Workshop Case Study: How to Use Learning Styles to Differentiate Instruction

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Abstract

Springer Middle School in the Brandywine School District is a school that promotes student success. It is mentioned in Springer MS’s IP plan that focusing on high quality instruction to meet the needs of all students is a goal. Therefore, it is crucial that the educators at Springer Middle School are aware of how their students learn best. The workshop, *How to Use Learning Styles to Differentiate Instruction,* can help educators gain a better understanding of learning styles and how to best support students. The workshop provides detailed definitions of each learning style as well as suggestions on activities that can be completed in their current lessons to support each learning style. Teachers are given handouts to take with them that contain the learned material as well as the Power Point Presentation. The purpose of this workshop is to help the 7th grade teachers at Springer MS better achieve their first goal of the IP plan.

Workshop Case Study: How to Use Learning Styles to Differentiate Instruction

Workshops are an important way to provide information and support to teachers and parents in order to promote student achievement. This specific workshop case study is focusing on learning styles and how they should be considered in the classroom. Teachers are the gateway to learning and their lessons should reflect the needs of all students. King and Watson wrote the article, *Teaching Excellence for All Our Students*. In the article, the authors state, "Beliefs in the capacity of students and their ability to be taught rest on clear theories of learning and intelligences…These teachers also purposefully employ a theory of learning to guide their practice” (King & Watson, 2010, p. 178-179). This perfectly summarizes the need for this specific workshop because it provides knowledge and tools to support teachers in order for them to utilize best practice. The facilitator of the workshop will provide descriptions of different learning styles as well as examples of how to support the learning styles in the classroom.

**School & IP Plan**

The school that the workshop will take place at is Springer Middle School in the Brandywine School District. The audience for this specific workshop is the 7th grade teachers. Springer Middle School’s IP plan is the general goals for the Brandywine School District. The first goal say, “High quality comprehensive instructional programming for all students” (Brandywine, 2016). The goal continues to use strategies such as: offering diverse academics and ensuring educational excellence and equity. This specific workshop reflects the first IP goal of Springer MS because it focuses on the instructional program for all students while making sure the content is diverse for all students to guarantee educational excellence. The workshop will provide teachers insight on the different learning styles that their student possess (diversity) and provide skills on how to create supportive content for all students (educational excellence and equity).

**Mission & Vision**

The one first component of Springer Middle School’s mission statement is, “to provide an educational environment in which each student can grow intellectually according to his or her experiences and abilities, and in which all students are encouraged to do their best” (Springer Middle School, 2016). This correlates with the mission/purpose behind the workshop. The mission behind the workshop is to teach educators different ways to best support students in the classroom based on the different learning styles. This skillset will further support an educational environment where all students can grow intellectually based on their ability to learn.

Unfortunately, Springer Middle School does not have a vision statement present on their website nor do they have one on the Brandywine School District website. Regardless of this, the vision of the workshop is to support teachers and help make their jobs easier by providing information on learning styles and examples of what should be imbedded in their lessons to support the learning styles.

**Goal/Rationale**

Learning styles is not a new concept that is known in the education world; this is something that affects every person. Rita Dunn is the author of the book, *How to Implement and Supervise a Learning Style Program* (1996). Dunn explains, “Many people prefer to learn in ways that are different from how other people of the same class, grade, age, nationality, race, culture, or religion prefer to learn. How people prefer to learn is their learning style preference…low achievers perform significantly better when they capitalize on their preferences” (Dunn, 1996, p. 1). The rational behind this workshop is to teach skills that will allow all students to prosper in the classroom. Referring back to Springer Middle School’s IP plan, the first goal refers to a high quality comprehensive instructional programming for all students (Brandywine, 2016). The first strategy suggests offering a diverse range of academic programs to challenge all students. Therefore, having teachers focus on different learning styles that students’ possess will ensure that each student is receiving suitable support and challenges to obtain the appropriate education. This workshop focuses on a crucial concept of student learning while reflecting on the goals of Springer Middle School’s IP plan.

**Workshop Model**

The title of the workshop is *How to Use Learning Styles to Differentiate Instruction*. The workshop will educate the participants (teachers) on different learning styles and provide example techniques of how to include different learning styles in their curriculum. There are seven prominent learning styles: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Armstrong, 2009). Participants will share out experiences of differentiating to meet learning styles and will work with others to brainstorm on techniques to use in the classroom. The workshop is meant to be interactive from the participants but informative; the facilitator will briefly teach the participants as well as encourage them to reflect on their own teaching skills and use of differentiation.

**Warm-Up**

The warm-up of the workshop should include brief sharing about the theme of the session and/or a short activity. Afterwards, the participants should think/write/share with a partner as well as share their thoughts with the group (Brigman, Mullis, Webb, & White, 2005). For this workshop, the facilitator will introduce the workshop with the title and begin with a brief activity. On a Power Point presentation, there will be different examples of learning style characteristics. The facilitator will read the examples while participants raise their hand if they agree with the example. Some examples are: *I can easily compute numbers in my head* or *I need to practice a new skill rather than just read about it*. The facilitator will explain that each example represents a specific learning style characteristic. The Power Point presentation will show each example and in parenthesis show the learning style; *I can easily compute numbers in my head* (Logical Mathematical Intelligence) and *I need to practice a new skill rather than just read about it* (Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence). Participants will then take the time to reflect with a partner on their own strengths; participants will also be given a piece a paper where they can take notes and reflect throughout the workshop (Appendix A); multiple copies of this will be available in case the participants need more copies to use. Once participants have shared with their new partner, the facilitator will ask for volunteers to share out their discussion with their partners and thoughts on the warm-up activity.

**Asking Before Telling**

Prior to teaching the material presented in the workshop, the facilitator should encourage participants to share out their ideas about the content in the workshop (Brigman, Mullis, Webb, & White, 2005). The facilitator will urge participants to share out what they know about learning styles. This is also a good time for participants to share out any experiences they have of their own learning styles and/or experiences with students. The facilitator will provide an example to help promote discussion; the example focuses on how the facilitator cannot learn just by listening to a teacher lecture, instead they need to see pictures and other visuals to better conceptualize the information. This shows that one of the dominant learning styles of the facilitator is spatial learning. The group will first discuss with their peers around them and then share out ideas, stories, etc.

**Introduction of Information and Skills**

During this portion of the workshop, the facilitator should teach the information based off “the tell, show, do model” in order to appropriately provide information; this keeps all participants involved, which will help them better absorb the information (Brigman, Mullis, Webb, & White, 2005). During this section of the workshop, the facilitator will continue to use the Power Point Presentation to provide information on learning styles. The facilitator will also provide a handout that maps out characteristics of the learning styles mentioned (Appendix B). During this time, the facilitator will briefly explain each learning style while the participants follow along; they should be writing down notes and thoughts on Appendix A. The participants will then discuss for a few minutes with a small group their own reflection of their personal learning styles (what do they consider their dominant learning styles based on the given information?). The facilitator will allow participants to share out their thoughts and discussions.

After discussing learning style characteristics, the facilitator will continue with the presentation. The focus will now be on teaching techniques to accommodate different learning styles. The participants will receive a handout that provides examples of differentiation based off of learning styles (Appendix C). Similar to before, the facilitator will present the information and the participants will listen and reflect using Appendix A. After the information is provided, the participants will turn to their small groups and reflect on their own teaching skills. The participants will discuss for a few minutes and then share out their discussions.

**Personalize and Practice**

After the information is provided to participants, there should be time available for small groups to complete an activity that is personable and applies the newly learned material (Brigman, Mullis, Webb, & White, 2005). Once the information is presented, the participants will complete a group activity that requires them to reflect on their previously taught lessons. During this activity, each member of the group should think about an activity that they recently taught. They should then think about ways they could change the lesson to better support different learning styles; they can use Appendix C to help think of examples. These changes do not need to be huge, just subtle ways to include more learning styles in the lesson. Group members should discuss and help each other reflect. While groups are working, the facilitator will circulate and address any questions present and/or monitor the group work. After fifteen-twenty minutes, the small groups will take turns sharing out the changes they would make to their lessons.

**Process and Summarize**

Once the main activity is completed, participants should summarize the workshop using process questions such as: “How can I use what I learned?” or “how did I feel during the activities and discussions?” This reflection should be discussed with a partner and then volunteers should share out their answers (Brigman, Mullis, Webb, & White, 2005). Questions will be displayed on the presentation and the facilitator will read them out loud for the participants. The questions are: How involved was I in the activities discussed, how did I feel during the activities and discussions, what did I learn/relearn, and how can I use what I learned in the classroom? The participants will have a few minutes to reflect with a partner. The facilitator will then have volunteers share out what they have learned and how they will apply it in the classroom. Once all the volunteers have shared out their thoughts, the facilitator will thank everyone for coming. They should ensure all participants that they will receive an email of the Power Point Presentation and that they can keep all the handouts.

**Evaluate**

The last step of the workshop is providing an evaluation to all participants and allowing them to reflect on the workshop. This feedback will allow the facilitator to change and improve for the next presentation (Brigman, Mullis, Webb, & White, 2005). The facilitator will give the participants the workshop evaluation (Appendix D) and allow them to complete. Once they are finished they are free to leave.

The facilitator will also complete the closing the gap action plan (Appendix E) and closing the gap results report (Appendix F) to help reflect further on the success of the workshop. Examples of what they would look like completed are attached at the end of the paper.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this workshop is to help Springer Middle School achieve the first goal of their IP plan, which is to provide a high quality educational program for all students. In order to challenge all students, teachers need to be aware of how students learn best. Even though each person possesses all of the learning styles, some of the learning styles are more prominent than others. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to incorporate different components of learning styles in their curriculum. While it is nearly impossible to include each learning style for each individual lesson, teachers should attempt to make learning easier for all students based on their needs. The *How to Use Learning Styles to Differentiate Instruction* workshop provides teachers with general information on the main learning styles while providing some examples of activities that can be included in the curriculum to support specific learners.

References

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