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Growing the Next Generation

Action Research Project

Luke T. Campbell

Western Oregon University

ED 659

Graduation Date: June 11, 2022

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED

Action Research Project Title:

How I Became a Better Social Studies Educator

Graduate Student: Luke Campbell

Candidate for the degree of : Master of Arts in Teaching: Initial Licensure

and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment of the requirements of this master's degree.

Committee Chair:

Name: Melanie Landon-Hays & Amy Bowden

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Date: 06/07/2022

Committee Member:

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ABSTRACT

This study is just the beginning of my research into how to become a better teacher, because I plan to always be looking for ways to improve. I hope to learn how to continuously improve my craft as a teacher and not become stagnant or jaded. I see how far I've come already, and I see where I can be as I observe other professionals in my craft. I think my teaching will improve as I try new things, challenge myself and my students, and interact with more students. My teaching style will become leaner as I drop the extraneous and focus on what is important, which is the growth of my students. The research literature I've found iterates my purpose, in that there are many others like me striving to become better teachers to help their students grow as people.

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Chapter 1

Philosophy of Education

Becoming a teacher has been a lifelong journey. It has taken me a while, but I gained the experience and confidence to finally enter the world of teaching. Over that time, the concept of the teacher I'd like to be adapted through high school, community college, university, traveling, working a retail job, more traveling, working in a school for the first time, and still changes today as new information and ideas are presented to me through the Master of Arts in teaching program at Western Oregon University.

From the beginning I knew that I wanted to be a teacher with real-world experience. I remember a history teacher I had in high school talking about the time he shot a grenade launcher in the Army. To a 15-year-old, that was really cool. While I still have not shot a grenade launcher, I value the random lessons from everyday occurrences of life. Because of my path I know how *not* to be scammed by someone on the street asking for money (they probably won't give you change), how to make a cold call, and what to do when you see a bear. How is this beneficial when it comes to teaching? I've learned that life is unexpected, people have differing perspectives, and this world is much bigger than me.

To become a teacher means that I must be a lifelong learner. This program has given me the chance to reflect on my past experiences with new information, resulting in growth. With a new perspective I can continue to challenge myself out of my comfort zone, and maybe continue to find my place in this world. One must learn about themselves if they are to know their place in the world. "Awareness of one's self is the beginning of learning" (Deloria, Jr. & Wildcat, 2001, p. 13). The process of discovering oneself is cyclical. We should learn to be okay with change, hardships, and growth. To me, that is learning. I am seeing my students experience hardship and

watch as they are forced to grow because the world around them dictates that they do so. What can I teach my students to help them? How do I teach them to begin becoming aware of themselves, their strengths, and weaknesses? Is that even my job?

Now that I am on the verge of becoming a teacher, I ask myself what it really means to be a teacher, and to teach the youth of our nation. Teaching is complicated, for that, I am sure. It is not straightforward, not an exact science, no matter how hard we try to standardize and make education the same for everyone.

I am going to become a history teacher. To some, maybe many, that means I will expect my students to remember names of important people, places, things, and dates. I believe some people think that history is all memorization. Teaching history in the United States may be considered this, but creating history is far from simple memorization. Students should be taught the historical processes of sourcing, collaboration, and contextualization. This will begin the move away from expecting students to remember “historical knowledge.” Paulo Freire (2018) says, “liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information” (p 79). History is much more than getting the right answer on a multiple-choice test. History is the story of humankind, and it encompasses everything; there is no other word that can relate to every topic, question, or idea besides history. Everything humans create *is* history, would that be a conversation between two people or the Olympic games. History is the ability to critically analyze our past and ask questions that better help us understand ourselves.

There are a limitless number of lessons to be learned through studying history. What lessons, then, do I teach? What lessons will my students want to learn? Not only do I have to discover what my students want to learn, but I must learn how I can teach them. Each student is a different puzzle. They have lived a unique life, affected by everything from the language their

parents speak, to the place they were born, and to the food that they eat. They have had different teachers and mentors before arriving in my classroom, and when it comes to learning, they have different wants and needs. Some can pop music in and plug away at an assignment, while others need silence. Some may not understand all the words in a text, while others have already read the text twice. I am finding that some students don't like to be in the middle or front of the classroom. They may feel like everyone is looking at them or they are surrounded. There is nothing wrong with any of these students. I need to know my students to best help them and ensure that they are in a good learning environment.

Getting to know my students is my number one priority. When I first came into the classroom as a student teacher, I had a lot of work to do in order to build rapport with my students. My first task was to get to know everyone's names. From there, I've begun to learn each and every student's friends, study habits, or parts of their home life. Each student is a puzzle that has to be solved to unlock their full potential. I believe aiming for your full potential is the reason for receiving an education. I want my students to make mistakes, be okay asking for help, and learn how to ask questions. I want my students to be involved in their own work, to make an effort to learn and challenge themselves, and experience life.

By the time students are in my history class they are close to achieving adulthood and the 'real world.' According to Grace Lee Boggs (2012),

...when Education involves young people in making community changes that matter to them, when it gives meaning to their lives in the present instead of preparing them only to make a living in the future, young people begin to believe in themselves and to dream of the future. (ch. 5, p. 9)

The change that I can hope my students make will be in the community. That is where we have the most influence. My classroom will be a large part of my community but goes further than the students attending classes. It is their siblings and their parents. It is the businesses that their families own and the streets that we all live on. We are in it together and will have to talk and work together to make change.

Hopefully, by my actions and my words, I can help my students grow and become more *human* human beings. My stepdad has a saying for dinners or get-togethers that I have somewhat stolen and run with: “inclusive, not exclusive.” I want to include as many people as possible in my teaching and have my students do the same. I don’t want them to shun someone because of that other person’s education level, class, or skin color. We are all human, and to accept others—their worries, ideas, and beliefs—into our lives is how we become more human. Just because society has determined that someone is on the ‘lower rung’ doesn’t mean that person isn’t human. Their voice should still be valued and heard. I want my students to understand that society has created the perception that being “on top” means you are *important* and have *influence*. I don’t think that’s the case; we all have influence over our worlds.

If my goal is to get my students to live their lives to the fullest potential, to be involved in their communities and worlds, how do I get my students to that point? What steps can I take in a history class that somehow creates some self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation in my students to become part of the world? What does it look like to teach life lessons through history, or through any class for that matter? When thinking about these questions, I should think about myself. Have any of my teachers been able to do these wonderful things? Have I really had a great mentor in my life with all the answers? No, I don’t think so, and I believe that I often rely upon myself to make sense of the world. But who gave me the ability to rationalize, question, and

hypothesize? I couldn't attribute this to one person, but instead to a conglomeration of all the experiences I've had and the people whom I've met, in and out of a classroom. Learning doesn't stop at the bell or when a student leaves a building that has been arbitrarily dedicated to the concept of growth. There is no one place, and definitely no one way, to learn. Growth and life continue on whether we'd like it to or not.

Just like I am motivated to become a teacher, I have been motivated to learn through living my life. Before I knew that the term "growth mindset" existed, I'd like to think that I had a growth mindset. Now that I do know about it, I can begin to tailor my thoughts and actions into continually growing. I am not stuck as the person I was 10 years ago with no confidence to become a teacher. I am not always going to be the person I am now. I can change, and I can think about what I want that change to look like. And if I know what I want my life to look like, I can take the steps to get there. That's what I've been doing the last 10 years: gaining experience to become the person I am now, ready to teach and continue to learn. If I can do this for myself, my goal is to instill this mindset into my students.

But how do I foster the practice of thinking with a growth mindset into my students? How do I get my students to think in the first place? Learning comes through thinking. I wrote this earlier, but writing that for a second time I begin to not believe that is not always the case. Learning can come from the repetition of tasks, until it becomes muscle memory. There are things that I have learned and will respond to subconsciously, à la Pavlov's dog. And now near the end of the first chapter that is to be the process of how I'm going to be a better teacher, I've already thought about changing my thoughts on learning. At least I am somewhat prepared for this, as I expected my perspective to change when confronted with a new idea. To go along with this, what will my students learn from me that I don't expect them to? If not all learning is done

on purpose, how do I account for the ‘accidental’ learning that my students will inevitably experience?

I think I can prepare my students for the inevitability that unexpected things are going to happen in their lives. Are they going to fight or fly? Can I realistically prepare them to do one or the other? What is something that I can teach to all of my students? I can try to instill a growth mindset, foster their ability to critically think, or improve their literacy skills. In the end, it is up to my students to make the choice how they want to live their lives. I think through all the lessons, and the lessons within those lessons, the big idea that I want my students to know is that they have the freedom and capability to learn to choose the lives they want.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Purposes and Objectives for the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to discover what it means to be a successful teacher and to equip myself with the tools and knowledge that have been laid out by others before me. This will allow me to continue the work of improving our students, and our society, in hopes of not just making a difference through myself but giving my students the ability to do better than I could ever hope for. Paulo Freire echoed this sentiment (2018) when he said that “...only through communication can human life hold meaning” (p. 77). In a way, then, I’d say that through my studies that I have researched the meaning of life.

I focused on ways to become a better communicator to teach my students to also become better communicators. I narrowed my research down into three different sub-themes. First, I searched for information to improve my skills at differentiation because I believe without knowing and teaching to every student, I will not be a successful teacher. Second, I researched the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) because it is an extension of differentiation and allows for concrete strategies based on how and why humans learn. And third, I researched strategies on becoming a better reader through a historian’s lens because reading is one of the most important aspects of communication. History is a concept that includes every human interest, activity, and idea, and it is what we leave behind for the next generations.

Procedures for the Literature Review

I selected literature for this review based on several criteria. First, I wanted recent literature, keeping my scope to anything after the year 2000. If possible, I narrowed that down even further to 2010.

I searched my three sub themes separately, the topics being the main keyword (differentiation, UDL, and literacy or reading). With all three topics I then looked for literature that involved high school social studies classrooms but I found more research when I broadened my search to any classroom. I found the most research on differentiation, with many articles (ranging in the thousands) on the topic. I had a similar experience of finding almost too much literature with UDL. Finding literature specifically on literacy and reading in a high school social studies classroom proved more difficult. For this topic, I relied heavily on using the sources of a few main articles that I gathered, from my search on social studies classrooms. Most of the time English Language Arts (ELA) classes were also involved. Eventually, with all subthemes, I chose to exclude special education. This is not to exclude special education entirely, but I wanted to find literature on general education classes that are also inclusive to students in special education. For most of my research, I used the EBSCO database and Google scholar.

Teaching is a Daily, Beautiful, Struggle

Communicating an idea to my students can be difficult. With that frame of mind, every idea could be difficult for students to understand. But there is nothing that students cannot learn, even if it takes more time or some assistance. You become the best teacher when you help make your students the best that they can be. The ‘job’ of a teacher is an amalgamation of many roles: leader, learner, counselor, cat herder, sophist, devil’s advocate, etc. When you work with over a hundred young minds every day, there is no day that is alike. These things I have learned teaching and have been reinforced by literature made by so many others experiencing the same thing.

About halfway through collecting research for this literature review I had the realization that all of these authors are normal, everyday, human beings. They are all reflecting on how to

better the education system; the same system that they were a part of for all their primary years, and which may or may not have prepared them for the task. I believe the people trying to make things better for our students, as in improving literacy, are the lucky ones. We have the privilege to reflect on our education history, question and challenge norms, and fight for the futures of our students.

There were many questions asked in the literature I researched. From the questions of others, I made my own, like who are my students? What is the purpose of them receiving an education? What am I teaching them? Why am I teaching them history? What is history? What is *teaching* history? I could go on. I may not have the answers to these questions, yet. The answers to these questions could be different for me than any other social studies teacher, although I think the point is for all of us to be at least on the same page about the important things. So then, what is important? I think that answer is obvious, and it is our students.

A Review of Differentiation

Differentiation is at the core of my philosophy of education. The term differentiation is an idea; the ideal classroom where every student is a learner at every opportunity. The term differentiation to me is like utopia; it's the gold standard; it's the chivalric code that all educators should strive for. Does that mean true differentiation is impossible? If we as educators see differentiation as impossible, then it will be so. Just like the idea of utopia or the chivalric code, differentiation is a product of our society. We aim to include every student in education because we know they are not. We theorize, test, reflect, and continue for the betterment of our students. If it is not us who will perfect differentiation, perhaps it will be them who will do it.

The term differentiation has been overused, over explained, and implemented in such a variety of ways that finding one definition is near impossible. The simplest definition of

differentiation comes from Tomlinson (1999), who states that it “is first and foremost good instruction” (p. 18). There are many elements to this, of course. There is a lot that makes up good instruction, including, but not limited to, classroom climate and management, teacher preparation, and student involvement. While education is all about students, you cannot have a classroom without a teacher. And Tomlinson (2013) gives us a simple yet important reminder: “The teacher is the weather maker in the classroom” (p. 3). A teacher having a bad day for any reason is going to reflect their mood onto their students. I would argue that a grumpy or tired teacher does not create a good learning environment.

The fact is that “children do not always learn what we teach” (Marshall, p. 12, 2016). When my students don’t reach learning targets I can attribute this, for now, to being a young teacher and still having much to learn, although I plan to always learn in this profession. But the above statement remains; sometimes what we teach won’t stick. What is important is to not stop just because of a bad lesson or a bad day. There's always tomorrow and there is always hope.

Education is about constant reflection. This reflection will incite action in ourselves to strive to become more *human* human beings (Boggs, 2012; Freire, 2018; Tomlinson, 1999). If we are going to differentiate successfully, that is, if we are going to give good instruction, we must think about what it means to get an education. This should be the first step for any teacher and their students. Without an end goal in mind, what is the point of differentiation? One problem is that the end goal is forever changing. Our world changes because of an innovation, a slight temperature change in our oceans, or a new generation adopts a radical idea on what life should be like. What it means to be human changes with the years, and what it means to get an education should change with it.

Proper differentiation takes time, and if you ask any teacher what their true enemy is, it is time. Time stops teachers from planning in-depth lessons that engage students or stops teachers from getting feedback quickly. Time is also the culprit for not being able to differentiate for every student. If there is a recurring theme throughout the literature, it is that differentiation is not happening because of time (Hertberg-Davis, 2009; Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, McDonald Connor, & Walker-Dalhouse, 2012; Marshall, 2016; Mills, Monk, Keddie, Renshaw, Christie, Geelan, & Gowlett, 2014).

Everyone is limited by the minutes and hours in a day. But there are better ways to use the time that we have. Rather, I think that this is a problem of self-efficacy. If teachers believe that they cannot take the time to differentiate, or if teachers think that the task to differentiate for every student is too much for them to do successfully, then they will not do it. But when differentiation is boiled down to its simplest roots it becomes part of the daily routine. As Marshall (2016) suggests, differentiation is about two questions: “What are students supposed to be learning? Are all students mastering it?” (p. 13). Teaching is a constant battle, sometimes against students who don’t want to participate, or the education system hindering progress in some way because of arbitrary hoops we must jump through. Teaching is about preparing our students for their lives, and it takes resilience to continue to try all the tricks in the book (including differentiation) to do it every day (Marshall, 2016).

One trick that teachers use often, to say that they are differentiating, is that of having gifted students, or at least students who understand the content, help lower-level students (Villamizar, 2017). Teachers may believe that their gifted students do not need differentiation and therefore only focus their efforts on differentiating for struggling learners. Gifted students are used in group activities as ‘anchors,’ or are assigned the role of tutor to another student,

again, with emphasis on helping the lower-level students, but often do not improve the knowledge and skills of the gifted learner. There are a few reasons why teachers use these unsuccessful tactics: teachers may lack content knowledge in their discipline, there is a lack of training and development for teachers on the philosophy of differentiation, and this lack of training leads to an extended amount of time that it takes for teachers to differentiate in the first place (Hertberg-Davis, 2009).

Differentiation is not only misunderstood by teachers, but also by the administrators pushing for its integration. If teachers are to implement differentiation effectively, expectations from administrators need to be clear and concrete without adding anxiety or time constraints on teachers. “Differentiation is a complex concept which is not easy to shift from a policy to a classroom context, and requires more careful explication at policy level and more support for teachers to enact” (Mills, Monk, Keddie, Renshaw, Christie, Geelan, & Gowlett, 2014, p. 331). It is impossible to clarify what a teacher must do every day to differentiate successfully, especially when everyone has a different idea of what differentiation is and what it looks like in a classroom. In one hypothetical example of what a differentiated classroom could look like, a principal described their ideal classroom in which the higher-achieving students are doing independent work while the teacher worked with one group that was struggling, and the teacher’s aide helped a third, smaller group, who had trouble with reading (Mills, Monk, Keddie, Renshaw, Christie, Geelan, & Gowlett, 2014). Even from a student-teacher’s limited knowledge of how a classroom works, I can see some problems with this scenario. This class setup plays into the myth that differentiation is basically not for higher-level students (Hertberg-Davis, 2009), assumes that every classroom will have a teacher’s aide, and that students, even the ones

who are learning at a higher level, have the motivation and self-discipline to be mostly independent in the classroom.

There seems to be a disconnect between the students in the classroom and the students described in the literature. Students want to get good grades for almost any reason besides to show that they have learned something (Tomlinson, 2005). Now, when it comes to differentiation and getting to know all my students, should I concern myself with what they think is the reason they should get good grades? They will learn something eventually, right? Even if learning is not what my students are thinking about, if I'm a good teacher, my students will learn regardless.

What grading is and what it should be are two drastically different things, at least right now. Through the practice of differentiating a class, grading nears its purer form. Grading should reflect a student's learning, but a single letter can hardly do that. In every subject, there is more to learning than what one symbol can define. 3-P grading is an answer to this (Tomlinson, 2005). For a grade to really mean something, it can be broken down into three parts: the performance or product of a student's work in class, the process they took in learning, and their overall progress over time. These three aspects paint a better picture of learning for the students and their parents. It tells both that improvement has been made, how it has been made, and what else the student can learn. At all costs, the 3-Ps should not be combined in a single letter grade because that defeats the purpose of breaking a student's learning down in the first place. The 3-P approach is not the only way to make better sense of grading. Reducing 'grade fog,' like docking points because a student forgot to write their name, or adding extra credit opportunities that don't display a student's learning is another way to differentiate grading. Other good practices to differentiate grading include grading assignments and assessments as worth more points later in

the grading cycle to emphasize student learning, and to base grades on clear learning goals that students are aware of. What is important to keep in mind is that grading and assessment are not the same thing (Tomlinson, 2005; Tomlinson, 2013).

What, then, is assessment? And what is assessment in a differentiated classroom? There are many ways that you could approach this question. What are you assessing? In my case, in a social studies class, a lot of assessment will be focused on my student's comprehension of text.

A Review of Universal Design

The idea of Universal Design (UD) comes from architecture. It is the practice of designing accessible buildings for everyone, rather than retrofitting buildings by adding ramps, elevators, or special entrances after the building was constructed to make it accessible. Since the rise of popularity of UD in architecture, academics have begun theorizing, testing, and implementing the principles into curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Universal Design is a relatively new idea to the world of education (Katz, 2013; McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2006; Meo, 2008).

The literature is on the side of implementing Universal Design to expand access to learning for all students (Meo, 2008; Snow, 2018; Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002; Katz, 2013; Vostal, & Mrachko, 2021). Because UD is a new concept to education, each person seems to have their own idea on how to implement UD, like creating SMART goals (Vostal & Mrachko, 2021), using a three-block model of implementation (Katz, 2013), or using a process that plans for all learners or PAL (Meo, 2008). The concept of UD seems simple and is one reason why it has started to take over as fast as it has. It is great that educators are beginning to think about building an inclusive curriculum from the ground up rather than adding inclusive

ideas into an already established unit or lesson. However, to create a successful universally designed curriculum, there are many aspects that educators need to keep in mind.

There is a lot of work to do before UD is universally (or widely) implemented. Just like many authors point out, universal can in no way mean that it will be effective for everyone (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002). It is unfortunate, but even the best laid lesson plan will run into its fair share of problems, and that could mean that a diverse learner does not have the same experience and learning opportunity as others. But that doesn't mean we should not attempt to create a lesson and curriculum that is based on UD. Universal Design is much like differentiation, in that educators use UD to make sure that they are giving good instruction to all their students (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002; Katz, 2013; McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2006). The reason that teachers should differentiate is the same reason that teachers should design their lesson with a universal approach in mind. We still must try to challenge our students while also ensuring that we “provide options through multiple means of engagement, provide options for content representation, and provide options for students to demonstrate understanding through their actions and expression” (Vostal & Mrachko, 2021, p. 32). All students should have the same access to the content of a lesson and have the same opportunities to express what they have learned.

An important aspect of creating a universally designed curriculum so all students can learn, and show that they have learned, is to establish goals. Goals help students' executive functions improve, like organization, impulse control, and self-monitoring. SMART is a popular acronym used to help teachers and students. SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. It is important for students to create their goals but they should not be expected to make SMART goals on their own, or just be created for them. To keep universal

design in mind, teachers must allow for multiple ways for students to express their learning. This means that when setting SMART goals teachers need to know what their students should be learning. A goal should not be so narrow that it limits students in their expressions, but open so students can reach the goal with the means that they have (Vostal & Mrachko, 2021). An example that Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson (2002) use is human flight. If a goal asks students to fly with their arms and legs, the students will not achieve flight. But when the goal is more open-ended like ‘students can fly,’ there are many ways for students to reach the goal (p. 11).

One way to make goals more achievable for students is technology. Just like the advantage of technology makes buildings more accessible, technology also helps teachers create more accessible curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Pieces of technology can be used to create scaffolds or supports, like help students obtain information or express what they’ve learned in a variety of ways. Instead of relying on a five-paragraph essay, with technology, students can create a presentation with PowerPoint or make a video that stars themselves as actors, all the while allowing multiple people, thanks to the internet, to contribute. But technology, like the use of laptops, cellphones, dictation services, etc., should not be the focus of a lesson just because it is technology. There must be a reason to implement a piece of technology. It is important to keep in mind that no single option will work for all learners, and that when creating a universally designed curriculum teachers keep in mind what they want their students to learn (Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002).

King-Sears (2009) notes that when thinking of Universal Design in education, most people “associate it with technology” (p. 199). This is a logical thought process, as technology is the great bridge that connects students to the learning targets. However, King-Sears (2009), in

the process of explaining seven principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), states that it “is also about the pedagogy, or instructional practices, used for students with and without disabilities” (p. 199). Implementing either one on their own can help students, but it is the combination of technology and pedagogy that creates a universally designed curriculum. The idea of UDL is to make sure all learners, no matter their diversity, can learn in the classroom. When the curriculum is enhanced for diverse learners, through both technology and pedagogical choices, everyone benefits (King-Sears, 2009).

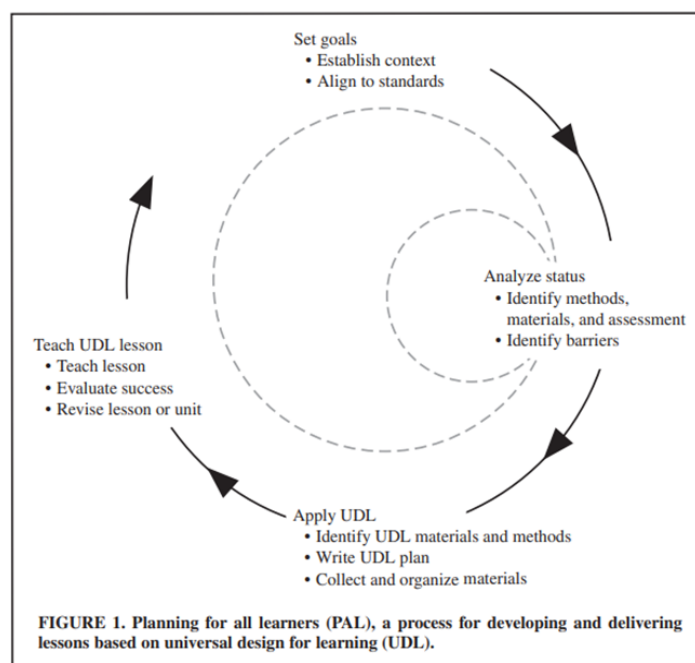
The seven guiding principles that King-Sears (2009) define are “equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical efforts, and size and space for approach and use” (p. 199). Equitable use can be achieved with technology, like using an online version of a text, but can also be achieved with good pedagogical practices, like redesigning the text of a textbook so it has a better focus on key facts, terms, and ideas. Flexibility in use not only means to provide multiple options for students to learn, but also is how a teacher explains “content, concepts, and rules” (King-Sears, 2009, p. 199) to students. Simple and intuitive refers to a straightforward presentation of content and is taking in account of “students’ background knowledge, language skills, and concentration levels” (King-Sears, 2009, p. 200). A variety of activities should also be included to help keep students engaged to accommodate diverse learners.

Perceptible information refers to using illustrations, instructing or explaining with precise language, giving students the opportunity for a tactile experience while learning, and using big ideas as a guide to learning. Tolerance for error means helping students understand that making mistakes is okay and provides an opportunity to learn. By providing timely feedback or scaffolding, teachers can encourage students to try again, or, when working with technology,

software can remind students of a relevant process and to try again. Low physical effort means to create a lesson or activity that does not create a physical barrier between learning, like expecting every student to handwrite for a class period or keep their eyes focused on a computer screen for a long length of time. Lastly, and according to King-Sears (2009) the “most frequently violated principle for UDL,” (p. 200) is size and space for approach of use. This principle reminds teachers that a student should not be hindered in their learning because of where they are sitting in a classroom; for example, a student can’t read a PowerPoint presentation from the back of the room or see information hidden amongst too many other words or images. The seven principles that King-Sears (2009) define are built around technology and pedagogy to ensure an inclusive classroom environment.

There is more to Universal Design than building SMART goals or integrating technology with good pedagogical choices. To reiterate, these techniques are not to be solely added to already existing curriculum, instruction, or assessments. The idea of UD is to start anew with the mindset of being able to include all students, no matter their needs. This may begin to seem like a monumental task to do alone, and one that will, along with the time it takes to properly differentiate, consume any downtime one may have. How can one educator be expected to accomplish this? In short, they’re not. Universal design is not intended to be done alone, but instead as a team with members of different fields contributing. General education teachers need to talk and work with special education teachers and staff to create curriculum, instruction, and assessments from the ground up to truly be inclusive. Without a voice (or two) that represents diverse learner needs, general education teachers may not have the knowledge or skills to successfully create a universal and inclusive classroom (Mcguire, Scott, & Shaw, 2006).

When planning for all learners to make a universally designed class, Meo (2008) states that a team must be created with members from different areas of specialty before tackling a four-step process. “Collaboration is a key ingredient” (Meo, 2008, p. 23) and all members of the team need to have the same focus that the curriculum they are creating allows for all learners to reach the learning goals. Setting goals is the first step of the process that a team must complete



Adapted from “Curriculum Planning for All Learners: Applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to a High School Reading Comprehension Program,” by Grace Meo, 2008, *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 52(2), (10.3200/PSFL.52.2.21-30) Copyright 2008 by Taylor & Francis Group. www.tandfonline.com Reprinted with

permission.

that Meo (2008) outlines. Secondly, the team identifies the status of the curriculum and classroom, considering current materials, methods, and assessments. The team should not focus

on one student's diverse needs but identify barriers that already exist within the classroom that hinders student opportunities for learning and expression of learning. Thirdly, the team applies UDL to a lesson or unit, keeping in mind the barriers that students may face. Lastly, the team would teach the lesson or unit, preferably teaching it as a team. If the lesson or unit is successful, that is, if all students reach the stated learning goals, then the team continues to create the next lesson or unit. If the lesson or unit is not successful, then the team continues to look for barriers that exist in their teaching so all students can reach the learning goals. It is important to note that Meo (2008) relies on the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) to supply templates that help the team set goals, create and analyze lesson plans, and implement UD practices (p. 23-24).

A Review of Literacy in Social Studies Classrooms

History and literacy go hand in hand. To be able to understand a text at a deeper level, that is to evaluate the language that is being used in a text to tell what is being said without it being explicitly written out, one must have an at least somewhat advanced grasp on the language they communicate or learn in. In the United States, the majority of residents (79.7%) speak only English (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2016). It is unfortunate to say that many students are not reading at their grade level and student literacy has not improved since the 1980s (Swanson, Wanzek, McCulley, Stillman-Spisak, Vaughn, Simmons, & Hairrell, 2016).

Recognizing this, there have been many attempts to improve literacy in history classes by moving away from the banking method of education (Freire, 2018), away from overusing a textbook, and toward teaching with primary and secondary sources, a method that puts the students in the driver's seat of what it means to be a historian and learning to interpret historical events to create their own conclusions (Nichols, 2006; Shanahan, & Shanahan, 2008; Shanahan,

Bolz, Cribb, Goldman, Heppeler, & Manderino, 2016; Swanson, Wanzek, McCulley, Stillman-Spisak, Vaughn, Simmons, ... & Hairrell, 2016; Reisman, 2012; Wineburg, & Martin, 2009).

Improving students' literacy not only improves their reading and writing abilities, but their overall communication skills. According to Nichols (2006), the benefits of teaching literacy through the historical process are communication and critical thinking skills which will be sought after in the workplace once students leave high school. Nichols states that the "ability to construct ideas with others through purposeful talk, or dialogue, is essential" (p. 4). Freire (2018) holds value in communicating with others as well, stating that "only through communication can human life hold meaning" (p. 77). Conversation and communication are necessary to creating an efficient workplace, or finding meaning to life, but, according to John Dewey (1933), are also important to teach students how to partake in our democratic government and create an ideal society. The key to reaching these lofty goals is to improve students' literacy, so they become better communicators. Is the current state of teaching students a historical narrative through textbooks enough to prepare our students for the future workforce, to participate in our democratic society, or discover the meaning of life?

Teaching a historical narrative through textbooks has been ingrained into teaching history. Asking students to remember historical information in an encyclopedic manner is the banking method – when we expect that students are empty vessels just waiting to be filled with knowledge – and is an outdated way of teaching (Freire, 2018). Teachers who use textbooks as the main source for their lessons are not challenging and engaging students. Students are not learning the historical process. Instead, they are given the 'facts' and expected to remember them. The overreliance on textbooks is obvious; a report from the 2006 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows "that 79% of eighth graders and 76% of 12th graders

reported using their history textbook daily or at least twice a week” (Nokes, 2010, p. 518). A textbook is a tertiary source, or a source three times removed from the historical events that are being reported on. Textbooks do use primary sources—maps, graphs, and other data in a multimodal manner—but ask students to disengage from the text to focus on these primary sources. Students will either read the text or engage with the primary sources, but not both; they may also not interact with the primary sources in a meaningful manner, observing the images as someone might do when they flip through a magazine in the doctor’s office (Boerman-Cornell, 2015). Students who are primarily being taught from a textbook are not learning the comprehension skills required to take part in the historical process.

There is more work to be done when it comes to preparing our students as readers. It is not sufficient to give all students the same text and to assume that everyone will understand, comprehend, and remember the same amount of information. We are setting up our students for failure when teaching with textbooks, or any history related text, that contain a large amount of academic language without first preparing them. There are two things that can be done to better assist our students: preview text and build background knowledge. Having students read a short synopsis or view a short presentation to build background knowledge increased reading comprehension compared to students who didn’t get the same material. Both are simple steps that build reading comprehension, and steps that do not need to take up too much class time. (Swanson, Wanzek, McCulley, Stillman-Spisak, Vaughn, Simmons, & Hairrell, 2016). There are also many other steps that can be taken to use primary sources to improve students’ literacy.

Like textbooks being overused in history classrooms, it is known that primary sources usually require a high reading and comprehension level. “Written in language that differs radically from our own, original documents pose challenges that daunt our best readers—let

alone those reading below grade level” (Wineburg & Martin, 2009, p. 212). To make primary sources more accessible to all readers Wineburg and Martin (2009) suggest that teachers should offer an altered document for students. While some may shy away from changing primary sources, so the original message isn’t lost, Wineburg and Martin (2009) are not stating that students stop engaging with original documents. Rather, students should compare the altered and original versions. Comparing both versions of a text allows students to ask if the change in wording affected their understanding or can be an activity in generating questions based on the changes that were made. There are three goals to altering a primary source: students will be able to focus their attention on a shorter document; simplified language makes the primary source more available to readers who may not be reading at grade level; and presenting a document with large font and a lot of white space is less likely to intimidate readers and stop them from even trying to read the document. This strategy is not perfect, but it does begin to open the world of text sources other than textbooks to students. This will lead “toward authentic historical inquiry and away from a version of history that rests on the textbook’s monopoly” (Wineburg & Martin, 2009, p. 216).

The three main parts of the historical process are sourcing, corroboration, and contextualization. To teach high school students any one of these can be a challenge, especially when students are used to receiving historical facts through textbooks. A skill that students need to learn to be able to take part in the historical process is close reading. Without close reading, students will not be able to determine the choice and bias behind an author’s diction (sourcing), or how one historical text compares to another in a historical argument (corroboration). The skill of close reading is just as important, and difficult, to teach, but can be accomplished through using primary sources and modeling. Reisman (2012) used document based lessons with primary

sources to teach students to read like a historian and determine if historical thinking, factual knowledge, and reading comprehension improved. The document based lessons that teachers used did in fact improve these areas in students' learning, although Reisman was unsure whether the results were skewed because of her presence and often intervention to assist the teachers in classrooms that were part of the study. Teachers who took part of the study also were trained to teach using the document-based lessons, which would have obvious effects on the teachers' abilities and students' learning. (Reisman, 2012). More research is needed to determine whether the steps that teachers took in the document-based lessons are as effective in improving students' historical thinking, factual knowledge, and reading comprehension as the previous study suggests.

Summary

Differentiation, Universal Design for Learning, and improving literacy instruction in history classrooms are key components to how I will teach throughout my career. It is evident that there has been a significant amount of study done in each of these areas. Putting it all together will be a challenge but teaching without these practices in mind would be an even more difficult challenge. These three themes correlate in one idea: how can I teach each student? It is a question that will forever be asked, as all students are unique. Every teacher should have this question in mind when building curriculum or giving instruction. Whatever constants there are in a person's teaching career, this question needs to be one of them.

In a perfect world, teachers would have all the supplies, assistance, and time that they require. That will never be the case. And perhaps when teachers get what they ask for, there will be more that we can use to better our instruction. That is the nature of teaching—ever evolving. The classroom will change, and teachers, administrators, and students must adapt with it.

Perhaps one of those groups will be the people who drive the change. In any future, change must be centered around the students.

There is no one thing that is good for all students. Differentiation strategies might work with one classroom but fail in another. This goes for UDL and literacy strategies, as well. What matters is that teachers continue to teach to the students in front of them.

Chapter 3

Research

Research Methods

The methods of inquiry for this study focused on the principles and practices of action research, using self-study aligned with professional teacher standards, teacher artifacts, personal journal entries, feedback from my cooperating teacher and supervisor, lesson plans and materials I've created, and assessment scores and completion rates as a means of data collection. I will begin with a review of action research principles to establish the foundation for this study's method of inquiry. Second, I will review the choices and purposes of data collection that helped to highlight my instruction and means for searching for improvement. Third, I will detail my context for the study, methods of data collection protocols, maintaining credibility and trustworthiness of the data, and acknowledge my limitations as a researcher. Finally, I will present the procedures used for studying my practice, while providing data and analysis that speaks to adaptations and adjustments made to my instruction as I implanted this study.

Research Questions

My focus for this research was how I can become a better teacher. Specifically, I examined how I can implement differentiation, universal design for learning, and focus on literacy in historical instruction to improve my curriculum and assessment creation, as well as my overall instruction and pedagogical choices. This focus aligned with the following INTASC Standards for teacher professional development. Additionally, I considered how studying my own practice in line with INTASC Standards could improve my own instruction and therefore, student learning. My purpose of this study was to discover how I can improve as a teacher so I can improve my students' learning. The research question (s) for this study were:

- Do all of my students reach the daily learning targets I set out for them? Data gathered from a focus on this question was used to test differentiation.
- Am I creating my lessons with all my students and their needs in mind? What barriers exist in the classroom environment, the curriculum, my instruction, and assessments? Data gathered from this question was used to validate universal design for learning.
- What steps did I take to improve student literacy and historical content literacy? What else can I do to help students? Data gathered from a focus on this question was used to describe literacy and teaching the historical process.

INTASC Standards

Just as there are standards that teachers use to guide their students, there are standards for up-and-coming teachers that help us become effective educators. There are many aspects of effective teaching, like empowering our students to take charge of their own learning, teaching content and real-life skills, or understanding the variations in which our students learn. These standards come from the Council of Chief State School Officers, which have created, and modified over years, its Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). INTASC standards I have been focusing on also tie into my action research project. Even though I would like to work on all standards at once, I will improve best by improving in three standards. The first that I focus on is Standard #2, Learning Differences. I approach lesson planning and assessment building with all my students and their individual needs in mind. All of my learners are diverse and building a curriculum for all students is definitely a challenge but will pay off as the learning environment becomes more inclusive. The next standard I focus on is Standard #4, Content Knowledge. I strive to teach my students the core concepts of history, while also attempting to teach them how to do history (and not just absorb information they are

presented). And to build on that, the last standard is Standard #5, Application of Content. Now is the time to teach students how to navigate the real world, and I believe critical thinking and a historians' lens will benefit my students as they endeavor on the challenge of becoming adults in the early 21st century.

Methods and Procedures

Because my purpose was to describe my own teaching practice as well as how I use data to improve my own practice in line with the INTASC professional standards, it was important to choose a method that could account for both what the standards are for teachers and how I was paying attention to my own practice through data collection to improve it. Accordingly, this study was designed as an action research study.

An action research study is a tool that educators use to hone their craft, provide information and data to their peers, and to establish a foundation for further research into an area of study. Data collected as part of an action research study are in multiple formats and can be quantitative or qualitative.

Data Collection

The basic steps in action research are 1) identify a topic or issue to study, 2) collect data related to the chosen topic or issue, 3) analyze and interpret the collected data, and 4) carry out action planning, which represents the application of the action research results. Data collection in an action research project typically is related to the topic or issues, and provides answers pertinent to the research questions. As Padak and Padak observe, "Any information that can help you answer your questions is data" (1994). Therefore, I used a variety of data collection tools related to my topic to ensure the validity of my results. Furthermore, I adhered to the following four characteristics in determining the data I would collect for my study, 1) anonymity of

students, 2) comparison in data collection was built in so that the results could be judged against themselves both before and after the intervention period, 3) aspects of performance to be examined were identified prior to data collection so that the information was relevant and connected to the research questions, and 4) a variety of data was collected so that different aspects of the topic could be brought to light (Padak and Padak, 1994). Finally, because I was studying my own practice while I was in the middle of said practice, I acknowledge the “spiraling nature” of data collection in action research (Padak and Padak, 1994). By focusing on data in connection to my research questions, my attention tuned to other pieces of data that emerged in relation to my questions. These emergent data pieces were included as part of the study as they had relevance to my research questions.

Because my research questions focus on differentiation, universal design for learning, and literacy, I chose to collect data that would provide information about how my practice and the interventions I identified aligned with the research topic. The types of data I chose to collect are described next.

Personal Journal Entries

The qualitative data that I collect from these entries will be invaluable to my research and future teaching career. In the creation of these journals, I can see my thought process and decision making regarding the creation of lessons and assessments. I hope to learn what I find is important enough to detail in my entries, and what I’m missing, especially early on in my data collection. This fits well with my research questions because I am aiming to discover how language takes part of my students’ learning, as well as how my students perceive information and my instruction.

Materials Created for Class

I am collecting all materials I have created for instruction, including PowerPoint slides, warm up activities, assignments, assessments, and any other written or printed material that I use to help my teaching like lesson plans. I hope to learn how I alter my instructions and learning targets for students as I become more practiced. This ties into my research questions because I plan to remove barriers from my lessons to allow all students to understand and be able to participate in learning.

Observations

This collection of data are also invaluable as they come from the professionals that I have been surrounded with during this process of becoming an educator. I hope to learn the insights of these professionals and hear what they deem is important to instruction. They take what I know and add layers of knowledge and depth to the how and why of the processes of teaching. This ties well with my research questions because I have received feedback from multiple sources, and just like every student learns in a variety of ways, every professional has different insights and bits of knowledge to share with me on what I do well and how I can improve.

Context of the Study

The study took place in a small high school in Southern Oregon in the vicinity of Medford. The area has been impacted by a fire that occurred in the fall of 2020 that burned down many businesses and homes, including numerous low-income houses. Unfortunately, there are students and families still displaced by the disaster during the 2021-2022 school year. However, the community rallied together and became even stronger, not letting the fire nor the coronavirus dampen their spirits. For the 2020-2021 school year, the high school reached a 95% graduation rate. The school district, which the high school is part of, has a near 40% Hispanic population. 25% of all students are Ever English Learners. Students with disabilities make up 16% of the

total district student population. Just under 95% of all students in the district, of 2,375 students, have free and reduced lunch.

Luckily, the fire did not burn down the new high school building that had been constructed the year prior to the fire. Students today have the tools and amenities of a brand-new facility. Every classroom has a Promethean, a smartboard, which teachers use for instruction. A new theater facility was built, and new bleachers were installed in the gymnasiums. Because of distance learning requirements from the previous school year, all students have a Google Chromebook issued to them.

I work closely with my cooperating teacher, who has been teaching at the high school for four years and teaching for a total of 18 years between Oregon and Washington schools. There are three other teachers in the social studies department we work in. All the social studies teachers at the high school have student teachers this year. One of the social studies teachers is a track and field coach, my cooperating teacher was a coach in previous years, and the principal of the school was also a coach. It is evident that this sports background affects the culture, and that the educators and professionals that I work with work as a team.

My cooperating teacher has two preps: World History and Leadership. Because of this, we teach five classes of World History to mostly sophomores. The first and last classes are the largest, with near 30 students in each class, while the other three class periods range from 12 to 20 students. There are students who have IEPs, 504s, or modified diplomas in every period. For many students attending my class, this is their first year in an in class high school experience. Monday and Fridays we see all class periods with shorter class times of 49 minutes each. Periods rotate on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday when class periods are near 70 minutes long. This

schedule allows us to see all periods four times a week with two short classes and two long classes.

Participants

Because this study was designed using an action research approach, the main participant in the study is myself, as the teacher. As my learning progressed throughout my student teaching program, I became interested in a number of ideas that would help me to improve my instruction. Ultimately, I decided to focus on the main research areas outlined in my research question. To lend credibility to the results I will share from my self-study of my practice, it is important to describe my role in the classroom where I teach. In this section I will focus on describing my own classroom and my role as the teacher.

When I teach a lesson or unit that I've created, because all the social studies classes are the same subject, I teach all five periods. This allows me to practice my delivery and tone the lesson by the time the last period of the day comes around.

How I Studied My Teaching

I will collect data on my teaching for two months and in four major ways: reflective journaling, lessons and materials that I created for class, interviews with teachers at my placement site, and observations made by my supervisor and other teaching professionals. I will look for the formative and summative assessments that are implemented to ensure that students are reaching daily learning targets. I will also look for times or areas in my lesson planning and instruction where students were not able to reach the learning targets, and try to pinpoint what barriers were in place that hindered students. Lastly, I will look for the steps that I took to improve students' literacy and involvement in the historical process, and steps that I can take next time to improve on literacy instruction.

After my data is collected, I will organize it by type. For my journals, I will pinpoint themes that are repeated throughout, as well as any questions that I ask and if I were able to answer them in my next reflection. For the lessons and materials that I create for class, I will compare the learning targets that I set for students, and evaluate student material to determine if they were able to reach said learning target. I will also be looking for activities that I included in the lessons to improve students' literacy and knowledge and capability to take part in the historical process. Themes and best practices from interviews that I conduct will help to determine what barriers exist for students and how best to overcome them. The observations that were conducted on my teaching will help me identify what current best practices I'm using, as well as if I am setting clear expectations and learning targets and if students are reaching the learning targets.

Chapter 4

Analysis

Research Questions

I will begin the analysis chapter with an overview of the research questions that I have used to study my teaching. My first research question attempts to show evidence of differentiation in my teaching and is as follows:

1. *Do all my students reach the daily learning targets I set out for them?*

My second research question pertains to Universal Design for Learning (UDL), attempting to show if I am creating inclusive lessons and curriculum and is as follows:

2. *Am I creating my lessons with all my students and their needs in mind? What barriers exist in the classroom environment, the curriculum, my instruction, and assessments?*

My final research question is centered around literacy and historical content literacy and is as follows:

3. *What steps did I take to improve student literacy and historical content literacy? What else can I do to help students?*

My research questions were tailored to continue to discover who I am as a teacher and where I can improve in my planning, delivery, and how best to meet the needs of all my students. I have qualitative data that will help me answer these research questions which include journal reflections, notes of observations on my teaching made by my university supervisor, and all the lesson plans that I created during my time as a student in the masters program and as a student teacher.

Data Analysis and Coding Process

Being new to coding and analyzing data, I relied on a format that was provided to me through the university. This process is detailed in the table below.

Table 1

Data Analysis Steps

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Phase 1.</p> <p>Familiarize myself with data</p> | <p>Interviews and focus group session transcribed via transcription service</p> <p>Send interviewees individual transcripts for them to check for accuracy and note additional information they desire to add</p> <p>Read transcripts against audio recording for orthographic accuracy</p> <p>Begin digital diary of thoughts concerning themes and any “surprises” of information</p> |
| <p>Phase 2.</p> <p>Generate initial codes</p> | <p>Organize data into meaningful groups with research questions in mind</p> <p>Manually code with notes in transcribed text</p> <p>Begin digital code book, collating data within groups</p> <p>Code for all potential themes</p> <p>Note tensions & inconsistencies of codes in digital diary</p> |
| <p>Phase 3.</p> <p>Search for themes</p> | <p>Organize codes into potential themes using digital table</p> <p>Note thoughts on relationships between the emerging themes in digital diary</p> <p>Note any potential sub-themes in digital diary</p> <p>Add a miscellaneous section in digital code diary for any seemingly unrelated code</p> |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <p>Phase 4. Review themes</p> | <p>Revise table of potential themes, considering internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity</p> <p>Read collated data extracts for each theme, checking for coherent pattern</p> <p>For extracts with no coherent pattern, re-examine theme and related coded data for sub-theme or renaming of theme</p> <p>For themes where coherent pattern exists, examine for individual theme validity in relation to entire data.</p> <p>Examine transcripts for any missed data extracts needing coded for theme</p> <p>Re-read entire transcripts for any new themes that may have been missed</p> <p>Stop when no more substantial and relevant themes emerge</p> <p>Examine how themes fit together in relation to research questions and note thoughts and considerations in digital journal</p> <p>Create thematic map</p> |
|---------------------------------------|--|

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Phase 5.</p> <p>Define & name themes</p> | <p>Adjust digital table of them to organize collated data extracts within each theme for consistency</p> <p>Identify relative narrative for each theme in the digital diary</p> <p>Write a detailed analysis for each theme, to include individual relevance and how that relates to overall analysis and answers the questions of this research</p> <p>Examine written analysis for any excessive overlapping of themes</p> <p>Examine each theme for any sub-themes needing to be identified and explained</p> <p>For each theme, describe scope and content in no more than two sentences, adding potential names to each theme</p> |
| <p>Phase 6.</p> <p>Write the thematic report</p> | <p>Write an analysis within and across themes</p> <p>Assure there is written evidence within each theme with related data extracts</p> <p>Choose vivid and relevant extract examples for each point of evidence in answering research questions</p> <p>Create analytic narrative that incorporates evidential answers to each research question</p> |

(Braun, 2006)

I began the coding process by reading through my journal entries. Besides trying to find evidence that answered my research questions, I wasn't sure what I was looking for or what I'd find. On the first read-through, I highlighted words that I thought pertained to my research questions. After reading through my journal entries, I created a table and input the words that I had highlighted, all questions that I had written down, as well as the main theme of the journal

entry. I included all the questions that I wrote throughout the journaling process because I believe there is value in asking questions; they show evidence of reflection as well as the foundation for major changes that I make in my lesson planning or delivery of instruction.

Table 2

Journal Entry example

| Date (dd/mm/yyyy): | Words/terms: | Theme/main ideas: | Questions: |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
| 23/03/2022 | KUD, integrate, writing, structure, assess, primary source, big idea, topic sentence, conclusion/transition sentence, template, paragraph | This journal is about my thoughts on an upcoming unit where I wanted students to practice their writing skills. I knew that I wanted students to write but I didn't know in what format, or what summative assessment I would use. I had a primary source as a foundation, and asked questions until I came upon the | What do I want my students to know, understand, and be able to do? What tech/project can I integrate into the lesson? Can I find a video for the lesson? So I should assess their writings. What parts? What structure do I give them? Should I do more than one paragraph? How will students react to the |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | <p>answer I was looking for. I then asked clarifying questions to ensure that I could support my students in the best way possible so they were successful and knew what my expectations were.</p> | <p>primary source? Do I have enough time? Will students have to write more than a paragraph to get their ideas across?</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

The second piece of data that I coded were observations made by my supervisor. There are fewer observations than journal entries, but they span a longer period compared to my journal entries. Because of the timespan of the observations, I expected to find more evidence of growth in my teaching capabilities. Coding the observations was easier than the journal entries; I had practice coding and I chose to sort the comments made by my supervisor into three categories based on my research questions and themes. Some comments that my supervisor left for me fit into two or even all three categories, but most comments pertained to one of my three themes in some way. I organized the comments by date and theme in a table, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Supervisor Observation example

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|--|---|
| Date (dd/mm/yyyy) | Differentiation - Do all my students reach the daily learning targets I set out for them? | UDL - Am I creating my lessons with all my students and their needs in mind? What barriers exist in the classroom environment, the curriculum, my instruction, and assessments? | Literacy & Historical Literacy - What steps did I take to improve student literacy and historical content literacy? What else can I do to help students? |
| 25/01/2022 | <p>“Nice job with intro examples, teaching by showing, reflecting & a bit of analysis”</p> <p>“Interesting hooks and relating to what they know”</p> <p>“Your questions do a great job targeting the standard, therefore your learning target could be expanded to</p> | <p>“Nice job with intro examples, teaching by showing, reflecting & a bit of analysis”</p> <p>“Students all seemed engaged in the outline assignment”</p> <p>“I know this is a “hybrid” assignment. However, would there be a way to get</p> | <p>“Like you had the book & noted it was translated”</p> <p>“Good work reviewing primary & secondary source”</p> <p>“So far no discussion of primary vs secondary validity. Why?”</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | <p>perspective and limitations”</p> <p>“What if at the end of lesson you asked students to rate 1-5 todays lesson for Hitler’s quote?”</p> | <p>greater interaction & higher order thinking from the students in class?”</p> | |
|--|--|---|--|

The third piece of data that I coded were lesson plans that I created throughout the masters program, which includes lessons I created before my student teaching. I followed a similar coding process with this piece of data as the previous two, highlighting sections and sentences in my lesson plans that adhere to one, and often multiple, research questions and themes. The time span of data ranges nine months, from my time in the masters program practicing writing lesson plans with little to no experience, to the first few lesson plans I created as a student teacher, to the most recent lesson plans I created near the end of my student teaching experience. Below is an example of my coding process.

Table 4

Lesson Plan Analysis Example

| Lesson Plan Name, Number, & Date | Differentiation (BLUE) | Universal Design for Learning (RED) | Literacy (GREEN) |
|--|------------------------|--|------------------|
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| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>edTPA practice World Belief Interactions and Relations Lesson 4 June 2021</p> | <p>To meet the needs of diverse learners I will provide translations of all texts into every language that my students read/speak. Audio versions of texts will also be available. If students need assistance writing I will give extra time or allow students to use dictation services if fitting. Any terms will be reviewed and posted for students to be able to easily access them when needed; I will put students in pairs and ask them to discuss what they learned from the last 3 days.</p> | <p>To meet the needs of diverse learners I will provide translations of all texts into every language that my students read/speak. Audio versions of texts will also be available. If students need assistance writing I will give extra time or allow students to use dictation services if fitting. Any terms will be reviewed and posted for students to be able to easily access them when needed.</p> | <p>Analyze, identify, compare and contrast, students will write, inclusive, To meet the needs of diverse learners I will provide translations of all texts into every language that my students read/speak. Audio versions of texts will also be available. If students need assistance writing I will give extra time or allow students to use dictation services if fitting. Any terms will be reviewed and posted for students to be able to easily access them when needed; I will hand out writing prompts to students. I will have a slideshow of all the</p> |
|--|---|--|---|

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | | | <p>pictures from the week up as well for the students to react to. Essay will be informal.</p> |
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Research Question #1

My first research question pertaining to differentiation asked if *all my students reached the daily learning targets that I set out for them*. To begin analyzing my data regarding this question, I looked at what I planned to do to differentiate for my students. Most of what I did to differentiate in one lesson, I did in all my lessons. Steps that I took to differentiate included having printed copies of texts for students to use, modeling strategies to complete assignments, having students work with their peers, especially when doing warm up activities, and covering material that was relevant to all my students by including Latin American history into my lessons because of the 40% Hispanic population at the school.

Because the research question asked if my students reached the learning targets, I went back to my lessons and analyzed the targets that I had created for each lesson, as well as analyzed the formative and/or summative assessments that I had created to check that students had reached those targets. Analyzing the learning targets, very few of them included academic language that was also included in my lesson plans, like analyze, observe, infer, etc. The academic term that was used the most was explain, and only so because I used it in three learning targets that built off one another in the same sequence of lessons. On the other hand, the assessments that I gathered were quite similar. The most that I collected were written, like exit tickets, graphic organizers like double entry journal notes, and warm up questions that students

responded to. I did have some variety in my summative assessments, asking students to create an audio or video presentation, or a Google slides presentation.

Analyzing my journal entries for differentiation proved more difficult. The journal entries are where I ask a lot of questions on how I'm going to differentiate in my assessments. Most of my writing on differentiation focused on the idea of making sure I knew what I wanted my students to know, understand, and be able to do. This led me to asking and writing about what I am going to assess my students on, which usually led me to wanting to assess their writing capabilities and not their historical knowledge. As per my later research question, I was concerned with increasing my students' literacy (vocabulary) and historical literacy (skills that historians use).

Analyzing the observations completed by my university supervisor was the best evidence to show my differentiation efforts and where I could improve. From the first observation, my supervisor is asking me how I know that my students reached the learning targets and is offering advice to how I can assess my students' learning. Ideas that I got for future lessons came from the observations that my supervisor gave me. Her reminders and pointers had me trying new tactics in my lessons to ensure that I knew that my students were reaching the learning targets.

Table 5

Learning Target comments from supervisor

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Date (dd/mm/yyyy) | Differentiation - Do all of my students reach the daily learning targets I set out for them? |
|----------------------|--|

| | |
|------------|--|
| 10/11/2021 | <p>“Impressed you know names already”</p> <p>“Create exit ticket...”</p> <p>“Sometimes with learning target you give a why”</p> <p>“Perhaps move around room and check student work while you wait”</p> |
| 30/11/2021 | <p>“Look for whole group formative assessment opportunities...”</p> <p>“Perhaps explain the why of what you’re asking them to learn”</p> <p>“Well done moving through room checking in with students”</p> <p>“Clear start with review and learning target”</p> <p>“Consider ideas for last few minutes of class - pack up & oral quiz? Or give an answer to a question?”</p> |

As I progressed through the program and my student teaching experience, I adapted my strategies for differentiation which led to me changing the ways that I assessed my students’ learning.

Research Question #2

My second research question tied into the first, but with a focus on creating my lessons in an inclusive manner. I used the tenets of Universal Design for Learning to construct the research question and ensure that *I am creating my lessons with all my students and their needs in mind*. I also wanted to know *what barriers exist in the classroom environment, the curriculum, my instruction, and assessments*.

Many of the tactics that I used to build my lessons with differentiation were the same as Universal Design for Learning. This includes strategies like scaffolding, modeling, creating

graphic organizers, providing several different options for students to read/listen to text, and giving students different options to complete a summative assessment (in written, audio, or video format).

My journal entries proved more fruitful in analyzing how I created inclusive lesson plans. I asked questions about making sure students had what resources they needed, if they had enough time to complete the assignments, and if they knew the expectations that I had set out for them. In my last journal entry I specifically asked what barriers I had in my lessons and curriculum.

| Date (dd/mm/yyyy): | Words/terms: | Theme/main ideas: | Questions: |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
| 31/03/2022 | Write, goals, community, society, rubric, grammar, punctuation, spelling, peer review, clear and concise argument, constructive criticism | This entry is about creating a rubric for the summative assessment for the writing unit. I am asking questions and clarifying what is important to include on the rubric. I have some feedback written in from my cooperating teacher as an added bonus. | How can I help my students be successful? Is there anything else I need to add? Any other aspects of a letter? I want a peer to read their letter, so what would that look like? |

I organized my supervisor's comments to help determine if I was creating inclusive lesson plans. The most asked questions that my supervisor asked were about student engagement in discussion or pair share activities. My supervisor asked me how to increase the engagement in

my students, but didn't give explicit answers. Her observations and my journal entries led me to creating different opportunities for students to share and speak with their peers as the year went on to give them more practice doing so.

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Date (dd/mm/yyyy) | UDL - Am I creating my lessons with all my students and their needs in mind? What barriers exist in the classroom environment, the curriculum, my instruction, and assessments? |
| 10/11/2021 | “How might you get non-volunteer to offer ideas?” |
| 30/11/2021 | “How might you get more buy in for elbow partner share?” |
| 25/01/2022 | “I know this is a “hybrid” assignment. However, would there be a way to get greater interaction & higher order thinking from the students in class?” |
| 13/04/2022 | “Would there be a way to encourage critical thinking & interaction other than on handout?” “Many students reluctant to pair share...it has been awhile. How might you facilitate more participation?” |

Research Question #3

My third research question put everything together, as my focus for my teaching as a student teacher was to *improve student literacy and historical content literacy*. Most of my assessments asked students to write or work with complex terms and ideas, and I wanted to know what steps I took to help my students in this area. I also wanted to increase my students' exposure to a variety of primary and secondary sources to build their knowledge and historical literacy skills.

I wanted to use texts other than the textbook, which is the infamous text that most history classes use. I attempted to move away from the textbook, but still relied on it as my base text in creating my lessons. Of the four units (Atlantic Slave Trade, Imperialism, Sourcing, and the Holocaust) and subsequent lesson plans that I analyzed (and actually taught in the classroom), two of those units I relied on the textbook as my main source (Atlantic Slave Trade and Imperialism).

Looking through the terms that I used in my lesson plans, I used 'analyze' eight out of 16 times, which equates to half. Other terms that I used in my lesson planning include 'identify,' 'compare,' 'write,' and 'question,' which were each mentioned five times throughout the lessons. The term 'source' was mentioned four times. The word that was used the most was 'read,' which was mentioned 11 times throughout my lessons. Other terms that I used in creating my lessons were relevant to the lesson, like 'imperialism,' 'colonialism,' and 'diffuse.'

I took a similar approach in analyzing my journal entries. The terms that I used the most in my journal entries were 'write' and 'assess,' which were mentioned six and five times respectively out of 10 journals. The term 'source' was mentioned in three different journals.

Other terms that I wrote were ‘bias,’ ‘literacy,’ ‘data,’ ‘rubric,’ and ‘inclusive,’ which were all mentioned twice throughout my journals.

Analyzing the observations that my supervisor made, she left notes that pertained to modeling in three separate observations out of five total. There was not much else that could be pinpointed out of my supervisor’s observations that showed that I worked on improving my students’ literacy.

Summary

The research that I conducted in the literature review helped me focus on skills to work on throughout my student teaching. I used three types of data to answer my research questions based on literature to improve my craft and become a better teacher. To restate, the questions I used to focus my research were as follows:

1. *Do all my students reach the daily learning targets I set out for them?*
2. *Am I creating my lessons with all my students and their needs in mind? What barriers exist in the classroom environment, the curriculum, my instruction, and assessments?*
3. *What steps did I take to improve student literacy and historical content literacy?*

I collected data from lesson plans that I created before and during my student teaching experience, observations from my university supervisor wrote, and journal entry reflections on my lessons and teaching experiences. With these three pieces of data, I began creating a picture of my teaching process and areas where I can improve.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Research Questions

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1. *Do all my students reach the daily learning targets I set out for them?*
2. *Am I creating my lessons with all my students and their needs in mind? What barriers exist in the classroom environment, the curriculum, my instruction, and assessments?*
3. *What steps did I take to improve student literacy and historical content literacy? What else can I do to help students?*

Key Findings

The first research question pertains to differentiation; my analysis of the data relating to this question suggests that my learning targets are not as clear as I would like them to be. The wide arrangement of my learning targets and limited assessments means that students who are not prolific writers will not be as successful; most of the assessments that I collected were written work in one form or another. I may have begun to change my summative assessment opportunities for students near the end of my student teaching experience, however, I still relied on writing activities to prepare students for the summative assessments. I will have to continue trying different strategies in assessing my students throughout the learning process, and not just in the summative assessments.

The second research question pertains to my use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The data suggests that my approach to UDL is very similar to differentiation, if not identical. The purpose of UDL is to work with other teachers and staff who work and interact with students of varied learning levels and styles. None of my lesson plans were created with input from staff that work with students who have Individual Learning Plans (IEPs), 504s, or are English Language Learners (ELL).

The third research question pertains to my attempt to improve student literacy and historical literacy. The analysis of my data suggests that I have gaps in my research, and did not assess or improve my students' level of literacy. I wrote about doing so in my journal reflections and attempted to include opportunities for students to improve their literacy skills in my lesson plans, but it is much like the lack of data that shows that my students reached the learning targets I set out for them. It is possible that I improved my students' literacy, meaning that they now have a wider range of vocabulary and can write a coherent paragraph, but there is little to no evidence to prove that this is true.

Interpreting Results

My research and the data that I collected suggest that differentiation does indeed take a lot of time. I also must admit that differentiation may look different from one teacher to the next, from one class to the next, and from one student to the next. That is, after all, the point. What works for one teacher may not work for another. The literature on differentiation suggests that there is no one simple answer to good instruction, and through the data collection process (i.e. my experience as a student teacher) I've seen that something that I think will work doesn't, and something that I thought that would go down in flames managed to get students engaged in the lesson.

The literature suggests that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiation are quite similar. My data shows the same correlation, in that many of the strategies that I implemented to differentiate I also considered strategies to make my lessons more inclusive. The literature suggests that technology be implemented, and SMART goals be created with students; I followed the advice of the former but not the latter. The absolutely necessary step that the literature states should be taken is to work with professionals outside your discipline and to include at least one professional who works with students of varied learning capabilities (i.e. students who have IEPs, 504s, or are ELL). I did not consult others in the creation of my lessons or have the opportunity to co-teach with others outside of my discipline, and my data shows a lack of true implementation of Universal Design for Learning.

Literature on literacy in social studies, mostly history classes, show that the textbook is over utilized. In the units and lesson plans that I analyzed half of my units used the textbook as the main text. The literature suggests that students' literacy rates increase after interacting with different sources, mainly historical primary sources. Even when I did include primary sources in my lesson plans, I had no concrete evidence that showed student literacy rates or improvement.

Limitations of Study

Limitations of my study include the type of data that I collected. All of my data was qualitative, and therefore came without numerical values to compare to one another. I also did not collect any student samples. The only source of data that I did not directly create were the observations that were made by my supervisor, which was the smallest collection of the three pieces of data.

The strongest asset I have is my reflection on the data that I have. I can improve in many aspects of my data creation and collection. To begin, I can be more consistent with creating

journal entries; an entry at the end of every day would take no more than 10 minutes but would yield a much larger sample. I could also improve the types of data that I collected and branch into student samples and feedback to gain a better perspective and understanding of my ability to assess my students' learning. Creating my lesson with a specific format meant that the data collected from that source was easy to code and theme, however I could also improve by including data from other materials that I create like the formative and summative assessments that I use in my curriculum.

Implementation of Findings

My findings can be used as an introduction to the themes of differentiation, Universal Design for Learning, and literacy instruction in social studies classes. I have compiled sources that pertain to each, and a works cited page is always the friend of a social studies teacher. Other aspiring teachers may be able to learn from the lessons that I learned through my data collection, in that they may be more in depth and consistent in their data collection. This doesn't mean only others will benefit from this action research project; I will be the main beneficiary of this work. The experience that I've had through the masters program and student teaching is invaluable. This action research project marks the beginning of my career and journey as an educator.

Conclusion

I have found that my findings are incomplete, but that's okay. I am taking one of many steps to becoming a better educator. I have concluded that differentiation, universal design for learning, and literacy are important in instruction. Working with others who have more experience than I do to implement these is one of the most important aspects, along with reflection, and continue teaching and learning.

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