differentiated instruction in a high school art classroom. In the next chapter, I compile an in-depth review of literature that provides necessary research on differentiated instruction and child development for my study.
Chapter II: Review of Literature

Introduction

My research seeks to understand the concept of differentiated instruction and how one art teacher specifically applies aspects of the theory in an art classroom. In order to provide a background for this study, I researched literature and theories about differentiated instruction. My main objective was to adopt a better, more thorough understanding of the use of differentiated instruction in the art classroom and to develop a foundation for my teaching strategies. To begin my research, I sought to explain why it was important for art educators to consider introducing the theory of differentiated instruction into their classroom. To establish a foundation for my exploration of this pedagogy, I looked to texts that discuss what differentiated instruction is and how it is being used in education today. I chose texts that are contemporary, composed by reliable scholars, most of which have published more than one text on the subject of differentiated instruction. The next segment of my paper will provide a detailed look into the theory of differentiated instruction that I hope to investigate in the art classroom.

Exploring Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a concept that originated in the past fifty years of education (Yatvin, 2004). Hall, Strangman, and Meyer (2011) define differentiated instruction as the ability to “recognize students’ varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning and interests; and to react responsively” (p. 1). Bush (2006) supplements their definition, writing: “Differentiated instruction is simply an honest and mindful approach to teaching our diverse student populations. It acknowledges individual differences and seeks to make learning meaningful for all
students” (p. 45). Even though differentiated instruction has been an established pedagogical approach for over fifty years (Yatvin, 2004), it is still not a concept that is practiced regularly. She explains that the concept of differentiated instruction emerged as psychology advanced, along with the rise of a constructivist philosophy of learning in the 1970s. Also, at this time, educators began to believe in the power of motivation in relationship to children’s learning (Yatvin, 2004). This pedagogical philosophy therefore responds to and occurred in concert with developments in fields that complement individualized education.

Carol Ann Tomlinson and Susan Demirsky Allan provide a variety of strategies for the incorporation of differentiated instruction into teaching practice in their *Leadership for Differentiating Schools & Classrooms* (2000). The principles that govern their theory of differentiated instruction include: a flexible classroom, effective and ongoing assessment of learning goals, flexible grouping, and respectful activities and learning arrangements. They also state that:

Differentiation of instruction stems from effective and ongoing assessment of learner needs. In a differentiated classroom, student differences are expected, appreciated, and studied as a basis for instructional planning. This principle also reminds us of the tight bond that should exist between assessment and instruction. (p. 5)

Tomlinson and Allan’s theory of differentiated instruction depends on their fundamental belief that learning is a process—each of their principles relies on the assumption that each individual student’s needs are in constant flux. It becomes the responsibility of the instructor, then, to be attuned to differences in their students’ learning styles and interests,
and maintain an awareness of each student’s growth. In addition to their emphasis on the attention to individual growth, Tomlinson and Allan articulate some of the expected benefits of this pedagogy: “evidence of quality work, mental and affective engagement, interest in school, degree of self-efficacy, growth of each student in comparison with self, evidence of complex thinking and problem solving” (p. 31). It is their contention that an instructor’s continued attention to a student’s individuality will inspire in them motivation to cultivate their sense of self through education. In its essence, theirs is a theory that affirms the values of a humanist approach to education.

Elsewhere in her research, Tomlinson discussed the practice of flexible grouping. The most comprehensive and incisive definition of this principle can be found in her work with David Sousa, *Differentiation and The Brain* (2011). Here, she discusses the advantages of creating learning groups within a classroom:

Groups based on readiness can bring together students with similar levels of readiness or mixed levels of readiness. Those based on interest can have students working with peers whose interests are like their own or peers whose interests differ from theirs. Groups based on learning preferences can bring together students with similar learning preferences or students who learn in different ways.

(p. 11)

Here, Tomlinson demonstrates the openness and the multiplicity of possibilities for which her theory allows. An instructor’s classroom can reflect both teaching styles and preferences, as well as the learning styles of their students. The principle of flexible grouping offers an art instructor several ways to appropriate this theory in their own classroom, and therefore requires no sacrifice from the teacher in terms of their personal
preferences. Tomlinson’s theory becomes relatable and reasonable, in this way, and could very well appeal to a large variety of instructors. When teachers consider the individual needs of their students and begin to reflect on and respond to them as individuals, the possibility for their success as instructors paves the way for students’ success as well.

In addition to Tomlinson, Allan, and Sousa, my understanding of differentiated instruction is informed by Heather Fountain’s most recent publication, “Differentiated Instruction in Art” (2014). Fountain, an Associate Professor of Art Education at Kutztown University and a founding member of the Arts in Education Program at Harvard Graduate School of Education, explains that when teachers practice differentiated instruction, and create a sense of ‘harmony’ between teachers, students, and curriculum and instruction, they are “providing the appropriate balance of support and challenge to draw students into meaningful learning that engages them and keeps them connected” (p. 10). Their emphasis on harmony suggests that differentiated instruction is intended to provide a more unified educational experience. By keeping the students’ strengths, the teacher’s strengths, and the curriculum and instruction in constant conversation with each other, education requires more engagement and hopefully inspires motivation in learners. The aspects of differentiated instruction as defined by Fountain (2014) are:

• Opportunities for students to be involved in learning through important real and attainable ways

• Unwavering support that helps students to believe in themselves and reach higher levels of accomplishment
• Investment in students that shows them that they matter and that they are worth their teachers’ time

• Reflective practices that consistently assess teachers’ actions and their students’ actions, needs, hopes, and fears as a way to guide future classroom practice (p. 10)

Differentiated instruction is the practice a teacher uses when attending to the learning needs of a particular student or small group of students. This pedagogy opposes a more conventional approach to teaching in which students are treated as a collective, rather than a set of unique individuals (Allan & Tomlinson, 2000). To be clear, differentiated instruction is not when a teacher presents lesson content through a different form throughout the week. Rather, it is when the teacher offers a “variety of instructional strategies for the same specific objective” (Nunley, 2006). More specifically still, Nunley (2006) writes:

So differentiated instruction doesn’t mean just using a variety of teaching strategies. We must structure the actual process of learning for the needs of our students. Let us sometimes march to their tune rather than expecting all of them to march to ours. (p. 12)

In other words, differentiated instruction encourages teachers to recognize students and their needs as incredibly unique in order to provide them with the most beneficial learning experience. An ambitious proposition, Nunley’s idea of differentiated instruction calls educators to restructure their entire approach to teaching.

To repeat, when successfully practicing differentiated instruction in the art classroom, the teacher employs several key methods to reach her students: real and
attainable opportunities, unwavering support to help students believe in themselves, an investment in students so that they develop a sense that they are worth their teacher’s time, reflective practices to constantly improve themselves, and acceptance.

Differentiated instruction requires a self-conscious effort to engage with students individually and encourage them personally. The teacher’s self-awareness is complemented, in this model, by the self-reflection that is required from the student. When these methods are employed, students will receive: a challenge, interconnectedness with their teacher and their classmates, independence, affirmation that they are an important part of the class, and a connection (Fountain, 2014, p. 10-11). This mode of teaching encourages student’s involvement in their education—it requires that they take responsibility for their learning. By promoting independence and thoughtfulness, an educator using this method models for students an approach to education that could easily translate into an approach to life more generally. Fountain implies that the benefits of differentiated instruction in the art classroom have the possibility of changing a student’s entire school experience for the better.

Gail Bush, the director of the Center for Teaching through Children’s Books at National-Louis University in Chicago, Illinois, explains that differentiated instruction is most beneficial to a student when the educator knows their students well enough that they are able to successfully plan for learning experiences prior to instruction (2006). In contrast to a Skillful Teacher Model, where teachers react quickly to student needs, differentiated instruction is planned into the lesson and done proactively rather than reactively (Bush, 2006). This method of teaching requires that a teacher spend time getting to know their students and develop lesson plans in an ongoing process. This
appears to present some logistical difficulties; however, the experiential emphasis of differentiated instruction allows for a teacher to learn about her students on a continuing basis. Tomlinson and Sousa (2011) affirm this:

Similarly, differentiation operates from the premise that if a student cannot learn efficiently or effectively in one mode, a strong teacher looks for another learning mode that will work for that student, and if content seems irrelevant to or disconnected from a student’s world, the teacher seeks to build bridges between critical content and student interests. (p. 8)

Therefore, a teacher who engages differentiated instruction and applies aspects of it within their classroom will be able to reach students more effectively. In the next section, I will discuss ways in which researchers and prestigious authors have found to apply differentiated instruction within the classroom. I will make clear how one can practically apply this pedagogical theory.

**Classroom Space**

One important aspect teachers should consider when using differentiated instruction is the way in which they use the space of their classroom. Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) explain that “The environment in which students are asked to learn must invite learning. That is, must be safe, challenging, and supportive for each student” (p. 9). This statement strengthens the notion that teachers should consistently be responding to their students’ needs. The form of the room, then, supports the learning that goes on within. Yatvin (2004) notes three basic spaces needed for a differentiated classroom: a space for solitary work, a space for specialized activities, and a teacher space. Traditionally, students have used a desk as a space of their own. However, because
of their possibly distancing design (slanted, and difficult to push together for group work)

Yatvin (2004) suggests using round tables in the classroom since that they can provide
personal space for a group of four, while easily fitting eight students for larger group
work. Rather than isolating students, then, Yatvin proposes that teachers encourage
students to engage in a learning community that is supported by the actual design of the
classroom space. The model invites students to be engaged more with each other and
cultivate their own sense of self in the learning process.

When it comes to a place for specialized activities, carpeted and uncarpeted open
floor space is one alternative if there are not large tables for painting and construction
(Yatvin, 2004). With consideration of age and behavior of the students in an art
classroom, it is my experience that many students perform well when they are free to
choose a workspace of their own in the classroom, rather than being confined to assigned
seats in close quarters with their classmates. Additionally, Yatvin (2004) notes that
resources like a classroom library with research materials and other tools can create a
comfortable atmosphere that will allow students to work independently, seeking out
materials and information as they need it. This format inspires students to take ownership
of their project and education.

When shaping the classroom into a differentiated area, it is important that the
teacher also designs a space for herself, as well as a small area that can be used to meet
privately with students (Yatvin, 2004). As with the students, a table rather than a desk can
be beneficial for the teacher in order to organize her computer, materials, student records,
etc. Even more so, teachers should take the extra step to ridding their classroom of
needless materials that clutter classroom space in order to give students optimum room to
work without “stumbling over others” (Yatvin, 2004). A classroom that acknowledges both student and teacher needs creates a positive environment that is capable of benefiting both parties. Yatvin emphasizes that the space should reflect the harmonious relationship between teacher, student, and materials. Tomlinson and Allan (2000) agree and address how one might practically employ this strategy:

As logical as such personalized classrooms seem, making them a reality challenges many comfortable assumptions and practices related to teaching and learning. For instance, planning for more personalized classrooms prompts an array of questions: Do our current practices make learners more independent or more dependent? What is the purpose of “standard” report cards, and are they effective? Does learning happen in someone or to them? How can we be “fair” and still respond to learner variance? How do standards and standardization differ? (p. 2)

These are underlying concerns that will inform my research methods. Hopefully, I’ll be able to ask both teachers and students questions whose answers will come to balance differentiated instruction’s emphasis on multiplicity with curriculum and performance standards that become necessary in evaluating how much and how deeply a student has learned a particular concept or skill.

Tomlinson and Allan (2000) speak to the practical application of differentiated instruction with these questions in mind. They write, “Differentiation is not really one entity, but rather synthesizes a number of educational theories and practices. Bringing those theories and practices together helps teachers address their classroom activity in a manner that is more holistic than fragmented” (p. 16). They emphasize that differentiated
instruction has less to do with the minutia of teaching strategies, and more to do with an entire approach to education. This model does not necessarily oppose standards, but requires an alternate approach to standard curriculum and evaluation. Tomlinson and Sousa (2011) attest that differentiation “is not a particular set of strategies, but a way of thinking about teaching and learning. It provides a framework for planning and carrying out instruction” (p. 9).

In comparison, Fountain (2014) explains that “Learning occurs best for students in an environment that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions, as well as comfort and order, and in which the learner feels appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and validated” (p. 53). It is not only the physical appearance of an art teacher’s classroom that can impact a student’s experience; rather, a combination of the classroom climate that is created, along with the physical appearance. Her explanation of a differentiated classroom emphasizes that the space should reflect the nurturing qualities for which this pedagogy calls for. My understanding of differentiated instruction, informed by Tomlinson, Allan, Sousa, Fountain, Yatvin, and Nunley, considers the importance of creating a learning community in which individuals are encouraged to cultivate their personal strengths and take ownership of their education. In the next section I will compare the theory of differentiated instruction with constructivism, a similar pedagogical approach that I hope to incorporate into my own teaching philosophy.

**Constructivism in Differentiated Instruction**

In this section, I explore the concept of constructivism. Yatvin (2004) and Allan & Tomlinson (2000) both describe the theory of constructivism as influential to their
development of a differentiated classroom. The two theories share many of the same objectives and principles and therefore bear further description. Regarding constructivism, Brooks & Brooks (2001) state:

In a constructivist classroom, the teacher searches for students’ understandings of concepts, and then structures opportunities for students to refine or revise these understandings by posing contradictions, presenting new information, asking questions, encouraging research, and/or engaging students in inquiries designed to challenge current concepts. (p. ix)

In a constructivist classroom, then, the teacher is figured as a responder to students. In addition to helping students with supportive and affirmative information, it’s important that the teacher challenges the student and offers them the opportunity to think more deeply about a concept or skill. In doing so, students are encouraged to take ownership of their ideas and use their critical thinking skills. Similarly, a classroom that practices differentiated instruction focuses on the development of the child rather than mastery of the curriculum (Yatvin, 2004). In recognizing that education is an ongoing and, indeed, unending process, teachers and students both have the opportunity to engage with material on a personal, and therefore more meaningful level. Yatvin and Eisner possess a common belief that a curriculum should be child centered in order for the student to achieve the most beneficial education. This opposes a more conventional, standardized curriculum that leaves little room for a teacher to integrate individual’s strengths and interests.

In Eisner’s 1979 discussion of the “five basic orientations to the curriculum,” he mentions one way to construct curriculum through personal relevance. Eisner argues that
for a curriculum to be relevant, “students must have some investment in it” (Eisner, 1979). Given that differentiated instruction and constructivism both have their roots in the educational theories of the 1970s, it is evident that Eisner’s idea of personal relevance was influential on their development and how we conceive of both of these pedagogies today. In some ways, this model of education is progressive in that it defies the belief in a systematized curriculum that ensures every student receives the same education, learning concepts and skills that the system isolates as most important. This model suggests that education allow for a more open interpretation of what is important for any student to learn in their primary and secondary education. Both Yatvin and Eisner support a meaningful, personally relevant curriculum in which the students have a vested interest; such a curriculum will be taken into account for the duration of my study, as this type of student connection is consistently paired with differentiated instruction.

Paolo Friere’s article Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) reinforces the idea that in order for students to realize their full potential, their status in schools must be changed from passive receptacles of information to problem-solvers who explore real world issues alongside their teachers in a way that allows them to adapt to an ever-changing world. This kind of problem-posing education will create students who “will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to this challenge…and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed” (Friere, 1970, p. 77). This model of education for primary and secondary schools actually mirrors education at the collegiate level in some ways. In a college classroom, for instance, students are treated more as colleagues that work in concert with their professor to solve a problem. In removing the conventional hierarchical nature of the teacher-student relationship, Friere’s pedagogy allows for
creativity and collaboration that are invaluable in an art classroom. Additionally, Fountain (2014) speaks to the importance of encouraging a community of equality when she describes educator and researcher John Dewey. Fountain writes: “As stated by Dewey and embodied by Differentiated Instruction, an effective curriculum takes into account students’ differing needs and actively involves them in the process of making decisions about their education” (p. 31). The overlap between the theory of constructivism and the practice of differentiated instruction is obvious, both focusing on the need for students to have a sense of ownership in their learning experience, to feel like a key piece in the puzzle of which their classroom is made up.

**Understanding Learners**

The fundamental belief on which differentiated instruction is founded is the importance of addressing students’ different learning styles, strengths, and needs. It is a teacher’s job to ascertain the most effective teaching strategies they can utilize to reach their students and encourage in them the growth of an intrinsic motivation to learn. In a word, a teacher must be a warm demander, “pushing students to achieve more than they think possible, while also supporting them and helping them to believe in themselves and their abilities (Fountain, 2014, p. 67). Fountain (2014) explains that “each theory and practice that informs DI helps to create a unified instructional practice that values all types of learners” (p. 45). The organic unity that differentiated instruction holds as ideal is achieved through the development of a nurturing community in which each student is made to feel valuable. Scigliano & Hipsky (2010) describe the benefits of differentiated instruction as follows:
Just as enjoyment comes from the frenetic activity of the circus, benefits can stem from differentiating instruction for your learners. These benefits include a sense of self-efficacy, increased content understanding, learner empowerment, increased academic achievement, and inclusion of each child in the learning process (p.83).

Taking on the role of warm demander, a teacher is able to enter into a dialogue with a student that is both nurturing and assertive in pushing her students to reach their goals and go beyond their current learning limits. In working together towards a common goal, the teacher serves as an encouraging coach figure to her or his students. In response, students will develop an intrinsic motivation to work together with their teacher and take responsibility for their education.

Noting these critical benefits to students, Scigliano & Hipsky (2010) discuss their beliefs on the three rings of differentiated instruction, all of which come to bear on each other: learning profile, ability, and interest. The learning profile is created through the emphasis on students’ individual strengths, preferences, and learning styles. In order to determine these strengths, Scigliano & Hipsky (2010) suggest the use of Howard Gardner’s (1999) multiple intelligences: “These include verbal/linguistic, logic/mathematical, spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existential” (Gardner, 1999, as cited in Scigliano & Hipsky). Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) expand on the relation between these multiple intelligences and differentiated instruction: “Learning style theory and models stem from the belief that people learn differently and will learn more effectively when the circumstances of learning match their particular approaches to learning” (p. 138). In addition to learning preferences, Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) also explore intelligence preferences. One can
easily assess their students through observation, interviewing, and multiple intelligence surveys (Scigliano & Hipsky, 2010). In addition to a teacher’s evaluation of a student’s learning style and particular type of intellectual strength, students will need to become aware of their strengths and learn to harness them. In becoming cognizant of their type of intelligence and learning style, students have the opportunity to reflect on their experience, consider what might work for them in a classroom and what might not. To do so is to become aware and interested in his or her own education.

Fountain (2014) explains that a teacher practicing differentiated instruction encounters multiple variables that shape a student’s individual learning experience:

To put Differentiated Instruction into practice is to recognize students’ varying background knowledge, skills, interests, current experiences, readiness, personal cultural development, learning styles, learning rates, learning challenges, language proficiency, motivations, ability to attend, physical needs, and social and emotional development, and then to use this information to help students learn in a safe atmosphere where their differences are valued. (p. 13)

Given the multiplicity of learning styles and intelligences, a teacher practicing differentiated instruction has many avenues to pursue in addressing her student’s needs. Awareness of these different factors allows for a teacher to have multiple access points with her students and create opportunities that depend on one or many of these in each lesson. Additionally, a teacher has options available to her and is not required to conform to a rigid set of principles. This openness could allow for a teacher to insert her own personality and strengths, while also addressing those of her students.
Bush (2006) determined that some effective ways to develop a student learner profile include group orientation, cognitive style, learning environment, and intelligence preference. Similarly, Scigliano & Hipsky (2010) suggest that students can be given four activities that are geared towards their strengths, while also providing them with two activities that give them the opportunity to learn outside of his or her preferences. The second ring of differentiated instruction that Sigliano & Hipsky (2010) describe is student ability. To determine an accurate sense of student ability, the teacher must develop levels of expectation, and provide students with the opportunity to learn at that level. Similarly, Fountain (2014) claims that “Teachers who expect great things have students who live up to those expectations” (p. 68). In order to be able reach learners who are advanced and seeking enrichment, as well as learners who are struggling, and have a hard time staying motivated, it is important to provide a wide variety of levels (Scigliano & Hipsky, 2010).

The third ring of differentiated instruction as provided by Scigliano & Hipsky (2010) is interest. They write: “This is the ring where they get to decide, depending on what captures their interests at the time, what they want to do” (p. 85). This concept parallels with Brooks & Brooks’ (2001) notion that as educators, we must pose concepts in such a way that students are not merely required to memorize test material, but requires that students retain information and simultaneously care about what they’re learning. To do so, they must feel a connection to the material. Students’ interest in the material can often wane at various points in school year, and so it seems that by this logic, a teacher must continue to develop lesson plans that respond to her students. Rather than plan terribly far in advance, then, this methodology requires a teacher be constantly evaluating and re-evaluating student interest in the material. Alternatively, a teacher must
find a way to encourage student interest in concepts and projects outside their skill set by connecting the projects to their lives and making them otherwise relatable.

In my research I will be observing what effective aspects of differentiated instruction an art teacher uses in her high school art classroom. I hope to discover how a teacher in an art classroom can balance these three aspects of differentiated instruction—learning style, ability, and interest—in very practical terms. I’m curious to see how an instructor can effectively and efficiently implement this challenging practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this review of literature describes differentiated instruction as I understand it. It is this understanding that I will use to evaluate the various teachers’ incorporation of differentiated instructing in their classrooms. For me, this pedagogy has the ability to provide students with a learning experience that is meaningful in its capacity to incorporate student’s diverse needs and interests (Bush, 2006). The use of differentiated instruction in the art classroom has the ability to present learners with self-efficacy, increased content understanding, learner empowerment, and increased academic achievement (Tomlinson and Allan, 2000). Fountain (2014) also describes that when students are taught through differentiated instruction, they will receive a challenge, interconnectedness, independence, affirmation, and connection. My research in the field seeks to understand how a high school art teacher employs aspects of differentiated instruction in her classroom, and how effective they seem to be. I hope to witness the proposed benefits of differentiated instruction, as outlined above, on students’ empowerment, independence, and achievement, as well as a teacher’s willingness and capacity to participate in the experiential design of this pedagogy.
Chapter III: The Design of the Study

Background Information

My study sought to discover what aspects of differentiated instruction look like within the art classroom. The questions that I specifically looked to answer through the course of my research were: What does the practice of differentiated instruction look like in a high school art classroom? What does an art teacher consider when planning and executing differentiated instruction? How does differentiated instruction benefit and/or challenge art teaching practices? What can I learn from art teachers who practice differentiated instruction? In order to answer these questions, I researched a variety of texts on this pedagogy to help discover what differentiated instruction is, ways that it can be applied in the classroom, it’s comparison with constructivism, as well as how to understand the learners in a classroom. In order to fully understand differentiated instruction, it is important to understand what fundamental principles and values structure its foundation. The purpose of this study is to discover how art teachers in the high school art classroom employs aspects of differentiated instruction and what I can learn from that teacher about the practice to improve my own teaching of art education. The following section discusses the methods of inquiry I will be using to conduct my research.

Methods of Inquiry

Through my review of literature I discovered that there is a large overlap between constructivism and differentiated instruction. And I will be conducting my research through the theoretical framework of differentiated instruction. This research will be a basic qualitative study and I will be collecting most of my data through observation and interview, along with some document analysis. Merriam (2009) states that qualitative
research is “interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings” (p.24). Likewise, Creswell (2009) stated that qualitative research is “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Appropriately, I seek to discover how one high school art teacher implements differentiated instruction. The human problem, in this case, is the education of a group of individuals with disparate strengths and interests. I hope to discover how differentiated instruction addresses this problem through a research approach dependent on reflection and critical analysis of the interviews and observations. In the following sections, I explain the site of study, my role as researcher, data collection methods, data analysis strategies, and ethics.

**Site of Study**

The site of this study is a high school in Western New York. Though this school is in a suburban setting, a large portion of its population lives in poverty. The school’s aesthetic and amenities, however, are not indicative of the impoverished state of its population. The walk to the art room is peaceful. One can’t help but admire the numerous artworks painted onto the wall by alumnus. Landscapes, self-portraits, cityscapes are all impressive. Mrs. K’s classroom is the third room in a row of four very large art classrooms. A glass wall separates the art hallway from the classrooms. The display cabinets scattered along this glass wall are empty now; the school year has only just begun.

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1 I refer to this teacher participant and school with pseudonyms throughout this research project in order to protect her privacy.
Mrs. K has four school desks surrounding her own desk, making it into an art table piled with chalk pastels, unfinished color charts, pencils, papers, and much more. From this point in the room, I can see very clearly around the entire room. Surrounding the left, front, and right of her desk, Mrs. K has arranged the students’ desks in a horseshoe formation. Closely behind her desk are cabinets and shelves adorned with examples of artwork, reminders, the class schedule, and short vignettes written for each class on the aging green chalkboard explaining what they’re working on.

To the right of her desk, I see more cupboards and drawers built into the glass wall. Through this looking glass, I can see a handful of past student’s artwork on the hallway walls. Directly in front of her desk, past the student desks, there are eighteen lockers for the painting and Advanced Placement (AP) students to keep all of their supplies. Next to the lockers are three large cabinets with supplies, cubbies for large piece of paper, and an industrial-sized drying rack. Leaning against the drying rack, are about ten large easels waiting to be used. All of these items make up the barrier between this art room and the one next door.

To the left of her desk, are two sinks that look like they have been through an art war. Splattered in paint, and pastels, plaster, and glue—these sinks certainly have character. Even more cupboards are above, below, and behind these sinks. Immediately next to the sinks is a small ramp that leads up to the office that the four art teachers share. Here, another glass wall separates the two rooms. The room speaks to Mrs. K’s organizational abilities and her time spent in the art classroom. In the next section I further describe the participant of this study.
Participants

I will be observing Mrs. K, an art teacher at Suffolk High School. I chose this participant through the method of typical, purposeful sampling. She was selected because she reflects the average person and situation of the phenomenon in which this study is interested—an art teacher that practices differentiated instruction. Mrs. K has worked in the Suffolk School District for twenty-four years and has developed an outstanding reputation in the community. At the high school, Mrs. K has her own classroom. I will refer to her with the pseudonym Mrs. K throughout this research project in order to protect her privacy. I will not be interviewing students since my interest lies in how the teacher plans and executes instruction. In order to conduct this research, I have obtained consent from the participant as well as the administration (see Appendix B).

Role of Researcher

My role in this research is observer as participant. My decision to employ this strategy was informed by Merriam (2009):

The researcher’s observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer. Using this method, the researcher may have access to many people and a wide range of information, but the level of the information revealed is controlled by the group members being investigated (p. 124).

When conducting my research, I will be sure to describe my research interests to Mrs. K and suggest that she conduct the class as if I were not present. With her permission, I will have access to lesson rubrics, examples, and handouts she uses in her classroom. Merriam (2009) also references Adler and Adler (1998) in defining the observer as participant role.
She suggests that it is important that one in this position observes and interacts closely enough with members to establish an insider’s identity without participating in the activities constituting the core group membership (p.85). I will therefore incorporate myself into their experience while maintaining the critical distance necessary to analyze the interaction between Mrs. K, her students, and their projects. This privilege will allow me to see first-hand how a high school art teacher uses aspects of differentiated instruction in her classroom. The next section provides an explanation for how I will be collecting the data for this study.

**Data Collection Methods**

In this section, I will discuss observations, interviews, and document analysis as data collection methods for this research project. As researchers must be careful, systematic observers in order to obtain the most accurate information, I will be taking rigorous notes while observing Mrs. K’s first period art class. During these observations, I will be looking for Mrs. K to provide her students with aspects of differentiated instruction.

During my research, I will employ observational techniques from Bogden and Biklen (2007) such as forcing myself to make decisions to narrow my study, writing many observer comments, writing memos to myself about what I am learning, and exploring relevant literature in the field. At the end of each class, after observing, I will follow up with Mrs. K and ask her about how she thought the class went and how her experience will shape the preparation of her plans for the next time. Merriam (2009) suggests that observation address a number of variables at play in the classroom: the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle factors,
and my own behavior. Ultimately, the success of the observation depends on the skills of the observer. Observations will be recorded in detail in order to properly and thoroughly analyze the data.

A formal interview with Mrs. K will also play a crucial role in my data collection (See Appendix C). At the end of my time observing, I will audiotape a semi-structured interview. I will also use collected lesson plans, handouts, and rubrics as an additional source of data. A wide variety of data will be collected and analyzed and ultimately help to draw some insights to my research questions. The next section will explain the way in which I will manage and analyze the data I have collected.

**Data Management and Analysis Strategies**

Merriam (2009) states that “The overall process of data analysis begins by identifying segments in your data set that are responsive to your research questions” (p. 176). In the case of my research, then, I expect to witness Mrs. K adapting to the individual needs of her students both within the space of a single day and over the entire duration of my observation. I will expect to witness her establish and maintain an individual relationship with each student, evidenced by conversations and other personal interactions. I also hope to observe the purported positive effects of differentiated instruction such as students’ developing an intrinsic motivation and deep connection with the concepts that Mrs. K introduces, as well as their own projects. I hope also to witness students supporting each other and looking to Mrs. K for encouragement in a way that suggests that a learning community has been cultivated. This type of data will connect with my research questions.
Additionally, Merriam (2009) suggested keeping “track of [my] thoughts, musings, speculations, and hunches as [I] prepare [my] data for analysis” (p. 174). After each observation, I will type my notes for the purpose of having an additional set, as well as making them easier to read, and in turn, easier to organize. After these notes are typed, I will turn them into columns and print them. Once printed, I will go through them and add reflective notes. From these notes, I will then begin to develop a set of codes. These codes will be grouped, narrowed, charted, and analyzed until I have created a comprehensive framework that will help in answering my initial research questions. As Merriam (2009) would note, I will attempt to find “recurring regularities in the data” (p. 177). I am essentially hoping to identify patterns of behavior that structure Mrs. K’s classroom. Though I plan to interview Mrs. K daily after each class, after my observing is complete and my codes are created, I will conduct my formal interview with Mrs. K.

During this interview, I will be using my phone as a recorder, as well as taking diligent notes. When the interview is complete, I will transcribe this recording verbatim. As I’ve found writing notes by hand to be an effective mode of analysis, I will then go through this interview to write reflective notes and create codes. I will compare these codes into the codes that I have discovered through observation. This system will help me to discover similarities as well as differences in what I have found to be true within my data collection. I will also collect documents that the participant uses in her classroom such as rubrics, assignments, and lesson plans. This combination of materials will help me to assess the effectiveness of her particular execution of the principles of differentiated instruction. My next section will discuss any ethical issues of which I need to be aware during the course of my study.
Ethics

As I will be conducting my research within a school with a class of minors, I want to be sensitive to the students’ learning environment, as well as respectful of the teachers’ authority and classroom management. Stake (2005) notes, “Qualitative researchers are guests in the private space of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 459). Confidentiality played a large role in my ethical conduct. All participants have been referred to through pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality. Though I observed the entire class, the teacher is the participant in this study. The next section will sum up the design of study for this research. I obtained college approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that assures participants of ethical procedures.

Conclusion

The study that I will conduct is a basic qualitative case study and I will play the role of participant as observer. Through the use of observation, interview, and document analysis, I seek to uncover aspects of differentiated instruction that one high school art teacher applied in her classroom. I will be taking careful observation notes, reflecting on them, and then coding them. I will also conduct several informal interviews at the end of each period, and reflect and code this data as well. When my observations are complete, I will formally interview the participant with semi-structured interview questions, and again, reflect upon them, and code my findings. Document analysis will come from examination of lesson plans, rubrics, and student assignments.

In the following chapter, I relate the story of major findings and their relationship to differentiated instruction. I have developed a set of characteristics that I associate with
differentiated instruction according to the research that I have done, and it is these characteristics that I will use to evaluate my findings: empowerment, diversity, warm demander, constant flux, flexible grouping, harmonious classroom, involvement of student, unwavering support, investment in students, and reflective practices. I chose to use present tense in this writing in order to bring the reader closer to the environment.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

Research Setting

Upon my first visit to Suffolk High School, I sit in my car in the parking lot for a few minutes and gather my thoughts. I am about fifteen minutes early, as I had anticipated the traffic to be a little heavier at 7:00 AM. The parking lot is large and located across from the football field. Though many of the parking spots are still empty, I park in the back, assuming that seniors have the privilege of parking close to the entrance. My walk to the door is refreshing. I love the beginning of fall. Once inside, I see that the walls are adorned with impressive displays of students’ achievements, both past and present. There are large collaborative artworks from the Advanced Painting classes along the main foyer, and a glass wall painted with details of the upcoming Spirit Week. I sign in as a guest in the main office, and am greeted by several teachers on my walk to the art room. This alone puts a gigantic smile on my face. Not being fortunate enough to have my own classroom, I am reminded how much I adore the high school atmosphere.

As previously described in Chapter III, I am still impressed by the overwhelming size of this Art Department. I refer to it as an entire department because it is one gigantic area with cathedral high ceilings that is divided into four large rooms that are separated by half wall cabinets. Three of these rooms have their own sinks, and one has direct access to a kiln. Each of the rooms can be accessed from the surrounding hallway as well as between one another.

Once I’ve settled in Mrs. K’s room, I sit alone for a short while. It is only a few minutes after seven o’clock and students typically do not start trickling in until about
7:20. I look around at the posters and artworks hanging on some of the cabinets, and take notice of the piles of portfolios on Mrs. K’s desk. To an outsider like me, it seems to be a bit chaotic. However, I have a feeling that she knows exactly what is in these folders and why she has taken them out.

When Mrs. K arrives just a few minutes before the bell rings, she greets me very warmly. In the blink of an eye, the classroom fills up with 27 students. I am going to be observing her Art II class. They are currently working with vintage irons as the subject of their art pieces, and learning about shading, values, and realistic depiction of an inanimate object. It is noticeable immediately that there is not much room for personal expression in this lesson. Mrs. K gives no instruction as they take the overturned stools down from their tables, and gather their materials for the class. It appears to me that these students are comfortable in this classroom environment even though it is still the beginning of the school year.

While students start to settle into their seats, Mrs. K announces a list of reminders and suggestions to consider while they all finish their practice drawings. I watch her travel around the room, pausing to individually offer students positive reinforcement and talk with them about their lives outside of the art room. Fountain (2014) explains that “Learning occurs best for students in an environment that contains positive interpersonal relationships and interactions, as well as comfort and order, and in which the learner feels appreciated, acknowledged, respected, and validated” (p. 53). I take a moment to appreciate the way Mrs. K connects with her students, and immediately come to admire the laid back, funny, organized, authoritative persona that she exudes. It does not seem
like these are qualities that could be grouped together, but first impressions tell me that Mrs. K teaches with a happy balance of them all.

Many of the students work hard throughout the period, but make no mistake; this is a high school classroom filled with a diversity of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The lesson includes how to do shading with pencil. I immediately identify a handful of students who complain that they are “too tired to do art today,” and wonder aloud “What am I going to need to know how to shade for in real life?” I am intrigued to see how Mrs. K is going to handle these students throughout the remainder of my time here.

I really enjoy seeing the way that she deals with different students in her classroom. Some students finished their pieces completely, while other students have only just begun to shade. She walks around to talk to each student throughout the entire class period and gives them advice and instruction. They are all very respectful of her and already have a classroom routine though it is still really early in the school year.

**Classroom Climate**

When I began observing, the students were in the process of drawing vintage irons. They were learning about value and how to shade, and focusing on how to realistically portray their chosen irons. However, the students had been working for so long on drawing these irons, they began to seem bored. As previously stated, a successful way to construct curriculum is through personal relevance. Eisner argues that for a curriculum to be relevant “students must have some investment in it” (Eisner, 1979). Though I understand that learning about values and shading are an important part of the art curriculum, I do not believe that Mrs. K was able to make a connection with this lesson to the student’s lives.
A few weeks into my observations, it was time to move on from the irons, and begin working with watercolor. From a show of hands, it does not look as if many of them have had a lot of past experience with watercolor paints. Therefore, Mrs. K did a lengthy watercolor demonstration. She talked to them about taking care of the brushes; they had all just gotten brand new ones. Mrs. K went through the colors in their watercolor sets. Telling the students how most of the set do not have white because “we don’t use white in watercolor—we just use more water.” She also distinguished the difference between blue-green and turquoise, and red-orange and orange. Mrs. K showed them the process of wetting the paints, having a paper towel nearby to blot the brush, and not getting the paper too wet.

The students’ first task was to create two color wheels, one with high intensity colors, the other with neutrals. “We’re trying to mix and get nice fall colors.” The students grab their rulers and protractors right away and get to work. I am surprised by how speedy they are able to work; they absolutely look eager to start even though there is not a lot of time left. Students at this age are also extremely good at cleaning up. Mrs. K rarely announced when it was time to do so. For the most part the students appear trained to keep an eye on the clock and know when it was time and how long it takes them to clean up. Also, announcements happen immediately after this period so there are technically three minutes of extra clean up if they absolutely need it. I wondered how Mrs. K developed the managerial skills that I was witnessing.

During an interview when asked what instances have helped shaped her career as an art teacher, Mrs. K tells me, while wiping charcoal from her hands:
I have worked with great art teachers. And...every art teacher that I’ve worked with, I’ve taken stuff from. Even being a student of great art teachers, as I told you my elementary art teacher, I know what I want to be like with the kids because I know what she was like with me. And then I also have seen some bad art teachers, and I’ve had bad art teachers. So I know that I don’t want to do what they did, ya know? When I got up to the high school, definitely that turned me into a much better teacher because I was able to work with three other fabulous art teachers that had been here for years and years. They’ve retired ten years ago. Plus, I would sit in their classrooms. Really, just respect them. So, what you see a lot of today and of course, a little bit of me, mostly me, I’ve gotten these techniques. Working with the students, getting to know their lives. That’s what, coming to the high school and working really closely in this big environment. We’ve got these open classrooms so it’s not like I have to knock. Just go down and sit with someone. Go into somebody’s class and really see how they act with the kids. And I think that’s what changed me as being a high school teacher because I came from middle school and elementary school.

(Interview with Mrs. K, 12/5/2013)

This interview satisfied my wonderings about how Mrs. K learned her skills as an art teacher. However, I wondered what made her feel prepared to teach successfully with theories of differentiated instruction. Mrs. K has been an art teacher for 25 years in the Suffolk school district, and it is apparent that she is very comfortable in her own classroom. She exudes confidence as a teacher, as well as an artist. After about eight weeks of observation she has made me laugh out loud many times. I would describe Mrs.
K as laid back, witty, organized, and authoritative. The students listen to her when she speaks to them in a way that makes me feel as though they carry respect for her. In over two months of observation, I did not witness any severe behavioral incidents in Mrs. K’s classroom. Without a doubt, there was a sense of ‘harmony’ between teachers, students, and curriculum and instruction. Fountain (2014) advises that “providing the appropriate balance of support and challenge to draw students into meaningful learning that engages them and keeps them connected” (p. 10). Mrs. K seemed to use this technique in order to maintain a well-behaved classroom climate. However, the aspects required for meaningful learning seemed to be absent.

The first period Art II class where I conducted my research began at 7:35 every morning. Nearly every day, students would come to class with breakfast foods they had purchased from the school cafeteria. Consequently, every day Mrs. K would casually tell them not to eat in class, and to finish up quickly. Though the students were seemingly disobeying Mrs. K by continuing to bring food to class, I felt that she was understanding of how early these students are asked to be at school. I observed this to be an instance of “picking your battles,” Mrs. K never made a scene about the breakfast food, therefore the students never argued with her. This seemingly became one of the ways in which Mrs. K connected with her students.

One cold morning, when two girls were acting particularly difficult, I observed Mrs. K handle the situation with great ease. The class was nearing the end of their second project (a realistic watercolor painting of a leaf), and some people were getting eager to move on. First, I watched as Mrs. K asked the first student to remove her hat several times. She must have asked at least a dozen times, but still, the student kept her hat safe...
on her head. It happens that this hat-wearing student was getting bored and eager to move on, just like the student that sat across from her. After Mrs. K had the entire class settled and working, she took a seat with these two young ladies. In a very conversational and casual way, she asked the first student why on earth she still had her hat on. The student replied “Because my hair will stick up.” I watched as Mrs. K gave her a side smile and a disapproving look. She said something like “It’s going to stick up? Well, okay. I’m going to get in trouble because I’m your first period teacher though,” and she let the student keep her hat on. I felt as though this was Mrs. K showing that she understands that her students are people, and that something like a hair-do is extremely important to a teenage girl. This situation became another example of how Mrs. K was able to connect with her students personally, even though she was not personally connecting them to the artwork.

After the hat instance was settled, Mrs. K began to show the two students how they can begin mixing together a gray color for the shadow of their watercolor leaves. In order to do so, the two students needed to get their leaves out, and actually observe the shadows they create when laid on the table. Mrs. K exclaimed with a straight face, “Will the real leaf please stand up?” She gave the girls a side smile and said “See? I told you I’m kinda funny.” The girls laughed and got their leaves out. The tension that was in the air when Mrs. K initially sat down with them seemed to relax, and the girls followed her instructions. Through a bit of humor and understanding, Mrs. K was able to bond with her students on a personal level every day. This action is reminiscent of a nurturing community in which each student is made to feel valuable (Fountain 2014).
The next week, in the middle of class, Mrs. K began to tell the students how she was going to be out of town on Friday. The reason was that she was going to Toronto with her family for the weekend to see the David Bowie exhibit at the museum there. I watched as she made her way to one of the students’ tables and pulled up a chair. She began to tell them all the things that she liked about David Bowie, and how when she was a sophomore in high school she wore red shoes to school every day because of his song. She talked about this for maybe 10 minutes. Though it wasn’t much, the students would stop working to look up at her and smile. It was clear that they were really listening to her. I observed many instances similar to this, which I have come to believe play a strong role in the positive classroom climate that Mrs. K has created. Fountain (2014) explains that teachers who practice differentiated instruction should provide an “investment in students that shows them they matter and that they are worth their teacher’s time” (p.10). From my observations, Mrs. K is invested in each of her students.

One week, a student who is very talented, but typically works very slowly in class brought in some of his own chalk pastel drawings to show Mrs. K. She told him she had something that she could spray on to them to help preserve them, and praised his work. Her ability to take interest in her students outside of the work that they complete in class is another way that she is able to form a bond with them. This reminds us Fountain’s (2014) notion of the warm demander. A warm demander is a teacher who pushes students to achieve more than they think possible, while also supporting them and helping them to believe in themselves and their abilities (p. 67).

This same week, Mrs. K did a demonstration teaching the students how they can go about matching the color on their leaf with their watercolor palette. She showed the
students several different ways to mix color, and gave them instructions of matching the color to their leaves, painting a swatch on their papers, and writing down what color combinations they used. This way, when it is time to paint their real leaf, they would be ready with the correct color palette. Through this process, Mrs. K is providing her students with the tools and knowledge of color for students to be able to make their work. I found that once the students were back at their desks, they worked very quietly. They seemed excited to actually start with the paint now, rather than just working on color wheels. Anticipation was in the air. Later, Mrs. K read the students a story while they worked, “The Last Leaf,” by O. Henry. Though the story was interesting and related to the project well, it still did not provide a personal connection for the students. It was written in Old English, and very hard to understand. This point of the project may have been a good opportunity to employ an aspect of differentiated instruction, and turn to the students to discover connections that could be made to the project in order for them to increase their investment in its outcome. Differentiated instruction has the potential to provide students with increased content understanding, learner empowerment, as well as increased academic achievement (Sgiliano & Hipsky, 2012).

Throughout the duration of my time observing, I had always thought that the class next door was a bit too loud (the one downfall to the half walls that separate the classrooms). On the day of this story, finally, Mrs. K recognized how much noise the class next door makes and asked them to keep it down because she would be reading a story. After she did this, she did make sure to make mention to her class that though they are noisy next door, they produce beautiful artwork.
For the most part, I felt like the class worked diligently throughout the reading. I was able to quietly help a few students that trickled in late, and write some passes for the bathroom, as to not interrupt Mrs. K. When she was finished reading, she asked the class if they understood the story. Students mumbled a variety of different answers around the room. She joked that she had hoped they were listening because there would be a graded quiz tomorrow on the main characters names, and the message of the story. This caused an absolute uproar. I think that it must be all high school students, not just Mrs. K’s class, but these students have become absolutely obsessed with their grades. Mrs. K has told me something like “If they’re asked to do something just for practice or for fun, chances are that it is not going to get done. If the teacher tells them it’s worth 10 points, it’s done with a smile on their face.”

**Expectations and Curriculum**

I believe that the experience that Mrs. K had in elementary school and middle school developed serious organization into her teaching. Because of this organization, her class always has a very clear understanding of what their expectations are. She is constantly reminding the students what is due, when it’s due, and how many points it will be worth. When asked about how she plans her curriculum, Mrs. K responded by saying

We always start our Art I and Art II classes with observational drawing. And we have certain things that every year we do to learn the technique of observational drawing. So we go and we talk about contour drawing, blind contour drawing, then we get into value and value shading, and talk about proportion. So it’s all about observation. Then we talk about composition. So then we go into the tricycle. So then we’re talking about composition and how you’re going to lay
things out on the page to make it look beautiful (positive and negative space). Then we talk, then I might give them like a ribbon project, they can do their own composition but they’re going to be working with techniques that they’ve used from before, like the bicycle. We’ll be doing the colored pencil. So they can use that colored pencil with the ribbons. (Interview with Mrs. K, 12/5/2013)

Given the research I’ve done up until this point, and my observations in Mrs. K’s classroom, it seems that Mrs. K is using activities that teach skills and techniques in observation and composition in her classes year after year. And she is building on prior knowledge in developing these skills and techniques, however, some aspects of differentiated instruction seem absent in her curriculum. For instance, Fountain (2014) lists characteristics of instruction provided by a teacher who practices differentiated instruction:

- Helps students make connections to their lives and their world by building on prior knowledge or experiences.
- Has purpose that does not simply fill time but uses it wisely to help students gain essential knowledge, understanding, and skills. (p. 11)

While Mrs. K certainly was not filling time by having students develop the necessary skill and techniques to create works of art, she failed to instruct in a way that allowed students to make choices of personally meaningful ideas on which to build their artworks. These ideas would be the connection to their lives and world and the curriculum could be formed in such a way as to address each student differently. This weakness in instruction tended to take away further potential for motivation and empowerment of students.
Whether or not the students in Mrs. K’s class fully understand it, Mrs. K intends that they learn certain skills and techniques in preparation for the next hurdle in the art room. In our discussion about curriculum, Mrs. K also went on to say:

Everything that they learn in Art 1, they’ll use for Art 2. Hopefully then, if they take the advanced drawing, I’ll say ya know remember your composition with the bike. We’re going to use a viewfinder to try and get the composition of the still life. It’s not just one object. Now you have a lot of different objects. So you’re always thinking about little benchmarks that the kids can master. So that the next year, or the next project, they’ll ya know, be building on. (Interview with Mrs. K, 12/5/2013)

Throughout my weeks of observation, it is also apparent that Mrs. K always has students “practice” before they move on to a final copy of their artwork. She has told me that she does this to help show a student’s progression throughout a project, and has also shared with me that she makes absolutely everything worth a grade. She has found that with high school students that if it has any effect on their grade, they will put more effort in. When interviewed, Mrs. K said:

Yeah, everything’s graded so that they’ll do it. And that’s what I’ve found works best with high school students. (She laughs.) Middle school students, they don’t care about their grade as much. [They think] Oh my gosh, I’m gonna pass anyways. The high school students, this art grade, it effects their overall averages. So we grade every little sketch and everything they do in class. They’re working. (Interview with Mrs. K, 12/5/2013)
Mrs. K’s evaluative practice attempts to offer individualized assessment as opposed to applying an empirical set of standards that does not account for each student’s growth over the course of the semester, and even over the course of one project. Mrs. K believes that by making each assignment graded and requiring students to present her with examples of their progress, she is better able to assess the development of each individual student’s skills.

Though I applaud the schedule that Mrs. K implements for her students, she seemed very easygoing when it comes to following the schedule. Her method depends on her empathy for students and acknowledges that differentiated instruction requires her to be more generous and less rigid about things like deadlines. Two weeks into their leaf project, students were continuing to work on their color wheels, while others practiced drawing realistic leaves in their sketchbooks. One student who was absent the previous Friday, expressed to me that she didn’t know what they were supposed to be working on because she thought the color wheels were supposed to be completed by Friday. I feel like this happens quite a bit, which seems to be holding back some of the more advanced students. Thus, these more advanced students were not being engaged throughout the entirety of the lesson, which demonstrated that differentiated instruction was not being implemented. Though Ms. K has high expectations for students’ completion of work and their work ethic, in addition to achieving a certain level of knowledge, skill and technique in art, the balance between satisfying the needs of individual students, particularly the advanced students, seemed disproportionate as it related to pacing of curriculum in this instance. In the following section, I further address student’s varying needs.
Different Students with Different Needs

After many conversations with Mrs. K, it has become apparent that the high school art classroom is a place filled with many different students, with many different motivations for being there. Some students sign up for art because they genuinely love art, some students fill an empty spot in their schedule, and some are seniors trying complete credit hours. Regardless of what motivates students to take the class, the teacher’s job to reach each of them the best that they can. When asked about her thoughts on differentiated instruction, Mrs. K replied

Well I do like to move around the classroom and say be up at the board, or have them come closer to me. Do groups. Ya know maybe just work in a little group that ya know might need more help. I’ll call five people over and say “Okay, you guys need a little help with this,” I think it’s just, you can’t just expect everyone to get it from the first demo. If I see one child that’s, ya know or a few that aren’t really getting it, I’ll pull them to the side. If I see that they’re all not getting it, I’ll call them back to the board the next day, I’ll have another demonstration. Um, I’m trying to think. Differentiated Instruction. Because of the different levels that we have with these classes that aren’t advanced classes, they kind of like mix everybody up. You have to kind of think on your feet, and ya know obviously teach so they can aspire to do their best.

Mrs. K’s description of differentiated instruction via group work echoes Carol Ann Tomlinson’s description of one of the principles that govern differentiated instruction (2000). This kind of group work also reflects a flexible classroom, which is an
effective and ongoing assessment of learning goals, flexible grouping, and respectful activities and learning arrangements (Tomlinson & Allen 2000).

Based on this interview, as well as many weeks of observation, it is very clear that Mrs. K has a great passion for her job as an art educator, and that she genuinely cares for her students. She is constantly motivating her students as a whole and individually. I asked how she plans for the different levels of student needs in her class, Mrs K. told me

And then there’s going to be students that even after you’ve demo’d it, you’ve talked about positive and negative space, you show them so many things on the board; they’re still not getting it. And then you’ve got the students in between. They get it, but ya know, it takes them a little longer to draw. So it seems like if I give them little. . .“Ok, by tomorrow we should have this done, by the next day you’re going to be getting your good paper.” If I just keep on telling them where they should be, the kids that are kind of falling behind, at least they know where they should be so that they could come in a period extra or two to kind of catch up. I don’t teach down to them. So I always have them strive to be their very best.

So, they’re gonna have to do it ya know?

She continues,

Some kids just, they never need to come in extra; they never need to. . .They might have a little extra time but usually not because I feel that the kids that have this great quality and talent, they go a little slower because they’re perfectionists. The kids that are in the middle, they tend to go a little faster because sometimes they don’t have that control with their pencil, so it kind of all works out.
In the excerpt above, Mrs. K expresses how she tries to manage the pacing of the class and expectations for low, middle and high achievers. This interview, however, supported that she does not have a complete understanding of what differentiated instruction is in relation to the content of her curriculum.

**Conclusion**

The weeks that I have spent observing at Suffolk High School were incredibly helpful. Mrs. K has shown me that reaching out to her students on a personal level allows students to feel comfortable in her class, and consequently, they become more engaged and eager to please her. Mrs. K also sets many attainable goals for her students, and constantly reminds them of their expectations as artists. Mrs. K also recognizes the different capabilities and personalities of the students in her classes, and attempts to make sure that they have an appropriate amount of work to stay challenged.

At this point in her teaching career Mrs. K’s methodology is implicitly informed by the principles of differentiated instruction, though it appears that she no longer needs to make these efforts explicit. Rather, one can see in Mrs. K’s lessons an apparently internalized differentiated method of instruction that has become automatic in her daily practice.

In this chapter, I summarized my experiences with Mrs. K in terms of the codes that arose as I read and reread observation notes, transcriptions, and reflective memos. The essential categories that emerged were: empowerment, diversity, warm demander, constant flux, flexible grouping, harmonious classroom, involvement of student, unwavering support, investment in students, and reflective practices. My next chapter will discuss how this effective teacher used aspects of differentiated instruction especially
in classroom management. The weaknesses lie in curriculum formation.
Chapter V: Results and Recommendations

When I began this study, my driving force was my desire to learn more about differentiated instruction, and to understand how one practically applies it to an art classroom. Overall, I hoped to observe techniques that I would be one day be able to apply to my own classroom. Primarily, I am convinced that differentiated instruction does not necessarily need to be a conscious practice, rather a teaching lifestyle.

What I Have Learned

Mrs. K is an art teacher that has taught art from kindergarteners to seniors in high school. She received her master’s degree from a regional state college 25 years ago, when she was hired as a full time teacher in the Suffolk school district. Though I know her credentials to be impressive, and her career to be successful, I have come to realize that she does not fully understand what the practice of differentiated instruction looks like. However, her misunderstanding of this concept does not change my opinion of her outstanding performance as an art teacher. Rather, it is additional proof that teachers that have received their degrees several years ago do not fully know how the “new” concepts in education are being applied and practiced. This can be a major problem for the field of art.

I found Mrs. K’s teaching style to employ many aspects of differentiated instruction based on Fountain (2014): unwavering support that helps students to believe in themselves and reach higher levels of accomplishment, investment in students that shows them that they matter and that they are worth their teachers’ time, and reflective practices that consistently assess teachers’ actions and their students’ actions, needs, hopes, and fears as a way to guide future classroom practice. However, when I asked her
directly about differentiated instruction, she stumbled slightly over her words and her answer seemed to focus on merely one characteristic of differentiated instruction (group work). Actually, the focus seems to be on classroom management, motivation, individualized instruction, and student self-efficacy which are all important parts of differentiated instruction. But the weakness in her knowledge base as it should be within differentiated instruction lies within the content of the curriculum she is teaching. If differentiated instruction depends on devising a curriculum or problem such that each student has opportunity to solve the problem in a meaningful way to them, then Mrs. K’s curriculum is weak as far as differentiated instruction goes. She depends on teaching technique and skill in art at the expense of each student’s expression of their meaningful ideas. Hence at Suffolk there were more sophisticated versions of what I saw in elementary school during my student teaching. All student work is of the same subject matter and hence less meaningful in idea or concept to them. More thought needs to be given in terms of how to devise conceptually-based curriculum in art using differentiated instruction.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

A more in depth study might collect data from more than one school district, and more than one grade level. I would be interested to find out what differentiated instruction in an elementary art classroom looks like, as they are much less independent than high school students.

**Conclusions**

As Tomlinson (2001) noted, differentiated instruction is a philosophy for teaching that involves providing each student, regardless of culture, ability, motivation,
socioeconomic status, language, gender, interests, and more (Tomlinson, 1999), with a pathway to learning in terms of: acquiring content; processing, constructing, or making sense of ideas; and developing teaching materials and assessment measures so that all students within a classroom can learn effectively, regardless of an array of differences. The method of assessment as well as the project or assignment may look different for each child, however the skill or concepts taught may be the same. Inclusive classrooms that generally refer to ability levels become only one part of a differentiated classroom. By considering the varied learning needs in each classroom, teachers can develop personalized instruction so that all children in the classroom can learn effectively (Tomlinson, 1999). So Tomlinson would agree that the managerial aspects of differentiated instruction are but a part; the conceptually based curriculum is a way to engage and empower students in personally meaningful lessons.

Therefore, as Tomlinson (1999) noted, in differentiation teachers proactively adjust teaching and learning methods to accommodate each child's learning needs and preferences in order to achieve his or her maximum growth as a learner. Teachers are responsive to student variety in readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles (Lawrence-Brown, 2004). The teacher may set different expectations for task completion for students based upon their individual needs or the demands of the lesson may vary. I did not observe Ms. K using tangible pre-assessment measures to gauge student readiness nor examine their learning profiles in order to employ differentiated instruction, I did observe her care in relation to student interest, even though she did not allow students to choose the content or ideas in making their art. She used the same content or subject matter for the entire class, such as drawing an iron, a tricycle, or using watercolor to
render fall leaves. However, her ability to relate to students on an individual basis, to command their respect, and show them her care while holding them accountable for the work was her strong suit.

Through the duration of conducting this study, I better understood the definition of differentiated instruction and the benefits that it might have in an art classroom. I was able to see what some aspects of differentiated instruction look like in an art classroom, and have come to believe that there is no singular way that differentiated instruction needs to be practiced. Overall this study led me to a conclusion that differentiated instruction is an umbrella term for practices that can be applied in many different ways using a combination of techniques that will best help each individual in a class. From my observations I learned that new theories of art education are often overlooked or misunderstood by teachers in the field, though they are very good teachers in the areas they cover. Their pedagogy is therefore limited, and professional development in this area in particular might be useful to these teachers. In this way, differentiated instruction, or practices of any contemporary theory, could be done more effectively.

The literature review that I did prior to my observation of Mrs. K’s classroom gave me the framework I needed to evaluate her practical application of the theoretical principles of differentiated instruction. My observation of Mrs. K’s classroom and my subsequent interview with her offered me the opportunity to attain key insights into the freedom that differentiated instruction allows for both teacher and student in the art room, especially in classroom management. I learned that, rather than a strict, formulaic method of teaching, differentiated instruction is rather a “fuzzy” set of principles that grant the
teacher more room to plan lessons according to the unique student interests as well as the teacher’s strengths.

With both the research I’ve completed and my observation experience, I hope to take this somewhat comprehensive or all-encompassing term—differentiated instruction—and make it an intrinsic part of my teaching practice. I hope to find a balanced and rewarding way to practice this pedagogy, capitalizing on the individual’s culture, ability, motivation, socioeconomic status, language, gender, interests, and more (Tomlinson, 1999) of my students and me. Additionally, in the face of the many restrictions placed on students’ ability to express themselves as unique individuals, it seems important to maintain at least one space, being the art space, in their educational career where their uniqueness is neither erased nor silenced, but always embraced. My hope is that other teachers may gain knowledge and understanding from my efforts.
References


Hall, T., Strangman, N., & Meyer, A. (2003). Differentiated instruction and


Appendix A: Principal Consent Form

9/12/2013

Dear Principal,

I am writing this letter to ask your permission for your art teacher, Mrs. K’s classes to be a part of a special art study in the fall of 2013. As part of my Masters project in Art Education at Buffalo State, I wish to document how art teachers use aspects of differentiated instruction in their art classrooms.

Data will be collected through careful observations during classes, formal interviews with the teacher, as well as analysis of documents, such as lesson plans, assignments, and photographs of student’s final products. No photographs will be taken of students or teacher. When writing my research, all identifying factors of participants in the study will be removed, and pseudonyms with be used for students, teachers, and location in order to protect your school’s privacy.

Please indicate your support or non-support of this research and sign below. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you,
Kristen Bartkowski

Please check an option.

_____ I give permission for you to conduct this research study with students

_____ I do NOT give permission for you to conduct this research study with students

Please print, sign, and date the line below.

Principal Name (Print) _______________________________

Principal Name (Sign) _______________________________ Date ______

**If you are unable to reach a member of the research team and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Gina Game, IRB Administrator, SUNY Research Foundation of Buffalo State at (716) 878-6700 or gameg@rf.buffalostate.edu.
Appendix B: Teacher Consent Form

9/12/2013

Dear Teacher,

I am writing this letter to ask your permission for you to be a part of a special art study in the fall of 2013. As part of my Masters project in Art Education at Buffalo State, I wish to document how art teachers use aspects of differentiated instruction in their art classrooms.

Data will be collected through careful observations during classes, formal interviews with the teacher, as well as analysis of documents, such as lesson plans, assignments, and photographs of student’s final products. No photographs of students will be taken. When writing my research, all identifying factors of participants in the study will be removed, and pseudonyms with be used for students, teachers, and location in order to protect your school’s privacy.

Please indicate your support or non-support of this research and sign below. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you,
Kristen Bartkowski

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Please check an option.

_____ I give permission for you to conduct this research study with students

_____ I do NOT give permission for you to conduct this research study with students

Please print, sign, and date the line below.

Teacher Name (Print) _______________________________

Teacher Name (Sign) _______________________________ Date _____

**If you are unable to reach a member of the research team and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Gina Game, IRB Administrator, SUNY Research Foundation of Buffalo State at (716) 878-6700 or gameg@rf.buffalostate.edu.
9/3/2013
Appendix C: Semi Structured Interview Questions for Art Teacher

Why did you become an art teacher?

Was it a love for teaching, or a love of art?

How long have you been a teacher here?

What did you get your master’s degree in?

How do you plan your curriculum?

Do you consider students’ past art experiences when planning your curriculum?

How do you plan for the variety of levels of student needs in your classes?

What are your thoughts on differentiated instruction?

   Do you feel that you incorporate any aspects of differentiated instruction in your classroom?

How do you implement classroom routine? (i.e. discipline, organization, demonstrations)

   How many years of teaching did you go through before you discovered what strategies worked best for you?

Are there any specific instances that you can recall throughout your history as an art teacher, that have helped shape the teacher you are today?

What teaching strategies do you feel work best for you?

When your students start to work at different levels, and paces, what do you do?

What do you think your best qualities are as an art teacher?

Do you have any advice for teachers who are just beginning their career?
Appendix D: Visual Abstract

**Research Questions:**
- What does the practice of differentiated instruction look like in a high school art classroom?
- What does an art teacher need to consider when planning and executing differentiated instruction?
- How does differentiated instruction benefit and/or challenge art teaching practices?
- What can I learn from art teachers who practice differentiated instruction?

**Problem Statement:**
My study was prompted by the realization that many classrooms are still structured in a way that treats students as if their learning needs are identical, despite the known problems with this style of teaching (Allan and Tomlinson, 2000).

**Review of Literature:**
Exploring Differentiated Instruction; Classroom Space; Constructivism in Differentiated Instruction; Understanding Learners

**Data Collection Method:**
Through the use of observation, interview, and document analysis, I sought to uncover aspects of differentiated instruction that one high school art teacher applied in her classroom over a period of twelve weeks for one period per day. I took careful observation notes during each visit, conducted daily informal interviews and one semi-structured interview at the end of the period of research.

**Research Findings:**
The essential differentiated instruction categories that emerged were: empowerment, diversity, warm demander, constant flux, flexible grouping, harmonious classroom, involvement of student, unwavering support, investment in students, and reflective practices. The weaknesses lie in curriculum formation and conceptually-based curriculum.