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Professional Synthesizing Project

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Abstract

In this report, the author discusses a synthesizing research project implemented at Polo Park Middle School in Wellington, Florida. The author reviews the problem of meeting the needs of all learners. He gives a solution of learning more about students through a multiple intelligence survey administered to all students. Teachers can use the data gained from the survey to differentiate their instruction and best meet the needs of all students. Results of the survey are given.

Professional Synthesizing Project

Polo Park Middle School is a suburban middle school in Wellington, Florida. The population of the school is approximately one thousand students and fifty teachers. Polo Park Middle School is part of The School District of Palm Beach County. The School District of Palm Beach County is located in South Florida, and it is the twelfth largest school district in the country. Polo Park is an “A” rated school according to the Florida State Department of Education.

Many teachers at Polo Park Middle School know the book definition of differentiated instruction, but they have trouble differentiating instruction. Through this project, teachers will learn about their students in order to solve the problem of being able to nurture students as whole beings by implementing differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students. “While the concept of ‘differentiated instruction’ can be defined in many ways, as good a definition as any is ensuring that what a student learns, how he/she learns it, and how the student demonstrates what he/she has learned is a match for that student’s readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning” (Tomlinson, 2004, p. 188).

Implementing differentiated instruction is an issue that many teachers have. Many are unsure how to differentiate their instruction. This year, Polo Park Middle School will be a No Child Left Behind school. Students have the option to leave their low-performing school and be bussed to Polo Park Middle School for their education. These students have vastly different needs than the school’s prior population. It is vital that teachers know how to best meet the needs of all students in the school. Having the knowledge of how a student learns best will give the teacher some comfort in how best to meet the student’s needs.

After reviewing a variety of solutions to differentiate instruction, I chose to implement a school-wide multiple intelligence survey for teachers to see their students' dominant intelligence. This solution impacts the least amount of classroom instructional time to survey students but gives a tremendous amount of information for teachers. With sweeping changes and new mandates daily, teachers at Polo Park Middle School do not have the time to supplement required lessons with additional demands. For that reason, the survey will be administered on a Professional Development Day when students are only in school for half of a day.

Christodoulou (2009, p. 2) talks about why educators should know a student's learning style and how to apply that to their life. By examining the different intelligences and teaching students through those modalities, students will learn more content in a shorter time (Gardner, 2004 n.p.; Kunkel, 2009 n.p.; Lesson Lab Skylight (Producer), 2005). Teachers can use the information they gain from the survey to adapt to the different learning styles of their students.

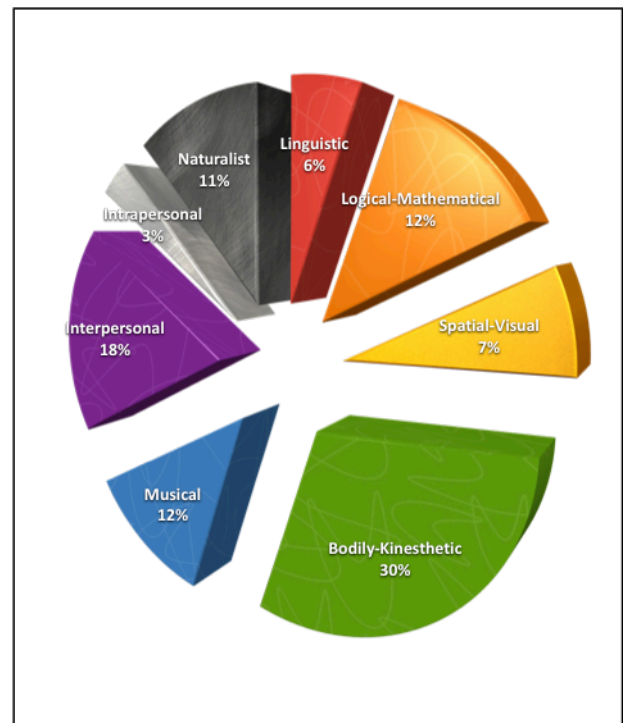
Of course with mandated assignments comes resistance. The biggest obstacle I believe I will face is resistance of the staff to administer the multiple intelligence survey. This year teachers are stressed more than in any other year in recent memory. Because of the sweeping changes and mandates, teachers feel they do not have time to do anything above and beyond the required lessons because of time constraints. I believe the best way to overcome this obstacle is to have the principal explain to all teachers that the survey is mandatory and all teachers must administer it at the same time school-wide. The administration of the survey will occur on a half day to lessen the impact of classroom instruction time.

The survey was administered during a Professional development day, and there were some obstacles. As predicted, the main obstacle was resistance to administering the survey. After compiling the data, only two teachers failed to turn in results for their students. A follow-up reminder email was sent to these teachers by the principal. The teachers did not turn in their results. In the end, 841 students completed the survey.

Figure 1 shows the results from the Multiple Intelligence Survey. The dominant learning style for most students was Bodily-Kinesthetic.

Interpersonal was second most dominant learning style. After review and discussion with colleagues, these results make sense for middle school students. Most students in middle school are active and social. The surprising result was six percent of students are strongest in the Linguistic learning style. Unfortunately, many teachers at Polo Park Middle School teach to this learning style through lecture format. The goal of this report is to use this information to show teachers the need for change in their lesson plans.

Figure 1: Multiple Intelligence Survey Results



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