Apr 21st, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Student Choice and Motivation in the Secondary English Classroom

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STUDENT CHOICE AND MOTIVATION IN THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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Research Question

What is the impact on behavior when students are given choice in assignments?

Literature Review

- Read information about Self Determination Theory (SDT) and differentiated teaching strategies
- "When the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are met in the classroom, it creates an environment in which students have greater motivation, engagement, performance and achievement"
  - Deci & Ryan, 1991
- "The goal of differentiation is to maximize the learning potential of each *individual* student."
  - Tomlinson, 2005

Methodology

- I wrote detailed lesson plans including activities with student choice.
- Lesson plans were evaluated for differentiated strategies and strategies involving student choice.
- Lesson plans were paired with anecdotal field notes about student behavior to examine the correlation between student choice and engagement

Lesson plans

Lesson plan topic	Learning objective	Differentiated strategy	Learning activity	Assessment
Understanding colorism	Students will be able to understand colorism by filling in a graphic organizer	• 5 different articles • Small groups • Discussion using personal experiences	Independently read articles about colorism and filled in a graphic organizer, stopping partway to share with a neighbor	Students turned in graphic organizers
Understanding colorism	Students will be able to read an article and organize information about it as a group	• 5 different articles • Small groups • Student roles for presentations	Students worked in small groups to make a poster. Each group member had a specific role to fill	Students presented posters the following day
Understanding colorism	Students will be able to present information they have gathered as a group and review other students presentations	• 5 different articles • Small groups • Student roles for presentations • Graphic organizers	Students presented their posters, and answered questions about their own presentations as well as other students	Presentations are graded based on the presentation rubric, student reflections will indicate retention

Lesson plans were analyzed using the above table and the below reflections

Personal reflections

I think the initial conversation went well, as this class is the "warm and fuzzy one" as my co-op calls it. Regardless, they seemed receptive to me leading the discussion about race, and we talked for even longer than I thought we would. My second question on the slip did not go as well as I had planned. It was about how colorism has affected their everyday lives, and I think it fed into the misconception that racism and colorism are the same thing. Students had some examples of how they were treated differently or acted differently because of their skin tone, but that did not further the conversation in any way. If anything, it just made it a bit more awkward.

Results and Data Analysis

- Common words in reflections: Interested, productive, issue(s), discussion
- Students were more engaged on days where activities were more conducive to student choice
- "A couple of my students got into a legitimate debate over what the characters should do. Though arguing is not the goal, it showed the kids were actually interested in and passionate about the subject."
  - Note from field notes, 11/15
- My results were consistent with Self Determination Theory. Students were more motivated and engaged once their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness

Conclusion

- Student choice is an effective way for teachers to keep students engaged and maximize the learning potential of all student
- More research must be done in order to determine how effective choice is in the classroom
- Teacher education programs should include student choice because it is an effective way to teach for social justice and allow each student to succeed