

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON USING DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION IN
THE MIXED ABILITY CLASSROOM AT ONE GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Table of Content

List of Abbreviation.....	5
Abstract.....	6
Operational definitions of key terms.....	7
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	8
Background to the Problem/Issue.....	8
Problem Statement.....	12
Purpose of the Study	13
Significance to the Study	14
Research questions	14
Chapter 2: The Literature Review.....	15
Introduction	15
About Differentiated instruction.....	15
Flow charts (D.I.).....	17
Teachers' perspectives about the commencement of differentiated instruction.....	18
Teachers' perspectives on the implementation of differentiated instruction.....	18
Teachers' perspectives of others' expectations.....	21
Local studies on teachers' perspectives about differentiated instructions	23
Theoretical Framework	24
Charts (constructivism paradigm).....	27
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	28
Qualitative Phenomenological Design.....	28
The role of the researcher.....	30

The research setting.....	31
The sampling.....	32
Data collection.....	33
Data analysis	36
Data Analysis Procedures.....	36
Timeline of the Study.....	38
Narration of Experience	38
Ethical considerations.....	40
Limitations to the study.....	42
Delimitations of the study.....	42
Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....	44
Introduction	44
Introduction to Participants.....	45
Presentation of findings	47
Research sub question I.....	48
Research sub question II.....	49
Purpose of D.I.....	50
Experiences implementing D.I.....	51
Challenge in using D.I.	53
Classroom space challenges	54
Standardized tests challenges.....	55
Planning and implement challenges.....	55
Theory vs. practical challenges.....	56

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTIONS	4
Benefits of using D.I.....	57
Summary of findings.....	59
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendation.....	60
Discussion	60
Conclusion.....	64
Recommendation	65
References	67
Appendix A.....	75
Appendix B.....	76
Appendix C.....	78

List of Abbreviations

MOE – Ministry of Education

D.I. – Differentiated Instruction

UWI – The University of the West Indies

Abstract

The process of investigation was done through a qualitative phenomenological approach which helped to communicate a description of teachers' lived experiences in the mixed ability classroom. The procedure of this inquiry commenced with a purposeful sampling of five teachers experiences in using differentiated instruction in the classroom, followed by a face-to-face interview and concluded with an explication of the teachers' responses of their lived experiences in using wide-ranging instructions with the mixed ability students. The investigation established that teachers would like to practice more differentiated instruction in the classroom but may also become easily distracted if appropriate resources and environment would facilitate such activities. They also noted the benefits and challenges of practicing differentiation in the contemporary classrooms.

Operational definitions of key terms

Differentiated instruction – Tomlinson (2000) Differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet the individual needs. Whether teacher differentiate content, process, products or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction.

Perspective – how you process and express what is happening based on your personal experiences.

Curriculum – Tanner (1980) defined curriculum as “the planned and guided learning experiences and intended outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences under the auspices of the school, for the learners’ continuous and wilful growth in personal social competence.”

Mixed ability classroom - Ireson and Hallam (2001) suggest teachers, “need to recognise that a class is mixed ability because children have different strengths and weaknesses and develop at different rates. They have different preferences for learning and displaying their work. A mixed ability class does not just consist of a range of abilities but also a range of learning styles and preferences. All pupils will show strengths at different times depending on the topic being studied and the learning style being used. When pupils are working out with their preferred learning style then they will not perform as well. All classes even those that have been set are mixed ability to a certain degree. Therefore the following strategies are valid for all classes.”

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background to the Problem/Issue

In keeping with the Ministry of Education's policy, Justice Government Primary School no longer 'streams' their students according to their academic achievement levels but classes are comprised of students with mixed abilities. The classrooms are a composite of at least three levels of learners who differ in their cognitive abilities, background knowledge and learning preferences (Huebner, 2010). Since the classrooms are faced with such diversities, the school has implemented differentiated instruction in an endeavor to efficiently attend to all students' educational needs. This current view of educational instructions also includes professional activities for teachers to participate in school advancement, cooperate in teams, construct proficient learning networks, create appropriate assessments and altering the working environment (Darling-Hammond, 2005). However, in spite of this modern development, some teachers continue to teach using a whole-class approach, which makes it difficult for below average students to cope with academic standards. Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005) advocate the quality of lesson delivery makes a difference in achievement. Lesson delivery also takes into account teachers' abilities to teach subject matters and concepts to diverse students in ways that accurately attend to their developmental age and learning needs while building on the schemas of every child as an individual learner. It is also noted that some work being done in the classroom has frustrated the above average students, since they are capable of completing the work before the time given, so that they are forced to wait and were idle for minutes during exercises.

A close look at teachers' in practical schooling may expose how many educators plan and deliver lessons. It may also reveal how teachers assess their differently abled students in the same way, with the same material, without being attentive to the inconsistency of how different students process learning. This situation existed long before Carol Tomlinson coined the words "differentiated instruction" and specified that the aspects of the strategy may meet the individual needs of student. Washburne (1953) proposes a thought that provoked the minds of educators. He suggests that they think about wise ways to accommodate the different and wide range of abilities in the classrooms. It was also noted in his writings that differentiated instruction first and foremost focused on the "gifted and talented" students, leaving educators to deal with issues related to meeting all students' needs, including the below average students in classrooms. However Tomlinson (1995) suggests that D.I. is an effective way to accomplish the task which may benefit all students learning in the contemporary classroom. This method of instruction catered for all levels of ability. D.I. is not a new idea but a new term used to express the thought of a method or strategy of teaching. In the writings of Confucius it is noted that to instruct a class of students who fluctuate in cognitive abilities, the teacher must start at each learners level of ability and build on their knowledge to develop them further (Tomlinson, 2013). Moreover, Tomlinson (2001) mentions that this strategy is now becoming an instructional tool that is readily available to the teachers in each classroom to make use of in their lesson plans and lesson deliveries to accommodate the needs of all students. It is further documented by Tomlinson (2005) that the intervention of differentiated instructional activities are mainly focused on students' several intelligences, learning development and critical thinking skills, so that students will be encouraged to seek their own interest in achieving educational success.

Though, teachers are conscious of the fact that “one-size-fits-all” lesson preparation does not satisfy the interests of all their pupils. In the teachers’ perspectives, according to Wanja Njagi (2014) differentiated instruction lessons are time consuming; teachers complained that they require additional time to plan and examine new ways of teaching so that they can vary their lessons to accommodate all learners effectively within the assigned time. Learners own their wide-ranging cultures because of their experiences, environmental issues, incentives and abilities, not to mention different learning styles. Teachers are aware of these differences but are cautious to deal with it (Tobin and McInnes, 2008). Oliver (2016) states that this is a universal phenomenon that teachers have been battling with, and asking the question: “How do I reach all learners with the requirements that are necessary for them to achieve a successful education?” However, the fact remains that differentiating the curriculum has become fundamental to the present-day classroom regardless of the challenges. Many educational institutions and administrators are supporting that it is “*central to best practice*” (Subban and Round, 2015). However, Joseph (2013) notes that pre-service teachers are weighed down and disoriented because the gap between theory and practice is a major issue among school teachers with mixed ability classrooms since the experience is realized only after entering the school.

In addition, the hope that teachers are practicing or even willing to practice this contemporary approach to teaching is presented in a recent study done by Joseph, Thomas, Simonette and Ramsook (2013) at The University of Trinidad and Tobago, St. Augustine. It reveals that pre-service teachers who were exposed to D.I. during their University course had felt that, the learning environment proved to have a positive impact on the comprehension of essential concepts which they received training for in the curriculum studies course. They

also noted better results of students' interest in the content and their examination results. As a result of students' interest they seem to be very willing to practice this method in the classroom. In addition, Joseph (2013) suggests, in his research, that while former students from the teachers' educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago by and large are aware of the theory of differentiated instruction, they often experience various challenges to incorporate the strategies in content, process, and/or product as they address subject matters to educate their learners in the mixed ability classroom. Consequently, the majority of teachers are not willing to practice D.I. even though they agreed that this strategy has great impact on children's receptiveness to learning and it serves as a great way to encourage the slow and talented learner.

D.I. caters for the different levels of thinking, different levels of cognitive development and levels of the abilities of students to succeed in their learning tasks. This calls for teachers to research a variety of methods and strategies to deliver content knowledge within one lesson plan. The process of accomplishing this takes time and well organized planning. For teachers to fulfill D.I. every day with every lesson to accommodate the mixed ability students they must be ready to challenge themselves with being consistent in their management of time and organizational planning skills. The teacher must also be very knowledgeable in the higher-order thinking and critical thinking skills as well as the multiple intelligences. It is also imperative that teachers understand their learners individually. The teacher must not only be aware of the students' level of knowledge or ability but the culture and socio-economic background of each student. The teacher must be aware that not only different abilities affect students' learning but also the different situations surrounding each child have consequences on students' ability to learn. Teacher training or developmental

workshops about the teaching of D.I. in the classroom should be given or made available to teachers on a regular basis, so that they can become more aware of how to use the strategy in different subject areas when delivering the content, or during the process or even for the product of each lesson. Many teachers are aware of differentiated instruction and its advantages but they are not knowledgeable of the pedagogy phases. This forfeits the purpose and benefits of differentiated instruction. It does not only forfeit the rationale but also allow teachers the reason to encourage their personal perspectives about it and consequently shun away from applying it in the classroom.

Teachers have several challenges with differentiated instruction. Research has evidence that teachers are inclined to teach the way they were instructed (Britzman, 1991). The traditional way seems to be easier since it was already known. Differentiated instructional strategies, on the other hand, have to be learned and learning takes time and effort; an effort some teachers are not willing to compromise with. This influences their perspectives on using differentiated instruction in the classroom. The classroom size was another critical issue of concern. Individual attention is difficult to manage since the classrooms are so crowded. The room size of the new model schools' accommodation caters for twenty students, yet some classes contain as much as twenty-eight students. This over-packed classroom hardly provides for learning centres or the more popular, arranging the tables into groups to accommodate collaborative and cooperative learning, which is essential to differentiated instruction.

Problem Statement

Differentiated instruction is an instructive method used by the classroom teacher to encourage students' to learn and advance their learning. Maddox (2015) comments that

teachers' instructions directly affect students' achievement. The majority of the teachers of the Justice Government Primary school have been trained. However, those who have not attended professional development workshops in differentiating lessons, but have been exposed to it via textbooks and personal internet research, expressed that they understand the value of using differentiated instruction. Nevertheless, some teachers have been observed teaching 'whole class' lessons with little or no differentiation methods in-keeping with the learning needs of individual students in her classroom. Hence individual attention for some pupils is deemed necessary for their educational development and furtherance. The practice of whole-class lessons appear to be impinging on the educational development of those students, who seem to be left behind and are struggling to cope academically.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to understand, from the perspectives of the teachers, why they continue to teach the way they do, despite their expressed belief that the differentiated instructional approach is valuable to the students' learning needs and is able to make a difference in their academic performances. Tomlinson (2005) expresses that some schools, in spite of contemporary ways of doing, still leans to the traditional *one-size-fits-all* end of the scale. Thus it is hoped that this study may encourage administration to plan for professional development that could assist teachers and others to overcome the challenges which they may be facing in carrying out differentiated instruction in the classroom. It is also hoped that teachers in the inclusive classroom make use of a variety of instructional strategies and encourage active participation during lesson delivery so that both, what is being learned and the learning environment are conducive to the learner and their learning (Tomlinson, 2014).

Significance to the Study

This study is significant to teachers in education since the expectations of the Ministry of Education requires teachers to manage the lesson delivery in such a way that all children with different learning abilities receive the content knowledge that will enable them to build on their schemas and improve learning, and reach the acceptable curriculum level for their age. However the developmental ages of children in the contemporary education system today may not be satisfied or achieve success without the implementation of differentiated instruction. Furthermore, the task of teaching three or more levels of students in one classroom is demanding of the teachers' time, energy and creativity. Thus the lived experiences of teachers' perspectives in this study may be used as a source of encouragement to other teachers who are struggling to meet the demands of the mixed ability classroom. It may also inform administration and parents as how to support teachers more effectively as they perform D.I. in the classroom. In addition it is hoped that it may provide interested readers and future researchers an additional reference which may inspire further exploration of the phenomenon of teachers' lived experiences with the implementation of D.I. in the mixed ability classroom.

Main research question

- What are the teachers' perspectives about using D.I. approach at Justice Government Primary school?

Sub research Questions

- What are teachers' understandings of D.I.?
- How do teachers feel about their lived experiences when implementing D.I. in the classroom?

Chapter 2

The Literature Review

Introduction

This research investigates the perspectives and lived experiences of teachers in the primary school who are aware of the benefits of differentiated instruction in the learning process of the inclusive classroom. However they seldom practice differentiated instruction and the very little that is accomplished in the classroom is only on specific subjects and those are the subject areas the teachers favour. As a result, this assessment of literature focused on the perspectives and lived experiences of in-service teachers who have been trained through workshops and have been exposed by another medium, in the strategy of differentiated instruction but are not practicing it often, efficiently or effectively. Therefore they are not accessing the benefits of D.I. and are also burdened with the challenges of the implementation.

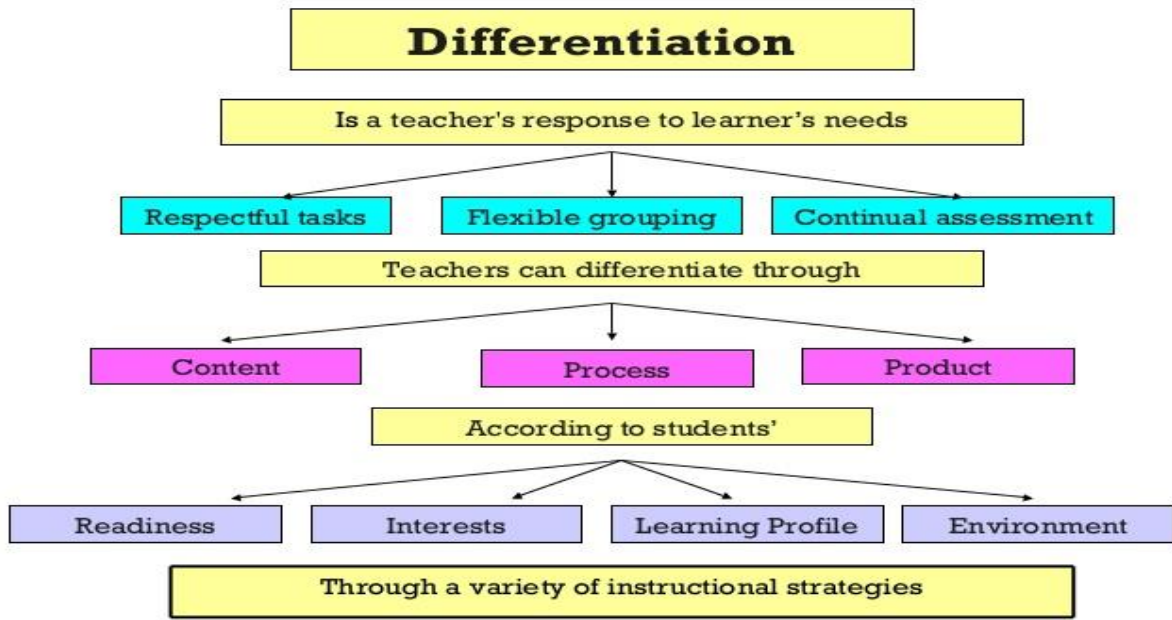
About Differentiated instruction

Differentiated instruction is an exceedingly efficient means of productive education for teachers to resourcefully engage all learners in their class (George, 2005). The teacher as the facilitator of transmitting information must recognize the differences in the children's commitment, readiness, willingness and interests in order to effectively implement D.I. in order to achieve success. D.I. is not a theory. It is a combination of several theories regarding the manner in which people teach and learn (Hall, 2002). Differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. The teachers who differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping, create successful approaches to instruction (Tomlinson, 2000).

At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Popularized by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2001), differentiated instruction is a deliberate and conscious method of planning and teaching to address student variance (Joseph, 2013). The insightful words of Tomlinson (2000) that, “Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group, to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction. This means “shaking up” what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn. In other words, a differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each student can learn effectively (Tomlinson, 2001, p.1) suggests that teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on students’ readiness, interest, or learning profile; content, process, product and learning environment.

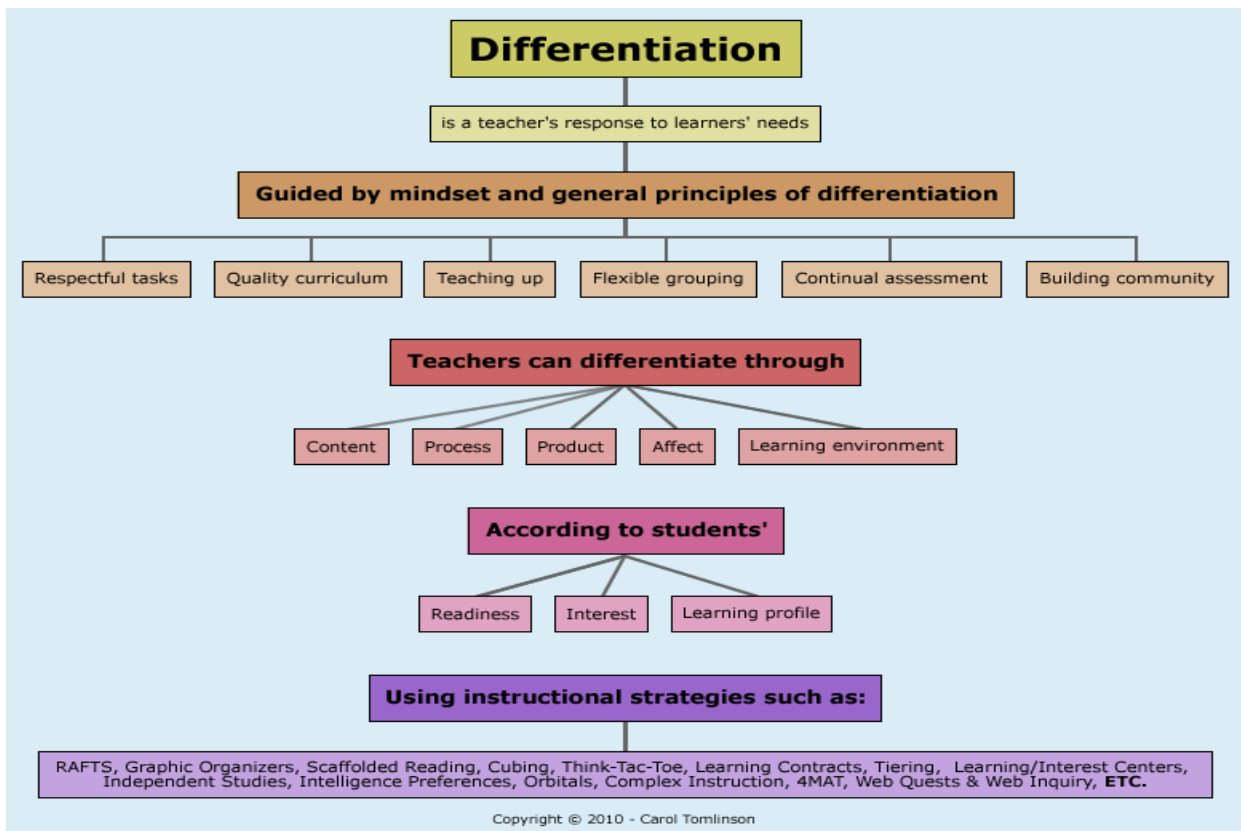
Flow charts 1 and 2 demonstrate the versatile and dynamic pathways of achieving D.I. have evolved over time with additional ways to accommodate the learning needs of all children in the inclusive classroom.

Flow chart 1.



Carol Ann Tomlinson
(2006)

Flow chart 2



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Teachers' perspectives about the commencement of differentiated instruction

Differentiated Instructions was not known by this term before the time of Carol Ann Tomlinson who initiated it and redefined the meaning to focus on other areas of educational development beside ability grouping and simply adjusting the program to the child. She describes it as the idea of differentiating instruction to accommodate the different ways that students learn which involves a hefty dose of common sense, as well as sturdy support in the theory and research of education (Tomlinson, 2000). It is an approach to teaching that advocates active planning for student differences in classrooms.

Differentiated instruction began with the notion of “adjusting the program to the child” (Washburne, 1953). The thoughts of this adjustment questioned how best the teacher can meet the needs of the children and wisely use the content to develop the interests of children with a wide range of differences in abilities. There was however, one approach attempted to find the solution to this dilemma. Ability grouping was developed to accommodate at least three levels of mental ability. The teachers had to develop alternative, watered down assignments for the slow learners and a more enriched curriculum for the average and above average learners. Afterwards Washburne (1953) reported that at the end of the learning period and for the testing times children were given a universal promotional test, then teachers began to tear their hair; as children were further apart than ever in their ability to learn the work of the grade to which they were assigned. Children were treated as though they were expected to produce the same results regardless of their mental levels or abilities.

Teachers' perspectives on the implementation of Differentiated Instruction

It is clear from studies conducted over the past decades that teachers encounter difficulties in accommodating students' individual differences by applying differentiation

strategies in practice, and particularly in sustaining their use over time (Read, 1998; Schumm and Vaughn, 1991; Simpson and Ure, 1994; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Wotruba and Nania, 1990; Westwood, 2001, as cited in Nicolae, 2013). The major challenges of differentiation include limited preparation time, large class size, teachers' heavy workload, lack of resources, teachers' lack of skills in differentiation, and teachers' lack of motivation to differentiate (Chan, Chang, Westwood and Yuen, 2002; Scott, Vitale and Masten, 1998; Westwood, 2002, as cited in Nicolae, 2013).

The greatest challenges presented in our schools today are to change the practice of traditional and linear approaches, which is highly ineffective within the inclusive classroom, and to make every effort to advance students' learning in the mixed ability classrooms. Consequently, teachers are expected to be proactive and respond effectively to the endless changing students' needs while being mindful of each student's learning process (Tomlinson, 2001). Tomlinson (2004) further emphasizes that "Teaching with the basic rules and traditions" has become the norm in too many schools. However, the common thought among many researchers is that; changing the teachers' core beliefs and dealing with their concerns about the reform can facilitate the implementation of differentiation (Fullan, 1999). On the other hand, research further shows evidence that the blind effects of overloaded, and sometimes, contradictory policy demands often resulted in teacher discouragement, professional knowledge ambiguity and significant degrees of work-related stress (Nicolae, 2013). There are studies that point out that the greatest challenge teachers face with differentiate instruction is time, followed by classroom management skills, changing teacher expectations, professional development and lifelong learning personal targets (Corley, 2005 as cited in Nicolae, 2013). Whereas teachers think that it is necessary for their students, others

do not like extra work. Supplementary preparation, considered by mostly out of the didactic norm, is not worth the time. So they stick to planning for whole-class instruction (Morocco, Riley, Gordon, and Howard, 1996) even though the result has no considerable effects on student achievement in the mixed ability classroom (Nicolae, 2013).

According to Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) “teachers attempt to D.I. by giving struggling learners less to do than other students and by giving more advance students more to do than other learners.” It is not helpful to struggling learners to do less of what they do not grasp. Apparently teachers are more likely to find adjustments for learner variances to be more popular than practical (Schumm and Vaughn, 1991); they feel uncomfortable with the idea of modifying materials, changing instructional practices, making long range plans, or adapting scoring and grading criteria (McIntosh, 1996) since somehow that may have a negative impact on struggling learners.

The most repetitive response teachers express about the use of D.I. in the classroom is time constraints. Dr. Wanja Njagi (2014) states in his research, “The differentiated instruction lessons are time consuming because the teachers requires more planning time and more analysis time in that all cannot get done effectively within the allocated time.” Teachers view the concern of increased planning time with apprehension. Teachers had concerns over the time allocated to prepare for differentiated instruction for they have syllabus to cover, high expectations for results and huge workload (Wanja Njagi, 2014). The findings concurred with Affholder (2003) who found out that the demands of time for planning and preparation to be a major concern of teachers.

Studies further reveal that many teachers experience obstacles in attempting to incorporate differentiated instructions in their lessons delivery in the classroom. Some of

these include a general lack of administrative support; teachers felt largely unsupported by the administration in their efforts to effect change in their classrooms and in the school, and were discouraged by the low achievement and motivation of their students (Hertberg, Davis and Brighton, 2006). There is also fear of lowering student test scores by deviating from the prescribed curriculum (VanTassel, Baska, 2006 as cited in Joseph, 2014). In addition to the obstacles there is the challenge of dealing with student behavioural problems (Brighton and Hertberg, Davis, 2004; Knopper and Fertig, 2005; Westberg et al., 1993); teacher resistance to a change in teaching style (Tieso, 2004); teachers did not recognize differentiation as relevant to addressing deeper issues of learning that may benefit their students academically (Hertberg, Davis and Brighton, 2006). In that study the teachers of a certain school were very vocal in protesting against being asked to differentiate curriculum, instruction and assessment, lack of time to plan for differentiation (Brighton & Hertberg, Davis, 2004; Knopper and Fertig, 2005) and uncertainty About parents' reaction to differentiation (Knopper and Fertig, 2005). Notwithstanding these obstacles, differentiation works best when teachers are motivated and when principals and administrators provide the enabling resources and support (Joseph, 2013).

Teachers' perspectives of others' expectations

The onus is, on the expectations of teachers, to recognize and understand if a student is a whole-to-part, part-to-whole learner; likes to work in silence, groups, independently; through written expression, speaking, and so on (Nicolae, 2013). Teachers are expected to meet the needs of all learners in these diverse classrooms (Wanja Njagi, 2014). There is no doubt that today's classrooms are typified by academic diversity more than ever before (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999; Meier, 1995). The current school reform

movement is a call for teachers to adjust curriculum, materials, and support to ensure that each student has equity of access to high-quality learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999). The expectation is that teachers need to customize their instructional delivery and assignments to address the needs of all learners while creating opportunities for success of all (Wanja Njagi, 2014).

Schumm and Vaughn (1995) suggest that general education teachers reject adapting instruction for individual learner needs because they feel if doing so it calls attention to student differences. Moreover, most teachers are unaware of learners' individual needs (Schumm and Vaughn, 1992, 1995). Consequently daily challenges confront teachers to address the learning needs of the students (Villegas and Lucas, 2007). The added stress for teachers is that the public insists that teachers play a primary role in the application of differentiated instruction in classrooms and so they have the key to successful implementation of differentiated instruction strategies (Wanja Njagi, 2014). Johnsen (2003) argues that teachers have a responsibility to make school a place where every student can benefit. Teachers are influential in scaffolding students to reach their highest potential in learning. Thus teachers come across a surmountable amount of pressure to elevate the learning standards while meeting the needs of all learners in the mixed ability classroom.

Teachers need to prepare students for the future by utilizing effective instructional alternatives for teaching an academically diverse population (Wanja Njagi, 2014). Teachers should be perceptive to the needs of students, cater for their different learning styles and seek ways to help them make links towards developing their learning, to reach a successful goal. Teachers are continually challenged to implement modifications to their lessons within the classroom to provide students with a positive, interesting, challenging, collaborative and

supportive learning environment to ensure that each individual student's academic needs are met (Wanja Njagi, 2014). Teachers need to assist in creating environments conducive to individualized learning that will allow full improvement of the opportunities to be taught and will help students in developing the knowledge and skills essential for accomplishing positive learning outcomes (Christensen, 2007).

Teachers reported that they required more training on utilization of differentiated instruction techniques. The knowledge and comfort of using differentiated instruction are the major predictors of teachers' willingness to use the approach (Wanja Njagi, 2014). This agrees with Blozowich (2001) who concluded that teachers implementing differentiated instruction require continuous and consistent professional development, coupled with intensive dialogue and consultation about how differentiated instruction techniques are being implemented in the classroom. Also McKenzie (2000) posits that there is a strong need for teachers to have extensive training in the implementation of differentiated instruction. Once teachers are equipped with strategies that empower them, they are more likely to implement these in their classrooms, and this is consequently likely to influence their attitudes and behaviours (Subban and Round, 2015).

Local studies: teachers' perspectives about differentiated instructions

John and Joseph (2015) recognize that many teachers develop sound pedagogical skills and competencies to meet the varying needs of learners in the classrooms. However, this ideal is not always achieved since some graduate teachers continue to experience severe challenges in bridging the gap between theory and effective classroom practice. Ireh and Ibeneme (2010) suggest one way to accomplish this is to emphasize differentiated instruction not merely as an instructional strategy, but rather as a critical teaching and learning philosophy

that all prospective teachers should be exposed to in teacher education programmes. There is a study which addresses this issue by exposing teachers in Trinidad and Tobago to differentiated instruction through classroom teaching and modelling (Joseph, Thomas, Simonette and Ramsook, 2013) which points to government's growing interest in greater inclusion of all students with special needs and the importance of addressing the question of learner variance in classrooms of the nation's schools (Joseph, 2013). Another study from Joseph (2014) indicates that forty-two Trinidadian primary school teachers were asked questions pertaining to their development in terms of:

Teaching delivery and instruction, reflection of their instructional practice, altering their instructional practices to suit students' differentiated abilities and any additional comments. Responses yielded the following themes: catering to students' preferred learning style, the promotion of a culture of reflective praxis among teachers and transformative learning as a means of fostering enhanced teaching practice among student/teachers. With these themes forming the principal aspects of the data garnered, the theoretical frameworks were: learning styles, reflective praxis and transformative learning.

The result was the perspectives of teachers concerns in all these areas to practically achieve differentiating instructions to meet the needs of all pupils in the inclusive classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism is used for the theoretical framework for this phenomenological study to develop an understanding of the teachers' perspective on the use of differentiated instructions in the inclusive classroom. Constructivism represents one of the big ideas in education. Its implications for how teachers teach and learn to teach are enormous. If our

efforts in reforming education for all students are to succeed, then we must focus on students. To date, a focus on student-centered learning may well be the most important contribution of constructivism (Hoover, 1996).

Currently, many educationalists conceive of learners as architects building their own knowledge structures (Wang, Haertel and Walberg, 1993, as cited in Anthony, 1996). In constructivism the learner changes from that of a submissive recipient of information to that of an energetic constructor or participator of knowledge. The current learning perspectives incorporated three important premises: learning is a process of knowledge construction, not of knowledge recording or absorption; learning is knowledge-dependent: people use current knowledge to construct new knowledge; the learner is aware of the processes of cognition and can control and regulate them; this self-awareness, or metacognition (Flavell, 1976) significantly influences the course of learning. If learning is based on prior knowledge, then teachers must note that knowledge, and provide learning environments that exploit inconsistencies between learners' current understandings and the new experiences before them. This challenges teachers; for they cannot assume that all children understand something in the same way. Further, children may need different experiences to advance to different levels of understanding.

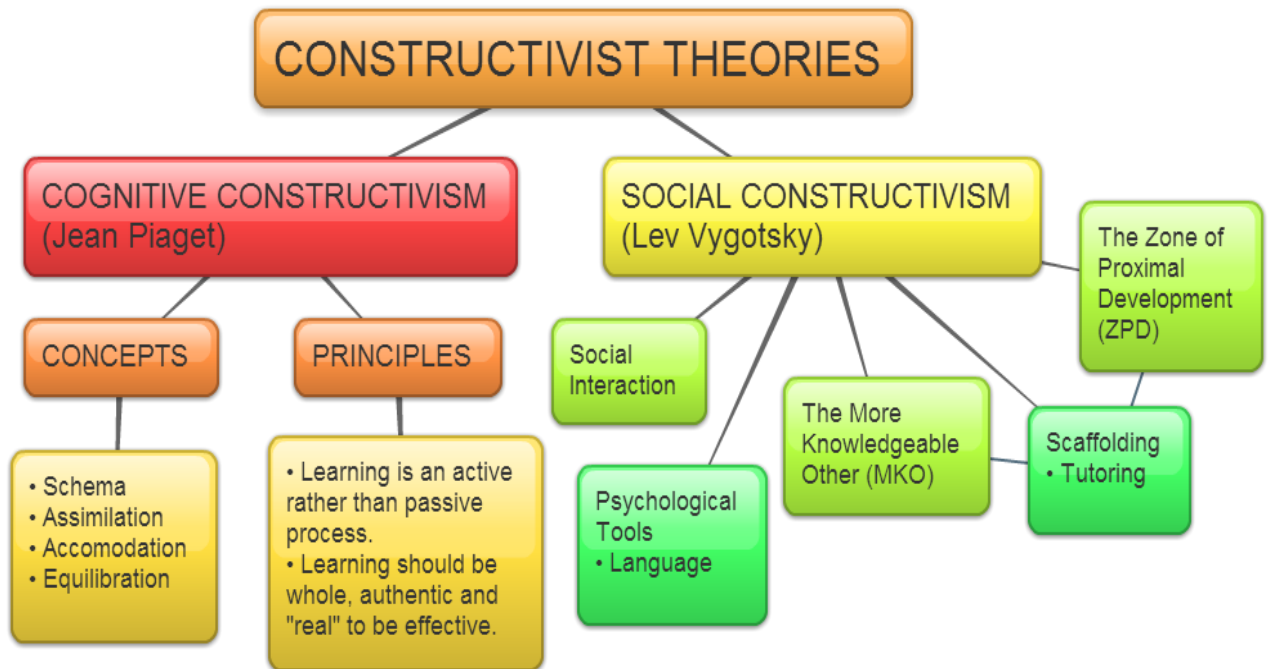
A constructivist teacher creates a context for learning in which students can become engaged in interesting activities that encourages and facilitates learning. This is a direct attribute to differentiated instruction. The teacher does not simply stand by and watch children explore and discover. Instead, the teacher may often guide students as they approach problems, may encourage them to work in groups to think about issues and questions, and support them with encouragement and advice as they tackle problems, adventures, and

challenges that are rooted in real life situations that are both interesting to the students and satisfying in terms of the result of their work. Teachers thus facilitate cognitive growth and learning as do peers and other members of the child's community. Thus constructivism has important implications for teaching. Teaching cannot be viewed as the transmission of knowledge; constructivist teachers do not take the role of the sage on the stage. Rather, teachers act as guides on the side who provide students with opportunities to test the adequacy of their current understandings (Hoover 1996).

Piaget (1968) notion is that children's development must necessarily precede their learning. Piaget (1968) disagreed with the tabula rasa notion of the child's mind. Instead, he proposed that young children gradually develop cognitive structures to make sense of the world.

Vygotsky (1978) argues that learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function. In other words, social learning tends to precede development (McLeod, 2014).

This chart captures the constructivism paradigm



Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative Phenomenological Design

The phenomenological approach seemed to be the most appropriate and effective approach to accomplish this study. The plan of action or strategy used will examine the perspectives of the lived experiences of a small sample of five (5) participants from Justice Government Primary School in an attempt to understand their experiences of the phenomenon which is the use of D.I. in the mixed ability classroom. The design of each question, (view Appendix C) was strategically fashioned to direct and steer the research so that data collected may not contradict or have any detachment to the issue being investigated. It was trustworthy to note that five teachers were chosen since a larger sample may become unmanageable for the time given to conduct this research. A purposeful sampling was decided on, in order to accumulate effective responses that would minister to the issue in this study so that resourceful conclusions and recommendations can be presented.

The phenomenological method of research was appropriate since it attempted to understand the human experience in the practical field through scrutinizing a person's description of their "lived experience" of a phenomenon (Waters, 2016). It was worth emphasizing that untainted phenomenological research inquires essentially to express rather than clarify. Furthermore, it was not originated from a hypothesis or a presumption of any kind but from a perspective of individual's lived experiences (Husserl, 1970 as cited in Lester, 1999). Therefore, the focus was on the subjective experiences of individuals' perspectives in regard to the phenomenon and the overview of things or the composition in which things

occur. As well as the culture we develop because of our experiences and how individuals construe their experiences (University of Hertfordshire, 2004).

Justification

The goal in phenomenology was to bring the readers into a new perspective, where they could view and attain meaning from the phenomenon in a different way or from a different point of view. Phenomenology was not an influential power to convince anyone to a particular experience but its main objective was to realize a deeper appreciation for the very nature or meaning of the phenomenon. As a result, it offered researchers new knowledge into varying facets of reality (Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, in order to sufficiently examine the research concerns or gather the knowledge, the researcher needed to employ an approach that tapped into the participants' lived experiences about the phenomenon. Thus, I have taken the epistemological phenomenological approach which emphasizes how essential it was for individuals to convey their knowledge of the phenomenon and express their subjective perspectives and interpretation of their lived experiences (Lester, 1999).

Furthermore, in this study, a phenomenological approach, which was found within the framework of the constructivist model, was used to construct an understanding of the commonalities of the participants' responses concerning their lived experiences and their perspectives about the use of differentiated instructions in the inclusive classroom. The nature of the problem was best suited to the phenomenological approach because it recognized the importance in simultaneously understanding several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) so that a comprehensive knowledge of the issue in question may be obtained.

The role of the researcher

The researcher's role was critical as it took the center stage to the results in a qualitative research; this also includes the process throughout the research protocols. Merriam (2009) declares that it is critical that the researcher recognizes that she is the most important component in data collection and analysis presentation for any research. The exactitude with which the qualitative researcher revealed her biases, point of view and subjective compassion determined how she selected, organized, interpreted and presented the data. Hence it was vital that the researcher remained subjective to the responses of the participants' perspectives throughout every aspect of the research, from start to finish. Johnson and Christensen (2012) advocate that the qualitative investigator struggles with inconspicuous meanings of natural phenomena as they observe the world to gain a greater understanding rather than controlling events to prove a theory. Hence the endeavour of the phenomenological researcher was to express the findings and results from the data collected without the researchers' subjective input. Therefore the researcher must be knowledgeable about the practice of bracketing and how questions should be phrased and the non-verbal cues when asking the participants questions, so that it may not skew the integrity of the data about issues within the phenomenon (University of Hertfordshire, 2004).

Throughout the process of collecting information, via face to face interviews, I maintained the primary role of a listener and an observer in order to collect not only the recorded responses of the participants but also the tone and reaction to my questions; those non-verbal cues that would not be recognize on the recording. Careful attention to the non-verbal signals allowed me to construct probing questions on the spot which guided further, richer data for this research. In addition, for ethical values, I have endeavoured to be unbiased

in this research and not impose my personal values, even though I am a promoter of differentiated instructions, I maintain that the research is the teachers' perspective. For this reason, I strived to maintain an objective view concerning each participant's contribution about the phenomenon and left my opinions out. The process of the phenomenon was guided by the meaning characterized by the participants' responses. As a result the researcher became thoroughly engrossed in the study, while perseverance to the protocol of bracketing (Nieswiadomy, 1993, cited in Creswell, 2009) was maintained, and innovatively categorizes the data until such an understanding of the phenomenon emerges (University of Hertfordshire, 2004).

Finally the credibility of the researcher is essential to this phenomenological research. Therefore I heed the advice of Patton (2002) which states that the major practice of the researcher is to declare any professional or private influence that may have affected the integrity of the collection of data, description of the report and the findings of the investigation. As a result, I found it compulsory to declare, for the sake of the validity of this research, that I am an advocate for D.I. and I am a primary school teacher at the school which I am investigating. However, let it be noted that throughout this study I strive to maintain the disposition of the principles of bracketing. In addition, I see great value in this study and therefore, included in my role, as researcher is to gather efficient information in hope that the findings will assist other researchers to utilize the information and will encourage teachers to educate themselves and practice differentiated instruction in the inclusive classroom.

The research setting

The research location or environmental setting in which the interview took place was an important consideration for both the participants and the researcher. The participants

should feel safe and must be made assure that confidentiality is maintained throughout the interviewing process. The environment which the interview is taking place much encourage the integrity of responses of each participant, which is essential to the purpose of the study, and the recording must be of good quality to transcribe the data with precision (Woods, 2006). Therefore the interviews were conducted half an hour after school was dismissed in an enclosed room at the of Justice Government primary school. The participants felt comfortable as the place was concealed and private with no outside interference and they also felt confident that their trend of thought would not be distracted by the environmental factors within the school compound. The interviews took between twenty to twenty-five minutes to be completed.

The sampling

Sampling is vital to the data, the analysis and findings of any study. Therefore it is crucial that the percentage or a selected few from a group or community are capable of assisting in the particular study. In selecting participants the researcher must keep in mind that the method of sampling and the participants selected are dictated by the phenomenon Hycner (1999). There are several procedures of sampling; however, I have chosen purposeful sampling since the phenomenon is the lived experiences of teachers and it requires specific participants with detailed knowledge about the use of D.I. in the mixed ability classroom. Trochin (2006) and Patton (2002) advise that purposeful sampling depends on the researcher's own insight to decide on the type of contributors needed to develop the study. Therefore for this study I selected a small heterogeneous group of five teachers; some of whom often practiced D.I. in the classroom and are aware of the benefits of D.I. but occasionally practice

it in the classroom. I limited my study to five participants since that is acceptable in phenomenological qualitative study.

The samples consist of both male and female from the various levels of the primary school:

- 1 infant teacher – Alana (pseudonym)
- 1 standard one teacher – Angela (pseudonym)
- 1 standard two teacher – Leon (pseudonym)
- 1 standard three teacher – Judy (pseudonym)
- 1 standard four teacher – Peter (pseudonym)

I chose one teacher from each level of the primary school; the infant, the junior and the upper levels, to gather a comprehensive understanding about their perspectives on differentiated instructions as a strategy for the mixed ability classrooms. I assumed that based on the various levels of learning abilities and on the ages of the pupils, at the various levels, the perspective of each teacher would vary. I also thought that the curriculum content and the way they assess their pupils would also make a difference in their lived experiences and deliberation of their perspectives. The infant levels do not assess their pupils with an end of term test but rather an alternative assessment is done via portfolio and pictorial journaling. Given this information I further assumed that the perspectives of those teachers would lean more towards the advocacy of differentiated instructions in the inclusive classroom.

Data collection

Data collection is not simply collecting information but it is a course of action in which information is composed. Merriam (2009) proposes that data collection is about questioning, observing the cues of the participants who are being questioned and evaluating

each response. Creswell (1998) argues that collecting data is “a cycle of interconnected activities with the intention of gathering sufficient data that will inform the research questions”. In qualitative research information collected includes transcribed recordings of participants’ responses, text of the experiences, sentiments and reflections of the research participants. The data collection strategy employed in this study was a face-to-face interview. Interviews are resourceful meanings of collecting data and are justified as a method of investigation. (Walford, 2001) states that by the use of interviews a colossal quantity of data can be accumulated in a limited amount of time.

During the interview, body language and tones were considered and applied as part of the data analysis in this research. The semi-structured approach was valuable to the study because it allowed me to adjust the questions according to the responses of the teachers and to probe for further responses in order to assess their perspectives during each interview. Additionally, this strategy was used to draw out from the teachers’ their thoughts and feelings, about their lived experiences with reference to the practices of D.I. in the mixed ability classroom. The semi-structured strategy could further allow for questions to be asked where some responses may need clarification. Merriam (2012) declares that the semi-structured interviews are not rigid as they allow for additional or rather probing questions to be included where the researcher sees necessary so that data may be more informed and development. Undeniably, interviews propel the researcher into the thought patterns of the interviewees’ mind and allow her to envision the world through diverse perspectives (Mc Cracken, 1988). I heeded the advice of Leedy and Ormrod, (2001) about the open-ended question format, which I also thought to be advantageous because it would enabled the participants to speak freely

and established rapport between the researcher and the teachers to offer comfort to gain their cooperation.

In keeping with the ethical principles of research the participants' permission was sought to audio record the interviews (view permission letter; Appendix A). They were promised confidentiality and anonymity to alleviate any fear they may have which allowed them to speak freely about their perspectives on the practices of differentiated instructional approaches used regularly, in all subject matters including the content, the process and the product.

An intelligible amount of data was obtained. The participants were very cooperative since they were my colleagues; it was easy to have a rapport with them. They felt comfortable to answer any question without apprehension. Even though I was familiar with the participants, I maintain a professional researcher's attitude during the interview and considered the advice of Merriam (2012) which states that the researcher must maintain respect for the participants' opinions in their responses, to refrain from asking questions that may offend and to maintain a rapport that will encourage trust. I was also careful not to prompt any particular response when I ask a question and to maintain an appropriated tone of voice that may encourage the participants to continue their involvement in the interview. (Questions and responses can be viewed at Appendix C). However, two intriguing questions that made the participants eager to answer were:

- What are the challenges in using D.I.?
- What were your experiences attending workshops for differentiated instructions?

Interviews were conducted in the 4th week of March, 2017. Scheduling of interviews were not challenging since I also worked at the Justice Government Primary School; the participants indicated to me the day that was convenient for them and I simply made myself available. I used my cell phone to audio tape the interviews. While the interviews were being recorded, this allowed me to be more focused and observant of the participants' body language, facial expressions, tones and other non-verbal cues which I documented and used in the data analysis.

Data analysis

Analyzing data involved pulling together participants' responses to questions based on what was ask in the general questions and developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from the data obtained by the participants (Creswell, 2014). The composition of phenomena was the main objective for the phenomenological data analysis. The organization of the data was liable on several steps; the crucial and subjective expressions that are evident in the lived experiences of the teachers, also that which was determined both by scrutiny and the researcher's intuitive judgment.

Data Analysis Procedures

Firstly, the recorded interview was transcribed verbatim. There after a reflective description of the data process began. It was common that qualitative, phenomenological data analysis engaged such processes as open-coding, axial, and selective cataloging to authenticate the significant meanings of the phenomenon (University of Hertfordshire, 2004). Berg (2009) advocates the application of a comprehensive examination strategy to explicate the phenomenon. Therefore themes were created and categorised by using the Microsoft word application which made presenting the data as a comprehensive thought. As I further

explored the teachers' responses, I found that Merriam's (2016) thoughts about analyzing data were quite intriguing since I could relate; she states that data analysis is a spiral of intricate processes that is messy and tedious. However, I then saturated my mind with the data by replaying the audio recording interviews a few times and made certain the precision of the transcript. Then I read the transcript, matched it with my observation notes and insightful jottings to ensure the precision of the records.

Furthermore to ensure bracketing was carried out, I followed Kleiman's (2004) strategy of data analysis process. I read the participants' responses as a whole in order to get a comprehensive sense of the experience. I continued with the process of triangulation of data to further ensure that the transcribed records were indeed accurate and I read the interview transcript several times in order to categorize the data into significant units or groups, I then joined together those units that showed similar meanings. Next I integrated the significant sections which are essential to enhance the research and included descriptions of the important context that were discovered and elaborated on the findings. Afterwards I re-examined the transcribed data descriptions, again, in order to validate the explicitation of both the noteworthy meanings and the general configuration. Finally at the conclusion of analyzing the data, I persevered with an explicit breakdown of the categories of information within the descriptive process of phenomenological research study. This essential scrutiny included the procedure of several steps; thorough expressions obtained from the participants, the phenomenological approach was practiced throughout the explicitation, significant meanings determined, well organized construct of data and the transcribed data corresponded with results.

Timeline of the Study

Table 1

Task Description	Timeframe
Conceptualizing the Study	December, 2016 – January, 2017
Background of the Study	February, 2017
Literature Review	February, 2017 – March, 2017
Methodology	March, 2017
Data Collection	March, 2017
Explication of Data	March, 2017 – May, 2017
Report Findings	May, 2017 – June, 2017
Review and Submit	June, 2017

Narration of Experience

My experience was mostly interesting, I learnt a lot in doing this research. However I had numerous challenges throughout the entire research. My first assigned supervisor could not be contacted; I requested another which I received in mid January, 2017. Another challenge was my indecision about a topic. I had two passions. Finally I settled on the Topic: “Teachers’ Perspectives on the Use of Differentiated Instruction in the Mixed Ability Classroom.” I also was uncertain whether to use the method phenomenological approach or refine my research as a case study. My supervisor advised that I use the descriptive phenomenological approach. I was grateful for that single advice. During the development of this thesis, feedback was not forthcoming. However, I managed to research and make sense of what was required; at least I assumed so. My only hope was that my

research led me in the right direction. Eventually, a flicker of hope gleamed when I received feedback on the first three chapters, a few days before the submission date. I also received some support from friends that I have come to know during this Master's Programme, which made my journey a little easier.

I must mention that this research was more than an investigation; it became a course of study. Reading articles and books for the literature review were tedious activities but I was grateful for the knowledge I have gained. It helped me personally to understand more about D.I. and refreshed some strategies that I had long forgotten. During the intense procedure of developing this thesis I used UWI's guidelines and past students' papers to assist me in the structure and requirements.

The data collection and explication of data was also tedious and challenging. My readings took me to an understanding that in descriptive phenomenological research explication of data was preferred since data analysis procedures changes the authenticity of participants' responses and so upon that counsel of Hycner (1999, as cited in Groenewald, 2004) which was explained in chapter four. I did an explication of the data. The interviews, on the other hand, were very interesting; in fact it improved the work relationship between my colleagues and me. For this the positive outweighed the negative.

The challenges continued though, due to personal constraints and work I struggled to complete within the expected time and requested an extension. During the extension period I managed to complete the thesis to the best of my ability. I will certainly take this experience and knowledge of research as an on-going process in my professional career because it has opened new ways of critical thinking that I accept as beneficial to my overall development.

Ethical considerations

The attribute of good research must hold fast to the ethical conventions which make the researcher's work credible. Merriam (2009) posits that qualitative research engages the use of ethics to ensure that the necessary measures are taken for reliability and validity. Moreover, the threat to validity must be managed since it measures the trustworthiness of the results and findings (Henrichsen, Smith and Baker, 1997).

First the researcher was aware of her predisposition as a teacher who practices D.I. in the mixed ability classroom and has convincing knowledge and experience that it facilitated the process of children's learning. The researcher is also aware that she is the human instrument (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) in the research process and that it is necessary to practice reflexivity which is the technique of reflecting significantly on self throughout the development of the research. This knowledge will help the researcher to control biasness by bracketing her thoughts so that it would not have great impact on the findings of the study. In addition, it will also help the reader to gain knowledge about the researcher's specific interpretations of the information from the participants (Merriam, 2009).

Secondly the researcher was conscious that she was the main instrument of collecting and analyzing data. Hence the researcher must have adequate engagement in data collection (Merriam, 2009) by reading the transcribed data over and over, be able to understand the perspectives of the teachers, uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework and to present a holistic interpretation of what was happening (Merriam, 2009). The researcher must also monitor ethical matters which may explicate the purpose of the study, maintain a systematic process of evaluating the potential risks, use discretion, proceed with informed consent, ensure good mental health of all involved, adhere to data collection

restrictions and limitations and know the difference between ethical and lawful conduct (Patton, 2002)

In the endeavour to keep the standards of ethics for this inquiry, I sought the principal's informed consent as well as the five teachers of Justice Government Primary school by means of letters which delineated the details of the study (see Appendix A & B). All interested participants must be given a clear definition and an overview of the issues involved in the study to ensure their willingness to be participate (Johnson and Christensen, 2012) without apprehension. The consent form explained the participant's rights for confidentiality and anonymity, and the freedom to stop participating in the study at any time he/she wishes to. There is a clause in the international standard of ethics which states that, "research participants are allowed to depart from a study unless they are bound by their profession" (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Ethical codes endorse that the researcher assures the prudence or confidentiality of both the identity of the participants and their responses. Anonymity of the participants is highly recommended in any research. Therefore the use of pseudonyms was used to hide each participant's identity. Participants were also reassured verbally and in the letter of consent that the information drawn would not be used for any other purpose than the study. To further encourage the participants' confidence I informed them that they could access the data at their leisure. To ensure that the principals of ethics are honoured, I often conferred with the participants throughout the process of documenting the explicitation; this enabled authentication of my findings according to their essence and experiences. This ensured that bracketing took place and my own thoughts and feelings were not interpreting the messages in a bias manner but rather it was the participants' true sentiments which were related in the

description of the data. This process of collaborating with the participants ensured that the researcher did not misinterpret what the participants meant to say, thus maintaining high internal validity or credibility of the research; this is known as member checking. The researcher used member checking or respondent validation (Merriam, 2009) to ensure validity was applied at its highest quality for this study.

Limitations to the study

Limitations are the circumstances in which the researcher was unable to control and that which may place restrictions on the findings or results of the issue and their relevance to other situations (Best & Kahn, 2006). The possibility of biased and flawed data from participants, bracketing of personal thoughts and experiences might have been difficult in interpreting the context of participants' perspectives of their experiences. Researcher bias is another fact that can be a limitation. If the researcher is familiar with the participants at Justice Government Primary school the probability of biasness may be high. However, I embraced an objective disposition and deal with each participant in an expert manner.

Delimitations of the study

Delimitations are the perimeters which confines the study to the purpose intended. This investigation cannot be generalized as the findings were specific to the lived experiences of teachers in one primary school, in the St. George East District and five participants were explicitly chosen by the researcher from the infant level to the standard four level. Another boundary is that only three teachers were well trained in the knowledge and practice of D.I. The other two were not formally trained but was exposed to two workshops provided by the school and through their personal experiences and longevity in the teaching service they

adapted some strategies of tiering and differentiating instructions to cope with the inclusive classroom.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

This study was guided by questions that were elicited from the teachers' perspectives about practicing differentiated instructions in the classroom. This part of the research may not be an analysis of the data as such; taking the advice from Hycner (1999, as cited in Groenewald, 2004) he warns that in phenomenology an analysis report may have conflicting inferences which may allow for the researchers to contribute subjective thoughts that may become part of the interpretation; this may defeat the purpose of bracketing which is fundamental to phenomenological research. Therefore it is more suitable to express the information in an explicit form so that the information from the participants will be a component of their whole perspectives of the phenomenon rather than an interpretation.

The main and sub questions were asked to individual teachers, which were recorded and several jottings of expressions were noted. Probing questions varied since the participants' responses caused additional questions to be interjected during the conversation. The variation of questions allowed for thick, rich data to be described and gave better understanding about the phenomenon. During the interview process I noted hand gestures, movements and facial expressions the common non-verbal cues of the teachers' in response to the questions. I applied these jottings as they support the construction of the reflective journal that will provide valuable evidence as I triangulated the data. Before expressing the descriptions of the phenomenon I would like to introduce you to the five teachers (participants) in this study. Pseudonyms were given to each participant to ensure anonymity.

A teacher was taken from each level or standard to harness the perspectives of teachers' lived experiences about differentiated instruction.

Introduction to Participants

The five teachers in this study have between 6 to 20 years of teaching experiences. All five teachers in this study have been trained in the use of D.I. However, only two teachers were privileged to experience the move from the traditional 'talk and chalk' ways of teaching, to the contemporary (*mixed ability classroom*) with constructivists' theories and D.I. strategies of teaching. The other three were employed in the teaching profession after the institution of constructivists' theories and differentiated instruction were established as the way of teaching to accommodate the mixed ability classroom. A document presented by the Ministry of Education (2013) stated that the MOE has produced a new program of study for the primary schools with a focus to include integrated and thematic lessons. This approach requires the use of D.I. to efficiently fulfill its purpose in the contemporary classroom.

Infant teacher - Alana

Alana attended the University of Trinidad and Tobago for four years and graduated in 2011. She is presently an Assistant Primary Teacher awaiting her appointment to Teacher. Prior to teaching in the government primary school she taught privately at a kindergarten school for five years. She gained some experiences about the implementation of differentiated instructions during her four years at UTT. She attended three workshops offered by the school during the years 2012 and 2013. She has never attended any other since and seldom implements differentiated instruction.

Standard one teacher – Angela

Angela has a Bachelor's degree in education from UTT and has been a teacher in a private school for six years. She taught infant one and two and is now teaching standard one. She is excited about the use of differentiated instructions and appreciates the methods that reach a number of diverse students. She implements D.I. with her thirty-one students as often as possible. Angela has attended several differentiated instructional workshops provided by the Ministry of Education in the school and she keeps up-to-date on new ways of doing with findings and research from the internet.

Standard two teacher – Leon

Leon is a teacher for twelve years. He has taught at other levels and is now at standard two. He has a Bachelor's Degree from UTT and gained most of his experiences about differentiated instructions from his tenure at the university. Leon implements differentiated instructions as often as he can. He spends a lot of time planning and researching ways of using differentiated methods to meet the interests of his pupils. He believes that in the mixed ability classroom it is inevitable that differentiated instructions be taught as often as possible to meet all the needs and satisfy the interests of pupils in order to gain success.

Standard three teacher – Judy

Judy has been teaching for ten years. She has earned a Bachelor Degree for UTT. She has exposed herself to various differentiated instructional workshops which have afforded her a vast amount of knowledge which she often implements. She also, like Angela and Leon, researches different sites to enhance her implementation of differentiated instructions to meet the needs and interests of her pupils. She admits that it is time consuming but enjoys implementing it as often as she can.

Standard four teacher– Peter

Peter is forty-two years old and has been teaching for the past 20 years. One year with the private sector and nineteen with the government. He has a Teacher's Diploma from the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC) which was Caribbean Union College at that time. He also completed a Bachelor degree with an emphasis on Language Arts at the USC. He taught standard three for one year, standard one for five years, standard two for twelve years and is presently teaching standard four. He attended workshops provided by the school from time to time but thinks that it is not practical in the real classroom based on his experiences. He does acknowledge that there is much value in implementing differentiated instruction, not only for the mixed ability classrooms but for all pupils in general; however emphasizes time constraints in the implementation process which influences him to revert to traditional ways of teaching in most of his lessons.

Presentation of findings

The result of the findings of each question and each probing question revealed the subjective perspectives of the participants' lived experiences in one school in the East district of Trinidad. The first question was specifically asked, so that an understanding of the participants' perspective on how they comprehend differentiated instructions will be revealed. How someone would view a thing determines how they respond, or how much they are willing to be involved or how well they would act towards it. Educators have different ideas as to what differentiated instruction is and how to effectively and efficiently use it in their delivery for the desired results intended.

Research sub question I: What is differentiated instruction?

Differentiated instruction was generally perceived by all five participants as lessons being done in different ways to satisfy the educational needs of all pupils with varying abilities in the classrooms. Angela, Judy and Leon used the analogy of *tailor made clothing to fit the individual's shape and size and so to lessons are fashioned to meet the pupils understanding and build on their schemas* to communicate differentiated instruction. Angela explained,

"In my own words differentiated instruction is, a sort, is a tailor made instruction, why would I say tailor made I like to use that analogy because if you think about clothing when you get a suit that is tailor made or something that is tailor made it will fit exactly to your body size and proportion and everything like that like if you go to the store and you get something you might have to take in you might have to alter the length or so. But differentiated instruction it is - is not like that it the instructions meets the child where the child is at their needs at their needs."

Peter expressed his views in stating that differentiated instruction is a means of tiering instructions to meet children's need. His perspective is that tiering and differentiated instruction are synonymous in function but they just carry different names or headings. He stated,

"I view differentiated teaching learning, as teaching, tiering the teaching of your lessons so that you cater for the different learning styles in the classroom in that the children who learn via different means different avenues whether it

be using your hands or pictures or direct instruction they are all able to gain from the content of the lesson..."

Alana also agrees that differentiated instruction is geared towards pupils learning abilities. She affirms that, *"Differentiated instruction suits the different learning intelligences of students, to cater to groups of learners"*.

After the participants thoughts or rather perspectives were articulated concerning their perspectives and the meaning of D.I., based on their personal experiences and their exposure or little exposure to professional development in the practical knowledge of D.I. It is necessary to mention that all the participants had similar opinions about D.I. even in the probing questions. The participants conveyed similar experiences, both trained and untrained in the knowledge of D.I. In that it has numerous benefits if done efficiently, if there are resources to accommodate the learning activities and if time is available. Three out of the five participants expressed their lived experiences in using D.I. with sufficient knowledge and exposure to the method and the other two expressed their endeavours to use differentiated instruction, with little professional training and has gained some knowledge through personal research and have infrequently use differentiated instructions in the mixed ability classroom. The responses to the interview questions educed essential information which four general themes emerged: purpose, challenges, experiences and benefits in using differentiated instructions in the mixed ability classroom.

Research sub question II: What are the teachers' lived experiences of implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom?

Interview question #1: What is the purpose for using differentiated instruction in the classroom?

Purpose of D.I.

The purpose was clear on all accounts that differentiated instruction is indeed the appropriate way to teach in a mixed ability classroom. The consensus from all participants about the purpose of differentiated instruction is that it *“supports learning”* Alana declared that it *“facilitates learning by matching teaching to learning styles.”* Angela asserted its purpose by this statement, *“the purpose of using differentiated instruction is to meet those children’s educational needs.”* Leon agreed with Angela on this point, he expressed that, *“the purpose of using differentiated instruction in the classroom is to cater for students’ varying abilities to learning their education.”* He further expressed his perspective by proposing an example, *“For example catering for students who are tactile learners in mathematics, having them use manipulatives.”* In Peter’s perspective *“the purpose is obvious.”* He assumed that it is common knowledge that differentiated instruction has one purpose and that is *“to include all learners in the approach, in the method that you are using to teach because they are unable to learn in the way that we are instructing.”* He further emphasized that *“the traditional ‘Talk and Chalk’ is not working in the mixed ability classroom and is unable to reach all or most of the children under your care.”* Angela shared a similar thought to that point. She explained;

“In the classroom we realise that learners have different types of needs we have children with reading disabilities we have different types of needs in the classroom dyslexia, dyscalculia, and we also have those with other special needs so the purpose of using differentiated instruction is to meet those children’s educational needs”.

Angela also believed that the drive in 1990 which states 'no child left behind' is of great consequences when describing the purpose of differentiated instruction in the mixed ability classroom. Judy advocated that,

“differentiated instruction allows for different levels of thinking abilities.” So by using different ways of doing, the concept of lesson or topic will be done differently and some children may learn it one way while others another way.” She clarified that, *“Some children may be able to look at a picture and see the main idea while others may look at a paragraph and be able to read the main idea. Some children are visual and some are linguistic.”*

Interview question #2: What is your experience in implementing differentiated instructions in the classroom?

Experiences implementing D.I.

This question proved to be an “*eye opener*” for the participants to reflect upon their lived experiences and submerge their thoughts into the reality of what actually happens in the mixed ability classroom. Their facial expressions connoted that they were indeed reflecting on lived experiences. In fact Leon specifically stated, *“It has been an eye opening experience that has encouraged me to do more in the lessons and units.”* Therefore with respect to the implementation of D.I., all the participants' perspectives about the use of differentiated instruction in the classroom were that it is the ideal method to assist pupils in a mixed ability classroom but two were apprehensive about the achievement of this method since it is time consuming and lack availability of professional development workshops which teaches how to practically apply it in today's classroom. Consequently, willingness verses time constraints and knowledge verses practical ability becomes the general consensus, as the greatest

concerns, with the implementation of D.I. Alana's straightforward response confirms that *"Planning takes time. Delivery takes time."* Judy also relates that similar concern about time. She declared, *"It sounds nice in your plans on paper, even though planning is time consuming, but in practice it is not easy."* Judy emphasized that D.I. is an effective method but it takes the cooperation of the learners to participate according to instructions. She explained,

"The group work and cooperative learning is supposed to facilitate or allow the weak learns to benefit from the strong and the strong learners get an opportunity to reinforce their knowledge but the problem with that is that they talk too much so the experience in using the differentiated instructions becomes tedious for the teacher and challenging to perform."

Angela's experiences, on the other hand, seemed to be an accommodation of the method of differentiated instruction. Her tone, facial expression and her reaction reflected a personal joy of her experiences in the classroom as she elaborated. I gather that time for planning and delivering lessons does not seem to be an issue for her. She began her response with a smile and this statement, *"I like this because the teaching and learning process, it becomes very dynamic..."* She further emphasized that this method allows children to be active participants in the teaching and learning process, *"...child is really so much a part of the lesson that they forget it's work, you know, it's like well, I am helping Miss teach."* In her experiences she shows appreciation towards differentiated instructions as it gives opportunity for the pupils to be interested in their education, she was very expressive as she explained,

"I would draw examples and I would use them whatever umm use their skills to bring forth the lesson where as in the traditional chalk and talk it really

sometimes is a hit and miss with students so when doing umm differentiated instruction the children, you get the ooos and the ahhhhs and sometimes you may not have to even write anything but that lesson is imbedded in the students mind when they are thinking about it like went if you ask questions umm about it later on in the term or maybe at the end of the umm at the the term you will hear them using those references and examples and so the child is really so much a part of the lesson.”

Angela reiterates how much she enjoys using D.I. in the classroom, in spite of the added noises collaboration and cooperative learning yields, “*sometimes you have to tolerate the noise.*” Leon, without hesitation, responded to the question. He and said that in his experience also advocated that his experience in implementing differentiated instruction was a positive one. He spontaneously responded to the question and said that his experiences were “*positive*” and it works better than the “*traditional learning and teaching styles,*” he also included that the activities “*engage*” the students in the teaching and learning process.

Peter as well expressed the benefits to pupils and their education implementing the strategies of D.I. in the teaching and learning process. He stressed that this method “*benefits everyone*” in the mixed ability classroom. He also affirmed, that the “*activities are interesting*” and that the pupils “*actually want to be included in the learning process*”.

Interview question # 3: What are the challenges experienced using differentiated instructions in the classroom?

Challenges in using D.I.

The general perspectives of the participants’ major challenges expressed by the five teachers are the classroom space, standardized tests and time to plan and implement.

Classroom space challenges

Classroom space is a challenge for all participants in this study. Every participant seemed to have expressed similar and different challenges concerning their classroom size. Effective implementation of D.I. requires space and the convenience of free movement. Alana suggested, *“Teacher and pupils must be comfortable to move around freely.”* Leon stated that, *“the infrastructure is not available for proper D.I. such as class size.”* This led me to probe and he explained, *“Classroom size sorry. The infrastructure as I mentioned is not accommodating for the variety of D.I. methods that I would like to do with my pupils in the classroom.”* Judy’s last response to the question was similar to Leon’s and Alana’s, She explained, *“the most challenging of all is space to execute these differentiated activities, some required group and teamwork, conversation, and the classroom setting is not conducive, the desk can be rearranged but the space is still too congested.”* Clearly there is proof from the teachers’ perspectives and their lived experiences that the inadequate size of the classroom is unable facilitate the strategies of D.I.

Peter was not too concerned about the classroom size since he did not practice much D.I. but preferred to teach the way he is accustomed to, he said that *“differentiated learning has been more or less limited because I stick with my style of teaching (chuckles).”* However, he did mention that the space was not convenient for some activities, he also revealed that he would seldom *“take them to the Audio Visual room, there is more space there,”*

Finally on this point Angela did not mention in plain words that the infrastructure of the classroom could be a factor in the challenges of implementing D.I. but she did mention the class size in terms of the amount of children in her class; she declared, *“my class is a big class I have 31 students”* and *“as I told you I have a big class it is really a challenge.”* Angela’s

challenge was mainly the effectiveness of using differentiated instruction with such a large number of children in her class. However, after a probing question: *What about the infrastructure, how does it contribute to the use of D.I.?* She explained that, *“The classroom is small for the amount of children. It is too tight fitting, congested; the children are unable to move freely, this partly contributes to the noise...”* She further stated that, *“The noise is not a problem for me but it is a little disturbing to the other teachers next door (chuckles).”*

Standardized tests challenges

Three teachers initially mentioned that the testing system is not in collaboration with the methods used in differentiated instruction and for students of mixed ability. Alana declared that, *“It does not cater for standardized test; or rather the standardized test does not cater for pupils with vary abilities.”* Angela agreed with Alana in her statement, *“The major challenge is the testing, it is not really differentiated because think about it, if I have to do a test to cater for all these students’ learning needs and as I told you I have a big class...”* Judy extensively expressed her thoughts on this challenge;

“Hmm, oh yes the product/evaluation of the children’s understanding is a problem when it comes to the standardized tests. Children at the average and below average levels are unable to critically and analytically think. They mainly follow what you demonstrate. So if they learn it one way they will expect it to be tested that way and most of the differentiated instructions is not taught the way that standardized test comes. For example: differentiated instruction encourages group work but standardized tests are individual. Differentiated instruction is hands on activities to understand concepts but

testing is like theory, a lot of reading and comprehending and trying to interpret what the instruction says, by-your-self."

Planning and implementation challenges

Alana, Judy and Leon emphasizes that time for planning is too short to execute activities for all the subjects all the time even if you integrated. Peter strongly suggested that *"time is the enemy."* Time seemed to be the most or rather major factor when it comes to using differentiated instruction. Angela, on the other hand, seemed to be comfortable with the workload of planning and implementing because she responded quiet delightful, *"Well, I take it one day at a time. I plan out my lessons and activities at home the day before."* She seemed to be contented with doing work at home to prepare for the next day.

Interview question #4: What are your experiences attending workshops for differentiated instruction?

One theme was prevalent with this question and that was theory vs. practical.

Theory vs. practical challenges

Angela, Judy, and Peter attended some workshops on D.I., the other two participants, Alana and Leon had training in D.I. from their UTT practicum training and attended workshops during that time. Angel and Judy also attended UTT and enjoyed the hand on activities which D.I. However all the participants had concerns about the demonstrations with adults as compared to working with primary school children. Alana indicated that, *"The theory and hands on experiences from UTT creates a gap to reality in the classroom"* Adults can think faster and see outcomes clearer because the awareness of concepts is already imbedded. Leon expressed his experiences after receiving training during his degree at UTT, *"The only concern I am struggling with is, it is easier to do differentiated instruction with*

adults because the concepts are already in our schemas, we will cooperate but in my experiences children are not that easily managed.” Judy was also of this view as she responded, *“It is not so with children, besides the hands on experiences, the children also have to expand their cognitive abilities to build on their limited existing schemas.”* Therefore D.I. for an adult is better managed than for children. Peter pointed out that *“The learning process for children is more complex than for adults.”* Angela seemed to be very optimistic about the use of D.I. and expressed her gratefulness for the opportunities to attend workshops. She declared, *“I found it to be very helpful, very interesting and although I was not provided with everything, there is, no one workshop that could give you all the answers and everything...”*

Peter’s main apprehension, about how to effectively use the resources to aid in the practical uses of D.I., when delivering lessons was prevalent in his discourse. Peter indicated that, *“Assessment workshops are practically useless eh now not because the material presented is idealistic or greater or anything you know, well because we haven’t been practically shown how to use it with children.”* Angela stated, *“We do the groupings or whatever resources available, we use it the best way we can”*

Benefits of using D.I.

The benefits of using differentiated instructions are numerous, both to the teacher and especially the learner. All the teachers acknowledge that differentiated instruction does not only encourage students’ willingness to learn in the mixed ability classroom but it also encourages teachers to consider the needs of students; not, just, the task of fulfilling of the curriculum. Leon said, *“When planning for D.I. I take into consideration students needs.”* Alana’s statement was fascinating, she stated, *“To facilitate learning by matching teaching to*

learning styles.” She also said that the, *“Focus is on the child rather than on delivery of the curriculum.”* Angela, Judy and Peter had a similar trend of thought, they declared that D.I. catered for, *“individual learning style, according to their individual levels or abilities.”*

Differentiated instruction explores different ways of presenting information to pupils of different levels of development even though they are in the same class and have the same age. Peter expressed,

“You cater for the different learning stylesdifferent avenues of instruction.they are all able to gain from the content of the lesson they are all able to grasp what you are trying to teach because you tailored to suit all their individual learning styles.”

The avenues in the teaching and learning process phased itself in various ways which allows for the process of connections to be made through the use of technology, resource, games, group work, project, discussions and manipulatives, etc. Peter, Judy, Leon and Alana declared that they use , *“the internet – power points, video clips and youtube videos to teach.”* Angela, on the other hand used more manipulatives to encourage active participation among her learners. She affirmed that, *“...the resources, is what gains their interest and motivates their participation, differentiated instruction is to encourage active learning among all students”*. The classroom is transformed into a *“comfort zone...”* Angela expressed that in the D.I. classroom children *“forget maybe that they are even at school, the learning becomes play and interesting activities and sometimes you have to tolerate the noise at times but I enjoy doing, I enjoy using differentiated instructions.”* She also stated that, *“The classroom becomes very dynamic.”*

Finally on this point, which is most significant, about the benefits of D.I. in the mixed ability classroom, in the teacher's perspectives based on their lived experiences, is that children recall information pertinent to the progress of their education. It is stated in different ways throughout their responses that, "*Children remember, they reflect and they use the strategies during class evaluation and end of term tests.*"

Summary of findings

Several findings were explicated from the responses of the participants in this investigation and are numbered below:

- Teachers would like to practice more differentiated instruction in the classroom if the environment and resources were readily available.
- Teachers may easily be discouraged if resources and the appropriate environment are not available.
- Teachers would like to practice D.I., with children of mixed ability, if they were professionally taught how to use the strategies effectively to ensure that all students in the mixed ability classroom learn the same concepts as required by the curriculum.
- D.I., in most cases, has benefited most pupils in the mixed ability classroom, since it caters for all levels of learners.
- D.I. explores all levels of pupils' abilities to ensure that learning takes place.
- Differentiation is a way of teaching that encourages teachers to understand and respond to each student's needs and guide them through the learning process.
- D.I. allows teachers and students to enjoy learning.
- Differentiated instruction tolerates different ways of assessing students' knowledge and understanding in subject matters.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendation

Discussion

All the participants agreed that differentiated instruction is a theoretical and practical approach that may provide the right environment for the mixed ability classroom. Teachers insisted that they would practice more D.I. in the classroom if the appropriate environment and resources were readily available. Appropriate resources are imperative in this approach to enhance the teaching and learning processes. A teacher provides the materials along with a basic instruction, and allows pupils to examine the materials and ask questions before and during the lesson (Firestone, 2016). The conceptual frame work of the constructivists for this study clearly identified manipulatives/resources as an important element in the use of D.I. in the mixed ability classroom. Firestone (2016) highlights that, “the use of manipulatives is constructivist because students are actively engaged in discovery during the learning process.” As much as teachers desire to encourage all their learners to achieve success they may easily be discouraged if resources and the appropriate environment are not available.

Equally important to the use of resources with the implementation or practice of D.I. in the classroom, teachers' request for professional development is resounding. The literature states that, “Educators' description of the use of D.I required more training and appropriate resources. The understanding or theory of how to use the strategies and the ability to use differentiated instruction are the most important methods of insight for teachers' enthusiasm to use the approach” (Wanja Njagi, 2014). Therefore, if professional workshops are provided and the times of the workshops are convenient, teachers will make themselves available. Teachers will be encouraged to enhance their knowledge and to use the strategies

provided in differentiated instructions effectively. There is evidence in the findings that 'support and inform' the crucial implementation. Peter stated, "*Teachers will also ensure that the use of differentiated instruction is provided to all students in the mixed ability classroom in order that all students ultimately reach the same level as required by the curriculum.*" Thus teachers are willing and interested to teach via this method. This is proven ever so often, Tomlinson (2000) declares, "Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group, to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction."

Consequently when differentiated instruction is not performed with thoughtful planning, proper support and precise knowledge, of the students' needs and interests, it may not be effective. Judy emphasized, "*It sounds nice in your plans on paper but in practice it not easy.*" As a result classroom management may become an issue and that becomes another research problem. Peter expressed "*the grouping activity now in my classroom I see it causes more chaos.*" If that is so, then the result will prove that the strategy of using differentiated instruction is not working. Angela, on the other hand, in this research reassured that differentiated instruction makes possible an environment conducive to learning for all in the mixed ability classroom. The children are able to "*recall information*" and they have "*used the information to help in class work and tests.*" So there is the experience of participants in this research that in spite of the "*chaos*" and "*distractions from the purpose,*" as advocated by Peter and Leon. There is evidence that learning will take place if differentiated instruction is performed with proper planning and knowledge. Therefore differentiated instruction is designed to benefit all students in the mixed ability classroom. Hence those differences in opinion prove evidently that the lived experiences of teachers

established both negative and positive perspectives about differentiated instruction when it is implemented in the mixed ability classroom.

Differentiated instruction, in most cases, has benefited most pupils in the mixed ability classroom, since it caters for all levels of learners. All teachers in this study have agreed that differentiated instruction propels active participation of all levels of learning abilities in the mixed ability classroom. They are convinced that this method of teaching has tremendous benefits to all students at varying developmental ages, *“it caters for all learning styles and abilities”* and it is the best application for the inconsistent levels of ability in a single classroom.

Teachers involved in this study have also attest to the fact that differentiated instruction explores a range of pupils' abilities to ensure that learning takes place. Various activities allow for the involvement of all children since it sorts out and attends to their individual interests and needs. Is it not the desire of all teachers to expect that their students achieve an education? Peter explicitly stated that, *“...are all able to gain from the content of the lesson they are all able to grasp what you are trying to teach because you tailored to suit all their individual learning styles.”* Judy said that, *“You plan the lessons to make it more interesting.”* So the answer to that question is off course, yes.

Differentiation is not a theory as such like constructivism but it is a way of teaching that encourages teachers to understand and respond to each student's needs and guides them through the learning process (Tomlinson, 2001). Hence the theory of constructivism incorporates most of the essential elements of teaching methods necessary to achieve most of the best strategies to differentiated instructions in order to each mixed ability classroom effectively.

In order to satisfy the needs of all students and design appropriate programs of study that will be responsive to the cognitive vigor and personal interests of students and to explore alternatives to long-established instruction; we need to review both the old and the new ways of what is taught and how it is taught, and determine the best means which students can achieve success. Teachers, educational organisations and administrators are seeking, up-to-date ways, to deliver lessons that will fulfill students interest in the contemporary classrooms. Thus differentiated instruction is a standard that is advancing in the educational bureaucracy to recover student achievement (Singh, 2014).

Another advantage of differentiated instruction is that it allows liberty and self expression; teachers and students “*enjoy this learning*” process since the students, themselves, are able to use their autonomy, within the boundaries of the lesson plan, to enhance their independent thinking and establish their own way of doing to accomplish educational success. In addition teachers receive a sense of satisfaction when students learn and enjoy learning.

Finally in this study the most important and vital point is that differentiated instruction tolerates different ways of assessing students’ knowledge and understanding in subject matters. Students are allowed through the use of differentiated instruction, different avenues to achieve and assess their understanding. They are able make sense of their education. They are able become more interested and motivated by the use of activities, games, debates, discussions, drawings, manipulatives and many other ways of exploring knowledge and building on their schemas to gain understanding in the education.

Conclusion

Through the use of literature, the strategies of differentiated instruction and teachers' perspectives of their knowledge and exposure to the practice of this phenomenon in the mixed ability classroom – the lived experiences of teachers were explored. The study has established that differentiated instruction is the ideal method for the development of pupils' education in the mixed ability classroom as oppose to the traditional 'talk and chalk' approach to teaching. Moreover the lack of the use of differentiated instructions in the mixed ability classroom is skewed towards the lack of resources and professional development being made available to teachers. However, the truth of this phenomenon is the reluctance on teachers' behalf to pursue the activities within the paradigm of differentiated instruction because of time. Peter said, "*Time is the enemy.*" Consequently time is the main issue in the practice of differentiated instruction in the mixed ability classroom; the time to plan, to think of the ways for using the resources available and the time to execute differentiated instruction. Judy, Alana and Leon spoke out about the lack of "*appropriate resources*" which may make possible the effective use of differentiated instruction in the mixed ability classroom. They also mentioned the lack of "*professional development*" in how to teach using differentiated instruction to children. Angela on the other hand seem to enjoy planning at home and preparing differentiated instruction tasks, for her large class as often as she can, which is for most of her lessons. She stated, "*Whatever the resources, we use...*"

Consequently, the teachers' conflicting perspectives concerning their lived experiences in the use of differentiated instructions in the mixed ability classroom makes it imperative that they profoundly reconstruct the curriculum and the procedures of the content, within the subject matters, so that all teachers may be able to use it and engage in specific processes to

benefit all students in their care. Finally on this point, the achievement of this goal may succeed when teachers are provided with an on-going programme which will professionally equip them for the contemporary ways of doing.

Recommendation

The explication of the findings in this study warrants the following recommendations:

With urgency, the Ministry of Education should make available regular workshops for teachers to improve their practice in the use of differentiated instruction in the mixed ability classroom and establish a permanent system of on-going training for all teachers which includes the alternative ways of doing as oppose to the traditional 'talk and chalk.'

The Ministry of Education should ensure that the appropriate and sufficient resources be made available to all teachers. The facilities and environment, which are infrastructural resources, should be conducive to implement effect differentiated instruction.

An adjustment to the curriculum's overload of content; this should be considered so that teachers may be able to have more planning time and implementation time to ensure that all pupils in the mixed ability classroom have sufficient time to engage in learning and acquire the skills and knowledge that my propel them into the desired levels of critical and higher order thinking.

Teacher motivation is fundamental to this move. Teachers should be informed about the benefits of teaching differentiated instructions so that it may encourage them to seek professional development in that area and to do their own research to enhance their lesson delivery to allow each child to respond positively and feel confident in the learning environment.

The administration should be more involved in supporting teachers in this endeavour.

Time should be given for teachers to plan together. Teachers' teamwork is just as vital to progressive education as students' collaboration in the classroom. When teachers plan together they are able to communicate their experiences and find solutions that would best facilitate learning by matching teaching to learning styles.

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Appendix A

The Principal,

██████████ Government Primary School

28th March, 2017.

Dear ██████████,

I would like to request permission to conduct a research study at your school.

This study is a requirement of the University of the West Indies as partial fulfilment of the Master of Education Programme which I am currently pursuing. The proposed title of the study is "Teachers' Perspectives on using Differentiated Instructional Approaches in the Mixed Ability Classroom at ██████████ Government Primary School." It is a study into the teachers' perspectives about the benefits and challenges with the implementation of differentiated instruction in the mixed ability classroom.

In order to carry out the research, interviews with five teachers: (one from each level - infant to standard four) a face-to-face interview will be conducted. One interview with each participant will be required in order to gain a full understanding of the research issue. I assure you that the highest level of confidentiality and all other ethical protocols will be observed. I thank you for your kind co- operation in this matter.

Respectfully,

Mrs. Kalisingh

.....

Teacher 1 (Primary)

Appendix B

28th March , 2017

Dear Participant,

My name is Mrs. Golda Sutherland-Kalisingh. I am currently a student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, enrolled in the Masters in Education (with a concentration in Curriculum) Programme. One of my courses requires that I conduct a small research project; I am asking you to participate in that project.

My area of study is the teachers' perspectives on the use of differentiated instructions in the classroom. You have my assurance that no individual teacher will be the focus of this research. Your participation will entail one interview. The interview will be tape recorded and written notes taken. The identities of all participants will be protected; as no actual names will be used in this or any future publications and presentations. As a participant, you should understand that you may be quoted directly but your name will not appear in any part of the report. All data will be stored in a secure location. Please understand that you may withdraw, at any time from the study, without prejudice.

I appreciate your willingness to give your time to this project to help me learn more about teachers' perspective on the use of differentiated instructions in the inclusive classroom.

If you have any questions, please free to contact me at 289-8470 and/or

golda.sutherland@yahoo.com

Regards,

G. Sutherland-Kalisingh

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I have read the above and discussed it with the researcher, I understand the study and I agree to participate. _____ (signature)

_____ (date)

Appendix C

Transcript of teachers' responses

What is differentiated instruction?

Alana

Instruction to suit the different learning intelligences of students, to cater to groups of learners. You know. Those who learn by music, drawing etc.

Angela

In my own words differentiated instruction is, a sort is a tailor made instruction, why would I say tailor made I like to use that analogy because if you think about clothing when you get a suit that is tailor made or something that is tailor made it will fit exactly to your body size and proportion and everything like that like if you go to the store and you get something you might have to take in you might have to alter the length or so. But differentiated instruction it is is not like that it the instructions meets the child where the child is at their needs at their needs.

Leon

Differentiated instruction is tailoring activities to suit the multiple learning styles of students in an inclusive classroom. It incorporated skills that mesh learning objectives into one cohesive activity.

Peter

I view differentiated teaching learning, as teaching tiering the teaching of your lessons so that you cater for the different learning styles in the classroom in that the children who learn via different means different avenues whether it be using your hands or pictures or direct

instruction they are all able to gain from the content of the lesson they are all able to grasp what you are trying to teach because you tailored to suit all their individual learning styles.

Judy

Well, huh, differentiated instructions are the use of, hmmm of materials and manipulatives to make learning more interesting. It is planning different instructions for differently able children of different levels. The instructions should cater for the needs and interests of the children according to their level or ability.

1. What is the purpose of using differentiated instructions in the classroom?

Alana

To facilitate learning by matching teaching to learning styles. To teach each child by the way he/she knows or will respond to the education.

Angela

In the classroom we realise that learner have different types of needs we have children with reading disabilities we have different types of needs in the classroom dyslexia, dyscalculia, and we also have those with other special needs so the purpose of using differentiated instruction is to meet those children's educational needs. You know there is this *umm* this slogan and a drive a decade ago in the 90s sorry, "no child left behind" in order for us not to leave any child behind in terms of meeting their educational needs and letting them being able to progress with other students we have to use differentiated instructions.

Leon

The purpose of using differentiated instruction in the classroom is to cater for students differentiated instruction. For example catering for students who are tactile learners in mathematics. Having them use manipulatives.

Peter

Well the purpose is obvious; you are reaching all the children or most of the children under your care. Because without it which *umm* happens often enough some children are left out they are not included in the approach in the method that you are using to teach because they are unable to learn in the way that we are instructing and so the benefits will obviously be that while you have included all will be able to benefit and to learn.

Judy

Well differentiated instructions, hmmm, allows for different levels of thinking abilities which caters for different ways of doing, the concept of lesson or topic will be done differently and some children may learn it one way while others another way. For example some children may be able to look at a picture and see the main idea while others may look at a paragraph and be able to read the main idea. Some children are visual and some are linguistic.

2. What is your experience in implementing differentiated instructions in the classroom?**Alana**

Planning takes time. Delivery takes time. It is inevitable that children are motivated. The teacher is happy as learning takes place.

Angela

Well I like this because the teaching and learning process, it becomes very dynamic the children feel as though that they are a part of what I am doing they feel that ok so we do the groupings or whatever the resources we use and all these things they feel that that miss is catering to my needs because I would draw examples and I would use them whatever *umm* use their skills to bring forth the lesson where as in the traditional chalk and talk it really

sometimes is a hit and miss with students so when doing umm differentiated instruction the children, you get the *ooos* and the *ahhhhs*. and sometimes you may not have to even write anything but that lesson is imbedded in the students mind when they are thinking about it like when if you ask questions *umm* about it later on in the term or maybe at the end of the *umm* at the the term you will hear them using those references and examples and so the child is really so much a part of the lesson that they forget it's work you know it's like well I am helping miss teach because miss is using my ideas miss is using me, you know, and this is what it is really about the child is the central focus of the lesson we put the child first and like I said it the classroom really becomes a dynamic place, a comfort zone where the children forget maybe that they are even at school, the learning becomes play and interesting activities and sometimes you have to tolerate the noise at times but I enjoy doing, I enjoy using differentiated instructions in the classroom.

Probing question: Do the children get carried away and play instead of learning?

Response: No, well yes, they do get carried away at times but that's why you have to plan properly and in planning you anticipate that this will happen so it plays in your mind before you actually do it in the classroom. You know your students you see so you will know where they will go off the learning and you also allow for that in planning because it is not just about *umm* learning it is about having fun while learning and giving them the opportunity to express themselves and they peer teach each other, they learn from each other. So many times I don't have to tell them they figure it out for themselves (smiles).

Leon

My experience in using differentiated instruction in the classroom has been positive. I see students who do not respond well to traditional learning and teaching styles engage

themselves in activities. They enjoy it. It has been an eye opening experience that has encouraged me to do more in the lessons and units.

Peter

Back to number two that is what you want to do you actually want while you are teaching for everybody to get involved in the learning process. *Umm* it's highly unlikely that you are teaching and want only those who benefit from direct instructions to learn or only those who are interested in activities to learn you actually want everyone to be included in the learning process in the ideal classroom to expect that at the end of the day that when you are finished teaching that everybody has learned what you thought, what you have thought.

Judy

Well I don't think it really helps because most of the children in my level, standard three see the opportunity to play with the thing, the manipulatives nah. It's so difficult to manage them and keep their focus even though I try the strategy of allowing them time to play with it for a few minutes to satisfy their curiosity, [breathes deeply] they still play when given instructions, you would think that at this level they would settle down, huh. I doh know nah I try but it real difficulty. It sounds nice in your plans on paper but in practice it not easy. The group work is supposed to facilitate or allow the weak learns to benefit from the strong and the strong learners get an opportunity to reinforce their knowledge but the problem with that is that they talk too much so the experience in using the differentiated instructions becomes tedious and challenging to perform. However, there are the positives of course that's why I still use it in some lessons. It helps keep the children engaged in an activity that is educational instead of the rigid traditional 'talk and chalk' and they do recall information after the activity

and use it to help them further their students. I think the content is too much to practice differentiated instructions in every lesson or even most lessons.

3. *What are the challenges experienced using differentiated instructions in the classroom?*

Alana

Classroom space. Teacher and pupils must be comfortable to move around freely. Time consuming and it does not cater for standardized test. Or rather the standardized test does not cater for pupils with vary abilities. Then there is the focus of the curriculum; the curriculum content is so much that it does not lend itself to do much differentiation of lessons. Teachers may face opposition by parent, other colleagues, principal because there was not enough topics covered in the time interval.

Angela

Using differentiated instruction is excellent umm it helps you really think a lot as a teacher my class is a big class I have 31 students and as I said I love to use differentiated instructions however I think the real challenge is when I teach in that way but then my tests and the other tests that they will have to go through it not really catering for that sort of the test is one test and not all the children are able to understand and sometimes you will really have to give them a little help in the sense that you will have to read or ask them it orally but then how many how many times is that done. So the major challenge I see is the testing the testing is not really differentiated because think about it if I have to do a test to cater for all these students' learning needs and as I told you I have a big class it is really a challenge so those who need assistance like with reading or or *umm* whatever they are not understanding I would *umm* allow them to come up and they would read back to me and they would explain in their own words what they think it is and if they are not along those lines with the question I

would ask them further questions to assist them in understanding so I think that is the major challenge they can do things orally they can understand but when it comes to that test I think that's were the biggest challenge is they feel like oh my God I know the work but I feel I can't do this because these words they don't mesh with what with amm with how I was thought then I have to write in a certain way and I think they I think that is it the major challenge with the testing well a part from your administrator telling you that your class is making too much noise close your door that's the only thing. The noise is not a problem for me but it is a little disturbing to the other teachers next door (Chuckles).

Probing question: What about time, does it affect your teaching in anyway?

Response: Time, yes, time is a challenge but if you plan properly and integrate and you know your students then time does not really affect your progress in the classroom, in fact time does not matter what matters is that the children are learning (smiles)

Leon

Some of the challenges I have faced in using DI in the classroom are related to planning and the availability of resources. Time for planning is too short as I have a heavy curriculum to deliver and this impedes my ability to use DI more. Also some of the infrastructure is not available for proper DI such as class size. The lack of internet services was a problem but now that we have internet I can do much more in the classroom.

Peter

Well My excuse, my experience sorry in using differentiated learning has been more or less limited because I stick with my style of teaching (chuckles). Despite my knowledge of this I more often than not use as I see what is an inclusive practice in that we kinda take everything in discussion, talk about it together, I share my personal experiences my business I

ask them about what they know about this so we more or less do a lot of talking. Right, so it's not plain lecture but is still me presenting most of the information and allowing them to relate to it and contribute to the topic as such. *umm* really and truly I have done the grouping and research, individual research, working in groups whatever. But somehow of the whole structure of the classroom I kinda stick to one way of doing things most times. Individual reading is done once in a while for the most part to save on time. I do group reading the whole class reads or side A and then side B and I find that whenever I try to mix up things, I know it is cause for planning it takes more time and *ahh* time is the enemy of well of my practice I think so. In that while trying to cover things in depth, while trying to cover the depth of the material that I would as I would like to, I find that there is little time to go through unique practices and stuff *umm* what I have observed is that when I cater to I would see that ok particular children respond to this or that type of thing. So I would try to plan a lesson in between to cater for them and you would see they light up and they get all excited to do what they do best. Jaheim has no behaviour but he likes to draw, drawing is his life. So any activity that has drawing including in it as part of the assessment or part of the initial stage, writing the note whatever he gets all excited so he is going to be focused then. Outside of that he couldn't be caught doing anything and he definitely not interested in writing am a boring note. Alright that is after instruction not the initial instruction but as long as he lesson caters for that he will be interested. In terms of using media and stuff I, I don't have the facilities for that so I do it very infrequently once in a blue moon I will bring my stuff to school take them to the AV room whatever, but a lot of what we need to effectively do this is not provided so I can't say that I am a frequent user of media as a, a tool for instructions.

Judy

As I said before the group work and the use of manipulatives are the times children see as ah-h-h fun, without learning time; a time to relax and play without the discipline of learning. Some other children, other children recall the activity in their classroom exercises, they even mention it in class when they get the answers, they say, Miss I remembered so and so activity and it helped me to do the sum or whatever correct. Another challenge I have in my classroom is appropriate resources to match the concept or activity which I may come up with or viewed on youtube. Most of the time I have to create the materials, there maybe some available in the stores but the cost is another story. Ah-ha, the most challenging of all is space and time to execute these differentiated activities because some requires *umm* group work and conversation and the classroom setting is not conducive, yes the desk can be rearranged but the space is still too congested.

4. How do you deal with challenges to differentiated instruction?**Alana**

Focus on the child rather than on delivery of the curriculum.

Angela

Well I take it one day at a time. I plan out my lessons and activities at home the day before. If I did not get a chance to plan then I do a little something off the top of my experience on the spot [chuckle]. I also try group activities to help with the process of understanding the lessons and well for the noise I try my best to quiet them but it is not easy so I guess the I close the door to keep some noise inside. But you cannot do differentiated instructions without noise especially with a class size like my own [smiles].

Leon

I have tried working around the DI problems. I do use DI but to a small extent. I usually use DI for reinforcement of concepts and summary lessons.

Peter

Well alright as I mentioned before some of the challenges that affect the delivery of Differentiated instructions is *umm* are sorry [*pause*] time, it takes a little more time in planning and delivery, also space well, I think it's space affects us although in my assessment there are very few children benefit from the grouping activity now in my classroom I see it causes more chaos, some of the bright ones like quieter learning they just like to sit and learn and those who enjoy the grouping enjoy it for the wrong reason so it ends up being a time to lime and talk so, so while while they are working it's a lot of time being lost in between. Also limited resources to cater for the different learning styles is because we have children who are rarely interested in media and alert to that type of activity ah mean it's not readily available the set up in the Audion Visual room, it isn't even smart so you have to bring accompanying resources to get it to do what you want so you have to bring a laptop, the internet access and the laptop to get this thing working so it is not all cut and dry so between those things it provide a serious drawback to this practice.

Judy

The challenges are endless [*sign*] but I enjoy doing it when I can. Anyway the endless challenges but I will mention three. Time, space and resources. The time it takes to plan and execute differentiated lessons makes it virtually impossible to do it all the time. The space in the classroom is a problem because the tables and chairs take up all the space you can barely manoeuvre yourself around even the children have problems getting to each other if we have

to do an activity that requires movement. I have to relocate to the hall or another larger room which off course takes time to do. If I move four times for the day a lot of time is wasted.

And the resources, most of my resources are teacher made but how often do I get the time to make the, I certainly cannot purchase these items all the time.

5. What were your experiences attending workshops for differentiated instructions?

Alana

I have never attended a workshop. I have gained some experience from the Utt degree and that is what I reflect on. I also research ideas from the internet - youtube and so.

Angela

I have never attended any workshop, the school has never provided any and I am not aware of any. I usually recall my practicum lessons from UTT training. I train myself – trial and error [laughs]. But it works the children are engaged and they are learning and I am enjoying it.

Leon

I did not have any training from the MOE in using DI. I learnt about it from my UTT degree which was hands on and very engaging and pro DI.

Peter

Assessment workshops are practically useless eh now not because the material presented is idealistic or greater or anything you know, well because you we haven't been practically shown how to use it and even if you are given one practical experience on how you can use this a failure to see it applied across the board in your situation means that you still have to actually come up with it for your self and some times that is the easiest thing to do so go to a workshop and they speak about the benefits of differentiated instructions, alright great,

I am really happy to learn that because I want all my children to learn when I teach but the actually hands on how to implement it off course is always lacking and I mean I know that's how workshops should be practical experience practice run of how to do this how it is implemented it at school, most times the only learning styles they cater to is lecture and an hmmm that's 5% of, of learners so we get a lecture on how to implement and practice differentiated instruction and that in itself is a joke because you are telling me that learners are able to learn in different ways by you showing it to me via that most ineffective method well that has been my experience and just telling me that I can use this and not showing me how is still limiting me because the teaching that I learned to do I learn that by watching my own teacher for a hundred years, you learn, what you were shown at college. So it's it's in you already so now doing something new needs another type of teaching; same way same intensity so that you are able to effectively implement what is expected and well what is desired because it is something that is desirous you want to do this because it is going to be helpful so better teaching experiences on how to implement it should be better for us more beneficial to us.

Judy

My experiences in workshops are great I get all excited to do these activities and the activities work with the children but you cannot do these activities all the time.

6. What do you consider when planning for differentiated instructions in the classroom?

Alana

I consider the child's abilities, interests, and potential.

Angela

Umm resources of course. The students' interest is very important, you cannot go forward without knowing your students and what they like and what will make them want to learn. So the resources is what gains their interest and motivates their participation.

Differentiated instruction is to encourage active learning among all students.

Leon

When planning for DI I take into consideration students needs. If they cannot do the activities and also what outcomes would the activity lead to.

Peter

The students' interest because their interest, if they are not willing to do the work then it will not make any sense to them they will simply hustle it down just to finish and at the end they cannot recall anything and and they do not revise. So my lessons must be geared towards the students' interest to achieve, umm achieve success.

Judy

I consider to differentiate by content and interest, it varies you know, sometimes I may go with content because three digit numbers are too confusing for some but when you use one digit numbers they understand the concept better and they gradually go to two digits and then three. I mostly differentiate with mathematics. As far as interest is concern I try to use their experiences like, umm like, when they share stuff, so you draw on their experiences in sharing stuff to show or demonstrate fractions or grouping. It depends.

7. What materials or resources do you used when differentiating instructions in the classroom?

Alana

Technology – short video clips on the laptop. Hands on materials like counters.

Drawing is a fun way to differentiate lessons and I use the text books as well.

Leon

I use a lot of posters and I have the students make these. I also use math manipulatives and science and also the internet – power points and youtube videos to teach.

Angela

I use the natural environment and sometimes the manipulative or teacher made things, I sometimes purchase items that I think the children will be interested in. I use the laptop computer to show educational videos, especially those with actions and probing responses. So it will not be like a show but engaging as well.

Peter

The challenges are so overwhelming that I try to use less distraction. The computer is essential but it distracts them from purpose. At home the computer represents game, play and purely entertainment so it is difficult for them to settle and watch an educational clip. Even the really interesting ones so I try to stay away from the computer; I use but seldom [sigh]. I use the text books and some manipulatives to make the lesson somewhat interested and different for them.

Judy

I use the laptop mostly it helps them to stay focus. They like the clips in fact they enjoy anything that does not take a lot of thinking skills and writing skills. So watching a clip

is engaging or oral discussion. I also use manipulatives and charts, teacher made activities and materials.